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Case Analysis

The Labor Pains of a New Libya

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People throughout the world are looking to events unfolding in Libya with considerable concern, grave wonderment, and at times, a lack of comprehension. Some of the most pressing questions for those watching the Libyan situation include: why has the opposition allowed the revolt to transform into an armed insurrection after it began as a non-violent protest movement? Perhaps more importantly, how is it that the Libyan regime has managed to survive so long in the face of a revolt which took in, at the beginning, the heart of the capital, Tripoli?

Answering questions about the situation in Libya is never going to be easy, especially given the power of the media, both international and local, to distort facts on the ground, and peddle misleading terminology. They sometimes use terms like “tribe” and “clan,” which have, sadly, found their way into the thinking of the revolutionaries themselves, and have come to represent units of political organization. Nonetheless, it is important to keep in mind three factors which distinguish Libya from other Arab countries, including the scenes of revolution, and which have made the process of understanding the war there more difficult:

- 1) The first factor is Libya's prominent role both regionally and on the wider world stage. Being an oil exporting power, Libya has been able to become a net importer of expatriate labor, deepening ties between Libya and many other states. This strong economic image concealed several internal problems Libyan society suffered from; this position has also attenuated the severity of Libya's bad relations with the outside world, which were born of Qaddafi's provocative attitudes and reactions to world events.
- 2) Qaddafi's personality is in and of itself a factor in the Libyan question. His character was influenced not only by the political history of Libya and his own Bedouin lineage, but also the massive fortune he has accumulated while in power. His control over this vast wealth and his populist, primordial ideology has allowed Qaddafi to present Libya to the world as having no problems besides those of foreign meddling and imperialist attempts to control Libya's fortunes. Qaddafi, who has gone through a lot of trouble to remain in power, has thus become a by-word for all of the social complexities of his country.
- 3) Then, of course, there is the question on the internal workings of Libyan society. Analysts and observers have little to go on to form their opinions and understanding of Libya.

The History of the Libyan State

To be able to understand these realities, and the interconnections between them, we need to take a step back in time, to the foundation of the Libyan state in 1951, and examine the anthropological and historical elements which set the stage for politics in Libya. We need to examine, specifically, the concept of leadership and the issue of the military coup d'état which brought Qaddafi to power in view of the internal and foreign factors at play. There is a direct causal link between these historical realities and what is happening on the ground now in Libya, both socially and politically. All of the above has been governed by three phenomena which have been very peculiar to Libya and which date to the Ottoman presence of the country in the 17th Century:

- 1) The first of these was the consolidation of power by an urban, foreign elite that was concentrated in Tripoli.
- 2) The inability of the central state authorities to impose their will on large swathes of the country until the second half of the 19th Century (the Ottoman flag was not raised in the city of Al Kafara,

in the extreme South-East of Libya, until 1912).

- 3) As a result of the above, local communities in most regions of the country produced their own political elites, and independent systems of rule, which were separate from the central state authority in Tripoli.

The practical consequence of this was the emergence, in the capital, of a small oligarchy led by a military-bureaucratic complex which lived off the earnings of piracy and duties levied on craftsmen, merchants, and peasants whose fields were close to the main towns. This group also led periodic raids within the borders of Libya to collect more bounty, under the pretext of tax collection, in areas of rugged terrain inhabited by Bedouin tribes and others who resisted central state rule; they also practiced long-term trade.

The governing oligarchy evolved from being a small military grouping under the direct control of the Sublime Porte at the outset of the 18th Century into an essential strand in the local, social fabric (owing largely to intermarriage between male Ottoman emissaries and local women), led by a political leader who imposed himself based on his personal characteristics, successful alliances and is relatively autonomous from the Sublime Porte; this caste never shook off its image of being a military-bureaucratic junta.

In the Libyan interior, the Bedouin tribes maintained their own socio-political formations. They appeared on the world stage as bands of fighters with their own, semi-independent leaders. These clan-based groupings earned their upkeep from livestock and the un-ending search for water and pastures for their flocks, as well as aiding the transport of merchants' goods and raiding smaller, weaker tribes.

At the crossroads of such nomadic tribes and the sedentary rural farmers grew a third grouping of people, with a different mode of political organization entirely. This type of grouping included the Sufi *Tariqa* [a Muslim spiritual path or order toward direct knowledge of God or Reality], who did not rely on the use of violence to bring about internal cohesion or to guarantee resource accumulation and accessibility to them. This order is politically subordinated to a leadership which is totally compatible with the requirements of that model, represented by a Sufi Sheikh adopting in his practice what is known in the Arab Maghreb states, as *Zawaya* (sing.: *Zawiya*), which became a space not only for religious ritual and observance, but for all matter of societal organization including political deliberations. Within the Libyan context, the Senoussis presented the most complete and genuine example of this political religious model or *Tariqa*. At first glance, the above discussion sheds little light as far as the concerned observer of Libya's past is concerned, until, that is, we notice that at the political level, what all of these groupings have in common is the concept of the absolute ruler.

Space limitations prevent us from fully discussing the theoretical aspects of this, but the following remarks will be useful in understanding the major components of this phenomenon, though the important point has already been made clear: regardless of whether it was in the case of nomadic Bedouin, or the Sufi *Tariqa*, or the urbanized military-bureaucratic elites, the common denominator of all political formations in Libya has been the presence of a strong-man ruler.

We need to keep in mind that the concept of leadership in these settings was qualitatively different from that found in modern bureaucratic states, like, for example, the United States. In such modern states, the heads of organizations, such as political parties, corporations, and even educational institutions, play the role of a temporary “leader” for social and bureaucratic units. In Libya, on the other hand, political leadership qualities combine charisma, the ability to utilize compulsion, wealth, family connections, and religious belief together to form a totally different concept of leadership.

In practical terms, such political groupings are generally an outwards expansion of the family unit, which in turn grows into the extended family, and those families brought into an alliance through marriage. A further ring of concentric circles comes from those who are drawn to the leader of a group, either willingly or compelled to do so. Others who follow the leader are doing so out of a system of patronage. Then, most rarely, are the coalitions formed between two or more leaders of equal standing who would only envisage working with each other to avert disaster. All of these types of groups show a variety of internal structures and strength, depending on the leader's source of power.

In the case of the Bedouin warrior-chieftain, much is made of the charisma and personal bravery of the warrior, or of the astute politician, in a cultural context where bonds of kinship are important to keep people together for reasons of internal cohesion, or to help in the raids against those weaker than the group, or to build alliances to construct external relations. In the case of the *Tariqa* Sheikh, on the other hand, the peaceful nature of the bonds between the group's members reflects itself in the power and structure of the *Tariqa*. Financial and military power, together with the semi- bureaucratic organization of his power, and his ties with official religious bodies and international foreign community, allowed the urban leader who is in control of the state, to form his political group and manage it in a mode of leadership distinct from the others presented above. This mode is characterized by centralization.

In all cases, there is a leader, and, within his own circle at least, charisma is important. Also essential is the capability to distribute riches in the way that he sees fit, as well as to be able to deploy violence, whether figuratively or otherwise, to preserve his position. By keeping himself at the focal point, the leader can ensure that his own, and his family's, interests, are seen to be identical with those of the group he is leading as a whole.

The State After Independence

What led to the emergence, in the middle of the 20th Century, of a formal state in Libya with a constitutional monarchy, albeit one in name only? To what extent were those developments related to what is happening on the ground today?

The most important political development for Libya, during the second half of the 19th Century, up through the first third of the 20th Century, was the transformation of the structures of governance in the country, and its instruments, since autonomous diverse traditional local leadership dynamics were destroyed at the expense of a situation where all authority was in the hands of the centralized state authorities. This new reality came into force with the rise of the new monarchy which came to power with

the independence of Libya, and it remained so during the *Jamahiriyah*, which Muammar Qaddafi has led singularly since 1969.

With their return to power in Libya in the latter half of the 19th Century, the Ottoman Turks managed to rid themselves of the Bedouin warrior-chieftains as the tribes no longer had the means to build large coalitions between themselves or produce strong leaders who could bargain with the Pasha of Tripoli (“the Beys of Tripoli” in the old American song) for their collective rights, and demand political power in the rural hinterland. The task of de-militarizing the population was continued and completed by the Italians, who also worked to dismantle the Bedouins' traditional trade routes and other sources of income. Under the Italians, Libya's towns gradually rose to become the effective seats of power economically, socially, and politically.

This was preceded by the development, in the Eastern provinces of Libya, of a truly remarkable Sufi *Tariqa* which was founded and led by Sheikh Mohammed Ben Ali Al Senoussi in 1840. The internal organization of this group, known as the Senoussi Brotherhood, allowed them to play a crucial role in attempts to thwart the European invasion and occupation of their country, which began in 1911. The Ottomans had given the Brotherhood a relatively free hand on many matters so they constituted what was similar to a state within a state at the organizational, financial and military levels. This situation allowed them to manage the social life in Burqa from which they could mount a resistance to the Italians after the Ottoman defeat and withdrawal in 1912. However, due to the mismatch in their military capabilities, the Italian colonizers dismantled the Senoussis' bonds which were linking between Senoussi's brotherhoods (*zawayah* and *awqaf*). They destroyed the bases of the Bedouin economic system, which was running the life of the followers of the Senoussi leader, who was pushed, alongside his aides, out of the country. This was all made easier by the fact that the Ottomans had helped to end the local bureaucratic military leadership in 1835, implanting instead a governor who was totally submissive to the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. This put an end to any internal political dynamics that could have produced an urban, local leadership. The Italians later took this further, dismantling what administrative institutions the Ottomans had left behind.

What Came Next?

After Italy had consolidated its grip on power, there remained no viable domestic political force within Libya. The only people left were aged civil servants and intellectuals who could not have found a way to actively resist the Italians during their fascist reign. In addition, “notables” of considerable financial wealth were left though many of them sided with the Italian occupation in a bid to preserve their own standing. Things remained much the same until the foreign occupiers had left, having been defeated decisively during the Second World War. Hastily organized Libyan brigades, who had formed with the support of the British and remaining Senoussis, had also played a part in defeating the Italians both on the northern shores and in the south of the country.

Historically speaking, the nationalist movement in Libya grew up as a reaction to this unique Ottoman-Italian axis: with their destruction of all of the indigenous power structures within the country, the invaders had removed any hope of there being strong local dynamism to produce local leaders, whether they were Bedouin warriors, *Tariqa* sheikhs, or bureaucratic military inspired.

Even Libyans who continued their struggle relentlessly abroad in Greater Syria, Egypt and Tunisia, did not progress to reach the level of modern strong influential organizations. Thus, the parties which were established in Libya, following the Second World War, and in the context of a new Libyan national movement, were led by new cadres of politicians who were unprepared for political life in the modern world, such as parties and trade unions. These political leaders continued to work within a context of tribalism and patronage which prevented them from addressing the populace as citizens with national belonging and civic rights of a modern state whose boundaries outstrip kinship, neighborhood and confession. A possibly unique exception to this grew up in the environs of Tripoli.

In the general region of the Libyan capital, the Tripolitanian National Congress, which encompassed some modern political features, was established one year prior to independence, in 1950. Yet this party, under the leadership of Bashir Saadawi, experienced a staggering defeat in the country's first elections, at least partially because of its difficult relationship with other political groupings. On the other hand, the Senoussi Brotherhood founded the Burqawi National Congress in 1948, a full three years before independence, preventing others, especially the modernist Omar Al Mukhtar group, from forming any independent political organization. The leader of this political party was the main leader of the Senoussi order, Idriss Senoussi.¹

It was in such a fragile political environment that the independent state of Libya was born. While the Libyan state came to inherit the trappings of a bureaucracy, which include the form of all modern state characteristics, had a constitution that was drafted by UN legal experts, and saw the growth of a political elite which took charge of public affairs, it was quick to ban all types of civic activity. At the time, there was no real labor movement to speak of, in contrast to the role which organized unions played in protecting the civil liberties of the opposition in countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco. The king-ruler was the only authority in the country who could influence the turn of events, and who surrounded himself in his Court with those who were deemed close enough through the normal systems of kinship and patronage. The state's machinery of repression was used to quash any potential challenge to the absolute authority of the king.

The Coup of 1969: Muammar Qaddafi Appears on the Stage

In May of 1969, Tunisian President Habib Bourgiba was watching with trepidation as Jaafar Al Numeiri came to power in Sudan. He used the event to send a message to then-King of Libya Idriss through his Ambassador, in which he stated “Your vast country richly endowed with wealth faces three deficits: a demographic void, a deficit of culture, and a political void. You can't solve the demographic deficit in the

¹ Idriss had previously been recognized as the Emir of Burqa by the Italians. While he established the Burqawi National Front as a precursor to the Burqawi Congress upon his return from exile; he never gave up spiritual leadership of the Senoussi *Tariqa*.

foreseeable future, and solving the cultural deficit will take some time though it is solvable; you can, however, make serious progress on the political front straight away through reconciliation and trade unions. You can stop harassing labor organizers, such as Salem Sheida, because labor unions can be a source of stability in your country, and you need to work on building a mediating buffer of institutions between yourself and your people, to help protect the wealth which God has bestowed upon you.”² This note was to foreshadow the coup which finally deposed the king four months later.

The really striking aspect of the missive sent by the president to the king is not its prophetic warning, but the way it addresses the question of deficits and vacuums. It is not that Libya lacked culture or traditional institutions mediating between the king and the people; it is that there were no modern representations of the state for them to take hold of. What is in evidence in Bourgiba's thinking here was the experience of his leadership of the Constitutional Party, and the considerable power of the trade union movement in that country. The lack of such bodies in Libya led inevitably to the military coup in 1969.

Qaddafi came to power with no obvious place to look to fill his cabinets. There was no independent civil institution which could organize political action in a modern way. The king did not select his ministers from parties trusted by his citizens or from a strong party which formulated an important part of the people's aspirations. A simultaneous oil wealth-supported financial surplus for the state's coffers, which it used to end all the traditional forms of employment in Libya, be they agricultural, pastoral or artisanal types of work. In return, the people of Libya were turned into public sector workers who were reliant on the authorities for their incomes and allowances. With the remarkable influx of oil money during the monarchical period, Libya undertook massive construction and infrastructure projects, and positions in the government were given to the King's relatives and allies; the power of the state was used to entrench old social relations.³ Although villages and towns across the country were benefiting from a construction boom, there grew a sense of resentment among those people who did not possess the societal pedigrees to gain honorable introduction to the inner circle of the king. This cauldron of social forces created the context which was ripe for Muammar Qaddafi's taking.

Qaddafi himself, with his lack of political experience, was taken aback by this situation upon his rise to power; the military came face-to-face with the deficit of which Bourgiba spoke. Alongside the closing of foreign military bases, the nationalization of major industries, such as insurance, oil, and banks, the Revolutionary Command Council founded by Qaddafi went on to create the “Arab Socialist Union” of Libya, which would act along the lines of Nasser's Arab Socialist Union in Egypt, and bring about one-party rule. Qaddafi did this in the hope of empowering a group of allies who could help in the fight against the reactionary forces (i.e., the remnants of the deposed monarch, his clients and allies), who were on the wrong side of his fight against colonialism to acquire a special political legitimacy based on advocating Arab rights, and the revolution against the remnants of the old regime.

² Memoirs of the Chief of the Tunisian Constitutional Socialist Party, Mohammed Sayyah, who was present at the meeting between Bourgiba and the Tunisian Ambassador to Libya (pending publication).

³ Al Sayd Mohammed Othman, *A Memoir of the History of Libya*, Rabat, 1996, pp. 285-286.

Leadership, the Masses, and Revolutionary Councils

Qaddafi came to power with his own reserve of personal leadership and charisma skills, but he was able to use the money which came with the reins of power in Libya to impose that personal leadership on all of the organs of the Libyan state, which he managed to shape to his will. It is important to note that much of Qaddafi's life before the coup remains shrouded in mystery (who would have wanted to write anything about him before then?). Some valuable information, however, was gained by Mirella Bianco, after her series of interviews with associates and colleagues of Qaddafi carried out in 1973. While there may have been a conflict of interest since they were discussing their "Leader," it does become obvious that Qaddafi clearly was an inspirational, take-charge-from-the-front kind of leader, capable of taking responsibility for his actions and instilling a sense of calm and respect in his underlings. This feeling was expressed most clearly by one of Bianchi's interviewees, Mohammed Al Zawi, who put it thus: "Qaddafi is unlike the people you are likely to meet in normal life. I may have known him well for a long time, but I have to admit that I find it difficult to understand his essence."⁴ This charismatic leadership explains how it is that Qaddafi came to lead the small secret civilian and military grouping which carried out the 1969 coup.

These qualities were not Qaddafi's alone, being found in leaders of all types of organizations throughout the world. This is what makes it difficult for anybody to understand the process in which he was able to take control of Libya through the efforts of a very small band of associates. It is worth pointing out that the sociological composition of this group bore some resemblances to the group which formed the nucleus of the Senoussi Brotherhood in the 19th Century. This perhaps is an indication of what these two had in common, which is to say the commonality of all Libyan politics: the paramount importance of leadership. In such systems, it is essential that the leader actually takes charge, controls the levers of power, dispenses wealth and money as he sees fit, and represses (physically or symbolically) with the use of warrior, Bedouin groups, religious *Tariqa* group, or military groups.

Qaddafi's own personal ambitions resonated well within the historical development of Libya's political landscape. Having been reared in an environment where individual leadership was prized above all else, he was able to monopolize all political decisions as a personal interest, contrary to what would be expected in a modern nation state governed by institutions. As soon as he concluded that the political party, which had been formed with his blessing, the Arab Socialist Union, would not further these interests of his, he dissolved it. He followed this with a ban on any type of political activity in the country. He called for the masses to step forward for power under the slogan, "power to the people". Qaddafi then went on to work directly with those who felt that they were left out of the corridors of power during the monarchical period, particularly those from rural areas, a campaign which he initiated under the slogan "The Bedouin Tent Vanquishes the Palace". With his calls of "Black Power," Qaddafi became the champion of the previously dispossessed, all with the help of oil money. Not to be outdone by his predecessors, Qaddafi quickly acquired his own group of fawning clients, in the shape of the revolutionary committees, membership of which was by determined by the results of "elections," with the process restricted to those who were not connected to the previous regimes. This would bring about a

⁴ Mirella Bianco, *Kadhafi, messenger du désert, biographie et entretiens*, (Paris : Stock, 1974), p. 58-61.

completely new body politic, which owed its power to Qaddafi, the newly independent state, and its new-found oil wealth. The vacuum which Bourgiba had spoken of made way for a new group of power brokers who had little time for written constitutions and laws, and did not bother themselves with civil service institutions.

Over a protracted period, Qaddafi traversed the well-trodden path of abandoning his comrades-in-arms from his military coup and worked on shaping Libya to match his desires and his vision of what an ideal Libya should look like, as well as how it should function. By distributing oil wealth in a very pre-determined way, Qaddafi ensured that no autonomous political opposition could rise in the country. All those in search of a decent life and some prestige in the state would have to curry favor with Qaddafi. Drawing on the human resources of the “masses of the people,” Qaddafi set up the revolutionary committees, and sprung his “Great Libyan Arab People's Socialist Jamahiriya” onto the world stage. The main character of this new play was the charismatic, mischievous Muammar Qaddafi.

The End of the Era of Individual Leadership?

Political upheaval in Libya has been a source of much consternation and confusion for many Libya-watchers for four decades. Some see the personality of Muammar Qaddafi, with his distaste for the routine work of governance and his love of the limelight, as being a major factor in this instability.⁵ There might be some truth to that, but it ignores some realities. Firstly, we need to bear in mind that Qaddafi's life as a leader for so many years has probably helped to nurture this part of his persona, although the sociological and anthropological seeds of this sort of behavior were probably already planted in Libya, as the author has made clear elsewhere.⁶ Qaddafi's character as a political leader was shaped in the absence of the rule of law, and with no established tradition for the peaceful transfer of power. Both of these elements were present in both the Sufi *Tariqa* and in constitutional monarchies.

The sort of autocratic system which Qaddafi leads is unable to sustain itself and arrange for the transfer of power, without the use of either physical violence or legal skullduggery, finding so much as a legal covenant or social contract normalizing the relationship between the rulers and the ruled in the type of state run by Qaddafi intolerable. Since Qaddafi left no space for anybody other than himself to have a political role in Libya, he unwittingly created secret enemies out of his political rivals who lived in the shadows. Advisory roles, which could bring people close to the leader's ear, became prizes fought over in fractious conflicts between his many followers, including his own children and members of the revolutionary committees. Herein lays the source of all of the political traction in Libya: the leader is compelled to constantly shuffle political portfolios in response to internal and foreign machinations.

The revolutionary councils are represented throughout Libya (enter the slogan: “Revolutionary Councils Everywhere”). They do not constitute a party and lack any kind of internal regulations, even on an ethical level, which they can impose on their membership, and, in fact, there is no set of restrictions whatsoever

⁵ Interview with American psychologist Jerrold Post, from 24 May 2010 (date of access unavailable): <http://www.aeud.fr/Jerrold-Post-Kadhafi-n-est.html>.

⁶ Alkawli Al Ahmar, *The Societal Roots of the Politics of Modern Libya: The Individual, the Group and the Leadership Structure of Politics in the Country* (in Arabic; Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2009).

that apply to its membership, nor a procedure for internal promotion within the councils, nor a democratic procedure for them. Like a one-size-fits-all, off-the-rack item of cheap clothing, the revolutionary councils can be made use of in all social environments, without having to worry about their role. Its nebulousness makes it possible for the councils to be used for anything. Their influence on all spheres of life in Libya is pervasive, whether social, geographic, cultural or political. Qaddafi further introduced a “tribal council” which had the role of monitoring and controlling the relations which existed between the various tribes of Libya, and ensured that any inter-tribal exchanges were in the interests of the political regime. Despite the complex net of state surveillance bodies, Qaddafi's experiences had taught him that the people would always find a way to break free.

Like adding a further layer to an onion, Qaddafi came up with the idea of yet another body through which he could exercise his power, calling it “The People's Leaders,” a group which was set up in the 1990s and was tasked with monitoring popular political activity in popular neighborhoods. Going further still, Qaddafi was also in charge of numerous state intelligence services, whose role it was to watch all of the others, and each other. Qaddafi even went so far as to allow his sons the freedom to set up their own military brigades who would be relied on to defend the regime in times of great need, showing how little he trusted the regular army. Playing all of these factions of people against each other gave Muammar Qaddafi the opportunity to sit for years on the top of a pyramid made up of a series of clientist and kinship-based relationships, benefiting from the state resources and preventing any other form of leadership. Since, technically, the revolutionary councils do not govern, and, instead, agitate for the constant revolution, there is a lack of accountability; he is like the constitutional monarch, with a revolutionary position similar to that of a *Tariqa* sheikh, making any potential competition impossible.

The problem was that the Libya of 1969 no longer existed. Oil money and its spread allowed for the urbanization of many Libyans, putting them into homes with running water and electricity. It also allowed many Libyans the chance to leave the country and travel abroad, which together with modern electronic communications and satellite television, made it possible for the people of Libya to see for themselves how things are managed in other countries, comparing it to their own country. The children of these rapidly urbanized people have also found it possible to go through Libyan state-funded universities and vocational colleges, yet they were not equipped with any of the tools they needed to replace foreigners working in any of the major sectors of the economy. This means that an entire generation was trained and ended up unemployed, living with their parents, and unable to start their own nuclear families.

Others within the same generation were a bit luckier politically and economically: the children of the members of revolutionary councils and the various security forces which protect the regime – the regime's protective shield. This group had learned from their parents how to make the most of kinship and friendship ties to acquire power within the state and to enrich themselves. Social relations with these youth and, especially, the children of Colonel Qaddafi became the coveted prize of advisers who filled the corridors of power. On the opposite end of this bonanza, the people who did not have access to this kind of social capital found themselves increasingly hemmed in and unable to improve their station. For them,

Qaddafi's speeches in front of the revolutionary committees to celebrate the anniversary of the "Revolution" held no promise of oil money handouts.

The political pressure applied to the people found its release in such things as the secret religious orders that sprung up and the regime sought to physically eliminate (such as in the case of the Abu Saleem Prison in Tripoli), or in the failed military coups, which led Qaddafi to diminish the power of his military to the utmost. Yet another route for the expression of dissatisfaction was for dissidents to organize themselves in other countries, making it easier for Qaddafi to accuse them of treason. Qaddafi and his regime proved themselves remarkably capable of weathering this storm. What they could not foresee, however, was the wave of youth revolts which toppled his neighbors to the east and west, in Tunisia and Egypt, and the increasingly pressing demands for democracy within his own borders.

Now the only question we have before us is: will the rebels who seem bent on overthrowing merely reproduce the cult of the individual leader once they gain power?

Looking Forward

The expected thing to do at this stage would be to look back and point out all of the chances the regime had to save itself and avert this kind of a revolution. Many believed that Qaddafi's chance to avoid catastrophe would be found in the adoption of a constitution which would set out a protocol for the peaceful transition to another leader, making way for his son Saif al Islam. In spite of the warning signs and growing disenchantment, Qaddafi missed this chance and others. The reasons for this lie in the political culture and psychological composition of a man like Qaddafi and other autocrats in positions similar to his own.

We need also not to lose sight of Qaddafi's very particular predicament. He came to power before he reached age 30, and had to impose his style of leadership on others around him in order to stay in power for more than 40 years. He made the most of what was available to him, relying mostly on a mix of traditional tools he found already in place, resulting from kinship, clientelism, and violence; however, these made him, in a sense, something of a prisoner to the requirements of internal balances.

Since the principle of imposing leadership is not restricted by values, laws, or norms, the leadership is for those who lead others with power. Sooner or later, the leader's clients themselves would form their own concentric circles of alliances, often relying on their own extended families. Perhaps one of Qaddafi's deepest problems was that all of his many children theoretically had equal access to power, planting the seeds for another level of power struggles. It seems that Qaddafi's unwillingness to see such a conflict break out prevented him from handing over state authority to his seemingly favored son Saif al Islam, and Libya paid the price.

War between Qaddafi and the rebels thus became inevitable in view of the sociological and anthropological background of the Libyan regime, as well as the historic experience of various political actors in that country. There was simply no independent organizational framework for political action which would have allowed action as well as peaceful and positive negotiations. These facts also explain the secret to Qaddafi's longevity and resourceful perseverance thus far; Qaddafi is able to safely localize all of the upheavals to particular parts of the country and threaten anybody who encroaches on him with

what remains of his considerable might. Having lost all moral and political credibility, Qaddafi's regime might not have much time left right now, but that does not do away with the problematic shortcoming of the revolution which suffers from the absence of Libyan modernist intellectuals.

Just like the regime itself, all those who speak on behalf of the revolution use the language of tribe and clan and thrones, and operate within the environment of fiefdoms of power. This language is used by the despotic regime to mislead people to be against the revolution. After all, when did tribalism ever produce a modern political way of thinking? Was this mode of societal organization not rejected by the members of the Omar Al Mukhtar Club in the 1940s [named for a famous leader of the Libyan independence movement]? Did we not get rid of it back in the days of the Nationalist Party of Bashir Saadawi, who understood that it would need help them realize their aims? Are we not simply falling into Qaddafi's trap by becoming tribalist? We all need to be clear about this, and speak with one voice: we demand a non-tribalist alternative for Libya.