

The Portuguese-speaking African countries and regime change in Libya

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Several countries have already established unofficial diplomatic relations with the National Transition Council (NTC), i.e. the political institution set up in February 2011 by the opposition to Muammar Gaddafi, to formally represent Libya. However, just a few countries have officially recognized the NTC: France, Gambia, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Malta, Qatar, Spain and United Kingdom.

On April 22nd, Gambia became the first African state to officially recognize the NTC “as the only legitimate body that represents the interest and affairs of the people of Libya”.¹ At the same time, Gambia also froze all the assets held in its territory by Gaddafi and condemned “the heinous atrocities that are being carried out by the Gaddafi regime against innocent citizens”.² Gambia’s recognition of the NTC was “symbolic, but meaningful nonetheless”, bearing in mind that it was “one of Gaddafi’s closest allies in West Africa”.³

Senegal did not go as far as Gambia, but nevertheless President Abdoulaye Wade recognized the NTC as the “legitimate opposition, whose natural role – with African and international support – is to prepare republican institutions

in Libya via democratic, free and transparent elections”.⁴ It is ironic that, despite the nuances of diplomacy, the first signs of switching alliances or policy adjustments in Sub-Saharan Africa regarding Libya’s regime-change-in-progress took place in West Africa. Gaddafi used Libya’s financial resources to guarantee his policy goals and influence and West Africa was one of the regions in the continent that most benefited from his favor. A few years ago, the former British Labor politician Neil Kinnock stressed that “loyalty is a fine quality, but in excess it fills political graveyards”. Gambia and Senegal seem to agree. Their decisions were the first visible signs of the forthcoming shifting alliances that regime change in Libya will entail, as well as the potential strategic implications for Africa, both at bilateral and multilateral levels.

In the past, the Arab world and the Arab League were the main dimensions of Libya’s foreign policy. Gaddafi’s progressive disillusionment regarding the Arab governments led to their replacement by new African allies in the late 1990s. Africa became “the ideological partner for Libya’s ambitions of regional identity”.⁵ Yet, in the last ten years, Libya’s political and diplomatic strategy towards

1 “Government Recognizes Libya’s Transitional National Council” (*The Daily Observer* [Banjul] via *allAfrica.com*, 26 April 2011).

2 *Idem*.

3 Jason Pack, “Gambia Leads the Way” (*Wall Street Journal*, 26 April 2011).

4 “Senegal’s Wade: rebels should lead Libya transition” (*Reuters*, 20 May 2011).

5 George Joffé and Emanuela Paoletti, “Libya’s Foreign Policy: Drivers and Objectives” (GMF/IAI, Mediterranean Paper Series, October 2010), p. 13.



Sub-Saharan Africa – highly personalized around Gaddafi – has had few concrete results. Thus, under normal circumstances, the end of Gaddafi's authoritarian regime will lead to a reassessment of Libya's foreign policy. Libya's foreign policy adjustment will be welcomed by Nigeria and South Africa in particular. Gaddafi's attempts to extend his influence in Sub-Saharan Africa and to enlarge his role within the African Union have been a permanent source of concern to Nigeria and South Africa in the last few years, a development that led them to react whenever required and possible in order to curtail his expanding influence. For example, "at the new African Union's founding conference in Pretoria in July 2000, Libya was marginalized and excluded from a leadership role either in the new organization itself or in its major project, the New Economic Plan for African Development (NEPAD)" (...) and "the major attempt to enshrine Colonel Gaddafi as an African statesman has been blocked by South Africa and Nigeria".⁶

South Africa – and Nigeria in particular – saw with increasing concern the expansion of the Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD). CEN-SAD was a clear Gaddafi product, opening the way for Libya to "become a genuine power in the region".⁷ Established by six countries in February 1998, since then its membership has grown to 29 members. In other words, CEN-SAD was mainly a multilateral mechanism allowing Gaddafi to expand his diplomatic and economic influence in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is not a coincidence that both Nigeria and South Africa – as well as Gabon – voted in March in favor of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, imposing a ban on all flights over Libyan airspace and tightening sanctions on Gaddafi's authoritarian regime. Despite Gaddafi's sup-

port in the 1990s for the anti-apartheid struggle, for Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress, President Jacob Zuma did not waste this opportunity to promote the role of South Africa as one of the continental African hegemonic powers. Even though South Africa is not a direct player in the ongoing Libyan regime change, when the moment is ripe, President Zuma may come to play a key role if he decides to harden his stance on Gaddafi and attempts to rally other African states against him.⁸

Like Nigeria and South Africa – and for the same reasons, although on a smaller scale – Angola also benefits from the demise of Gaddafi's authoritarian regime. However, at the same time, President José Eduardo dos Santos sees the ongoing events in the Middle East and North Africa region with great concern, and fears a possible contagion effect. Moreover, the Angolan President considers the international intervention in Libya – as well as the external pressure exerted upon Tunisia and Egypt – to be an unwelcome precedent. So far, there have already been at least two unsuccessful attempts to organize significant protests in Angola against the regime.⁹ More importantly, Angola fears a possible regime change that could benefit from external support. If possible, President José Eduardo dos Santos would like to have the best of both worlds, i.e. Gaddafi's departure, but without gross external interference. Unsurprisingly, when he received Libyan secretary for African Affairs Guma Amer in Luanda on April 30th, the Angolan President defended a peaceful solution to the ongoing conflict.¹⁰ The same message has been repeated since then on different occasions. For example, on May 25th Ango-

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6 Ibid., p. 38.

7 Ibid., p. 37.

8 See Pack, "Gambia Leads the Way" (fn. 3).

9 See Vasco Martins, "Empty words of revolution in Angola" (IPRIS Viewpoints, No. 43, March 2011).

10 "President dos Santos briefed on situation in Libya" (Angop, 1 May 2011).



lan Minister for Foreign Affairs George Chicoty attended an extraordinary session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU), which “demanded an immediate pause in the fighting and in the NATO-led air campaign”.¹¹ In Addis Ababa, Chicoty accused NATO of “unilateralism” rather than searching for a peaceful solution to the Libyan crisis.¹² A few days before, Chicoty also criticized the interference from the West – the Angolan Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Manuel Augusto,¹³ did the same on May 20th –, as well as the choice of a “military solution”.¹⁴ Yet, the fall of Gaddafi would open new possibilities for Angolan diplomacy in order to promote its influence. In the short run, as far as Portuguese-speaking African countries are concerned, Gaddafi’s departure will allow Luanda to reinforce its influence in Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe.

In contrast to Luanda, Bissau and São Tomé have nothing to gain from the removal of Gaddafi. In fact, the opposite is true. Both will be heavily hurt by the regime change in Libya, since over the last few years both have benefited from Gaddafi’s financial support. The close relationship between Guinea-Bissau and Libya is an open secret. On several occasions, Bissau-Guinean President Malam Bacai Sanhá traveled to Libya. In the aftermath of the military unrest, in April 2010, leader of the mutiny and subsequent Army Chief of Staff Gen. António Indjai’s first trip abroad was to Libya. Unsurprisingly, one of the few rallies outside Libya supporting Gaddafi’s regime took place in Guinea-Bissau, organized by the Association of Friendship between Guinea-Bissau and Libya.¹⁵ Thus, it is not a shock that President Bacai Sanhá called for a ceasefire and a peaceful solution to the Libyan crisis,¹⁶ and later on the Bissau-Guinean government condemned NATO’s bombings as “cruel and unacceptable”.¹⁷

São Tomé and Príncipe also sees the fall of Gaddafi with great concern. All the financial support promised by Libya for 2011 was frozen, including the construction of a five-star hotel, a project amounting to US\$35 million and considered crucial to start developing the tourist industry, as well as Gaddafi’s important contribution of US\$1.4 million to the 2011 state budget.¹⁸ The close

relationship between Patrice Trovoada and Gaddafi was already evident in 2008, when Trovoada was Prime Minister for a brief three-month period between February and June. Like Guinea-Bissau, there was no surprise when President Fradique de Menezes expressed his “indignation” over NATO’s military intervention in Libya.¹⁹ Since he became President in July 2003, Fradique de Menezes has traveled to Libya to meet with Gaddafi on several occasions. For cash-strapped São Tomé, the fall of Gaddafi and the subsequent foreign policy changes in Libya, like in the case of Guinea-Bissau, is really bad news.

For Cape Verde and Mozambique, the fall of Gaddafi is not an important issue in their foreign policies, at least not as much as it is to Angola, Guinea-Bissau, and São Tomé and Príncipe. When the Libyan crisis erupted in mid-February, Mozambican President Armando Guebuza criticized Gaddafi’s heavyhanded response to the protests.²⁰ In parallel, Mozambique’s Foreign Minister Oldemiro Balói said that the real goal of Resolution 1973 was “regime change”,²¹ and more recently, in accordance with the position held by the African Union, criticized NATO’s military campaign.²² However, the truth is that “there will be few tears shed in Maputo when Gaddafi is finally toppled”.²³ Indeed, President Guebuza stressed that the time has come for an inclusive transitional period as well as political reforms which meet the aspirations of the Libyan people.²⁴ In other words, Guebuza could live with a regime change in Libya.

Cape Verde’s situation is not much different from Mozambique. Libya only opened an embassy in Praia last year. Unlike Guinea-Bissau or São Tomé and Príncipe, in the last few years Cape Verde did not benefit from Gaddafi’s financial support. Thus, Foreign Minister José Brito could freely summon Libyan ambassador Salem Ali Mohamed Almakrihi, in order to criticize the disproportionate use of force, and to express his “worry and concern regarding the seriousness and risks” of the situation prevailing in Libya.²⁵ Like Mozambique, bilateral relations between Cape Verde and Libya were, at this stage, still unimportant, even though in the last couple of years there was a bilateral rapprochement. When Cape Verdean President Pedro Pires visited Libya in June 2009, he announced that his country had become a member

11 “Decision on the Peaceful Resolution of the Libyan Crisis” (*African Union*, 25 May 2011).

12 “Angola acusa NATO de desrespeitar posições africanas e de querer assassinar Kadhafi” (*Lusa*, 28 May 2011).

13 “Ingerência no conflito na Líbia tem interesses geoestratégicos - secretário de Estado” (*Angop*, 20 May 2011).

14 “Governo angolano rejeita opção militar para a Líbia” (*África 21*, 23 May 2011).

15 “Organização amizade Guiné-Líbia convoca marcha a favor de Kadhafi” (*Lusa*, 11 March 2011).

16 “Guiné-Bissau pede fim de ataques à Líbia” (*VOA*, 23 March 2011).

17 “Governo da Guiné-Bissau considera “cruel e inaceitável” operação da NATO” (*Lusa*, 5 May 2011).

18 Ramusel Graça and Cristina Krippahl, “Guerra na Líbia abre buraco no Orçamento de São Tomé e Príncipe” (*Deutsche Welle*, 24 March 2011).

19 “PR “indignado” com a intervenção da NATO na Líbia e da França na Costa do Marfim” (*Lusa*, 29 May 2011).

20 “Guebuza Denounces ‘Inconceivable’ Violence” (*AIM/allAfrica.com*, 25 February 2011).

21 “MNE moçambicano recebe que Líbia se transforme “num Iraque”” (*Prestígio*, 15 April 2011).

22 “Líbia: União Africana “dissocia-se completamente” dos ataques da NATO – MNE moçambicano” (*Lusa*, 25 May 2011).

23 “Guebuza Denounces ‘Inconceivable’ Violence” (*AIM/allAfrica.com*, 25 February 2011).

24 Nico Smith, “President Pohamba Promotes Regional Integration” (*Namibian*, 20 May 2011).

25 “Governo de Cabo Verde convoca embaixador da Líbia” (*VNN*, 27 February 2011).



of the CEN-SAD – like Guinea-Bissau in 2004 and São Tomé and Príncipe in 2008.

With Gaddafi's demise, Libya's leading role in CEN-SAD will certainly fade away much to Nigeria and South Africa's relief. Inevitably, the fall of Gaddafi will mean that the strategic weight of the African dimension in Libya's foreign policy will decrease, and this will imply that part of the financial resources channeled by Gaddafi to the Sub-Saharan states will be diverted by the National Transition Council to other policy objectives. In other words, it is likely that the end of Gaddafi's authoritarian regime will imply that Libya's foreign policy will become less oriented towards Sub-Saharan Africa and more focused on the United States and Europe, as well as the MENA region. As always, there will be losers and winners. As far as the Portuguese-speaking African countries are concerned, Angola's foreign policy will benefit from the Libyan regime change, Cape Verde and Mozambique will be able to live with it, while Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe will inevitably end up paying the bill. Thucydides explained it a long time ago: "the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must".

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