

The Balkanization of Libya

Interview with Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya

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CAIRO, May 13, 2011 (IPS) – As the battle for Libya rages on – with the country’s economic heartland, Misurata, being the scene of some of the uprising’s fiercest fighting – experts are warning that a ‘Balkanisation’ of Libya is possible if the U.S. and NATO opt to exploit loopholes in U.N. Resolution 1973 by arming the opposition.

In the region, “Muammar Gaddafi was advocating for the African Union (AU) to be independent instead of being subservient to the EU and the U.S. by pushing for the African Development Bank (ADB) and replacing the Franc with an African currency,” Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, research associate at the Centre for Research on Globalisation (CRG) specialising on the Middle East and Central Asia, told IPS. “Realistically, the Libyan intervention is an attack on the African continent by cutting its head off. They don’t just want to ‘Balkanise’ – fragment and divide – Libya, they want to ‘Balkanise’ the entire continent.”

“Now the west has rediscovered that Gaddafi is a dictator and a tyrant, they are prepared to take action against his regime, under U.N. Resolution 1973, which is primarily concerned with the protection of civilians. The irony is that NATO is now using EU weaponry to bomb some of the same weaponry it had sold to him earlier,” Kaye Stearman, media coordinator with the UK-based Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT) told IPS.

In response, former British ambassador to Libya, Richard Dalton told IPS that “NATO has no strategic interests in Libya or elsewhere beyond what is stated in the North Atlantic Treaty as amplified by publicly announced decisions of the NATO Council. Its concern in Libya is the implementation of UNSC 1973”.

“The EU wants to see stability, prosperity and good government in all its neighbours,” Dalton emphasised.

According to U.N. Resolution 1973, which authorised action to protect Libyan civilians, all member states must ensure strict implementation of the arms embargo established by paragraphs 9 and 10 of the previous Resolution 1970.

Geographically, Libya is a gateway from North to Central Africa and is positioned between Eastern and Western Africa. Human rights advocates warn that by arming opposition groups tribal conflict could spill outside of Libya’s borders. This would also be in direct violation of the U.N. mandate, they say.

“Some EU countries are also considering whether to supply arms to the anti-Gaddafi rebels, which could increase future instability. This can have unforeseen long-term consequences, which can bring great harm to societies and militate against peace building,” says Stearman.

One example of how this has played out in the past, Stearman explains, is the U.S. arming of “mujahedeen ‘freedom’ forces in Afghanistan in the 1980s and 1990s, which actively prolonged conflicts, led to the growth of armed extremists, including local and foreign Taliban forces, the proliferation of a warlord-based society and the thwarting of the growth of civil society. In addition, the same weaponry supplied by the U.S. was later used against U.S. and allied forces.”

During the Potsdam Conference in 1945 – at the end of the Second World War – the Soviet Union, Britain and the U.S. came to an impasse over the fate of seized Italian colonies in Libya. The U.S. wanted a U.N. trusteeship but the Soviet Union suggested various provincial trusteeships, with Tripolitania under its command, Fezzan under France, and Cyrenaica under Britain.

That history is repeating itself now with the U.S. and the EU not only looking to divide Libya under two administrations in Tripoli and Benghazi, but also to eliminate a key competitor that had visions of uniting Africa, Nazemroaya said.

Libya and China were rapidly becoming key energy partners as Beijing positioned itself to be the third- largest buyer of Libyan oil – with more than 50 investment projects in the works.

Analysts like *Asian Times* reporter and author of *Obama does Globalistan*, Pepe Escobar point out that China has taken a serious hit with the recent unrest in North Africa. Its new contracts in Libya totalling 18 billion dollars have declined by nearly 53 percent – this was the aim of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM)’s strategic policy to minimise China’s economic interest in Africa.

AFRICOM, headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany, is responsible for U.S. military activities in 53 African nations.

The U.S. badly wanted a base in Africa and the Libyan intervention has “now provided the opening”, Escobar told IPS. “AFRICOM’s participation is the Pentagon’s strategy to counter Chinese investments in Africa.”

Escobar says that at the 2010 Lisbon Summit of leaders of NATO governments the agenda was “total domination of the Mediterranean and the establishment of a NATO ‘lake’... Gaddafi’s business dealings with China irked Brussels, Paris, London, and of course Washington”.

In recent days, Libya’s opposition claim to have gained an upper hand by seizing control of the besieged city of Misurata, whose strategic seaport has been a key lifeline for humanitarian aid missions evacuating migrants and refugees fleeing the violence.

However, Nazemroaya points out that Misurata – which could be likened to a Shanghai on the African continent – is an important industrial and trade base for Libya and Africa that would be a major economic prize should the opposition maintain control.

“Misurata is a very important industrial city and economic heartland. Qasr Ahmed, which is

located 250 kilometres east of Tripoli, is a commercial port, and the main headquarters for the Libyan Iron and Steel Company (Lisco) that exports over 60 percent of its products with nearly 50 percent going to markets in Italy and Spain,” Nazemroaya said. “Furthermore, the Libyan National Oil Company – which is one of the top 20 energy companies worldwide – is also based there. Privatisation is happening under the guise of a foreign peacekeeping mission, which is why the EU wants to send soldiers.”

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