# CONTINUITY AND BREAKDOWN:

# THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN LIBYA'S RELATIONS WITH BRITAIN (1951-1984)

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester

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by

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# CONTENTS

# LIST OF TABLES, CHART, AND MAPS

TABLES:



CHART:



MAPS:

# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this dissertation is to study the foreign policy of Libya towards Britain from the establishment of the Libyan state in 1951 until the breakdown in relations in 1984. This long period covers almost the whole lifetime of the contemporary Libyan state and comprises two different regimes, which conducted two completely different foreign policies. The task of this study, however, is to answer the question, How and why has Libya's foreign policy towards Britain changed from opposite poles?

Chapter One provides background to the study. It briefly examines the historical roots of the Libyan-British relations and the legacies that Libya inherited from her past. Then the study is divided into three parts. The first two deal with the reasons why Libya's foreign policy took the course it did during the monarchical and revolutionary regimes respectively. The first part is divided into five chapters. The first three deal with the monarchical foreign policy, focusing on Britain's role in creating the Libyan state, the friendship and alliance between the two countries, and the Suez crisis and the Libyan government's delicate position. The two remaining chapters deal with Libya's foreign policy under the revolutionary regime, starting with an examination of the nature and origins of the Revolution and then examining issues which have been a matter of concern for both countries, such as the evacuation of British military bases, nationalization of the British Petroleum Company, Libya's support for Malta in evacuating foreign military bases, Libya's support for the IRA and other liberation movements, Libya's support for the Palestinians, and Britain's harbouring and aiding Libyan opposition groups. Part three deals with the reasons why Libya's foreign policy changed. It examines oil and leadership, and explores their role in the shaping of Libyan foreign policy.

The study argues that the monarchy's foreign policy closely shadowed that of Britain since it was a British creature from the first. This kind of foreign policy was incompatible with the aspirations of the Libyan people, who tended to identify themselves with the ideology of Arab nationalism and Pan-Islam. As a result, the monarchical regime faced a serious dilemma, which led to its eventual downfall.

This study also focuses on and argues that the change in leadership in September 1969 and the two leaders' different personalities, beliefs, and ideologies best explain the contrasting nature of and change in Libyan foreign policy. The monarchy's subordinated foreign policy was completely changed after the Revolution, when the new regime showed that it was determined to pursue an independent and pro-Arab foreign policy. This new orientation in Libya's foreign policy seems to have appeared to Britain as a threat to her interests and led eventually to the deterioration of relations between Libya and Britain.

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Studying foreign policy, especially that of the third-world countries, is a difficult task because data and information are not only scarce and unorganized but also seen as top secret, which inhibits research in the field. This being so, it is incumbent on me to acknowledge here that this study could not have been completed without the support of many institutions and individuals, to whom I owe a debt of thanks.

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# DEDICATION

To my nuclear and extended family,

and, most of all,

to my father and mother.

# INTRODUCTION

Libya's foreign policy in general, and towards Britain and the USA in particular, has attracted the world's attention on account of its radical change from a position of subordination during the monarchical period between 1951 and 1969 to an independent and sometimes aggressive posture after the military coup of 1969 and the installation of a revolutionary regime.

The scene presented by the large numbers of armed British police officers surrounding the Libyan People's Bureau in London's St. James's Square (with a police helicopter hovering overhead) as thirty Libyan diplomats left the building under heavy guard and were ushered into dark-windowed vans provides an apt image with which to begin this study of how and why the Libyan-British relationship went from friendship and alliance to complete breakdown. Prior to 1969, no one could have imagined such a scene. Britain's influence over Libya's affairs was substantial, its virtual control appearing firmly entrenched. Britain not only had military bases in Libya but, more importantly, it had the trust and commitment of the King of the country. As result, Libya was strongly tied to British policies and the pursuit of a pro-British foreign policy. This all came to an end after Mu'ammar al-Qathafi's assumption of power in 1969. He was determined to end Libya's pro-Western foreign policy and her subordination to Britain.

Although much has been written on Libya's domestic policies since 1969, and in the light of these on its history, economic evolution, ruling ideology, relations with the USA and the former Soviet Union, and, not least, on the role of al-Qathafi himself, little systematic examination has in fact been made of Libya's foreign policy. As will be made

evident by the subsequent discussion, much of the writing on Libya has been done by journalists whose contributions frequently appeared to form part of a vigorous media campaign waged in certain Western countries, especially the United States and Britain, against Libya and the al-Qathafi regime. The other kind of writing on Libya has appeared to aim at flattering al-Qathafi and the Libyan Revolution. Works falling into such categories are certainly neither scientific nor objective, and contribute little to a better understanding of the country's domestic and foreign affairs.

The choice of the subject was not determined only by the paucity of studies in this area, but also by a recognition of the long-term significance of Britain for Libya, and *vice versa.* The relations between the two countries have always been intricate and go back as early as the seventeenth century, when a peace treaty was signed between England and the state of Tripoli. In the contemporary period, Britain played a significant role in the penetration of Italian colonialism into the region, fought against it in the Second World War, and, after the defeat of the Italians, took over the government of Libya. During this last period, Britain was directly involved in Libyan affairs and set the basis for the future Libyan state in the way that would secure her interests in the region. After Libya achieved what was to prove at best a nominal independence in 1951, Britain became the protector of the monarchy. She was closely involved in creating many of Libya's public institutions, including the army, and became the place where Libyan army officers received their advanced training. Among those trainees was al-Qathafi, who stayed four months in Britain in 1966.

As far as Libya's foreign policy towards Britain is concerned, no systematic study has been devoted solely to the subject despite its importance. In an attempt to fill the gap, the present study analyses the origins of the Libyan-British relations and the continuity and shifts in Libya's foreign policy towards Britain from the establishment of the relationship on the eve of Libyan independence until its breakdown in April 1984. During

this period, Libya witnessed two types of regime: the conservative monarchical regime, which lasted almost eighteen years under the leadership of King Idris, and the revolutionary regime, which started in September 1969 under the leadership of al-Qathafi. The foreign policies of these two regimes, in general and towards Britain in particular, have differed to the point of being antithetical.

*The Study of Foreign Policy in Developing Countries: An Overview*

The question of how to study Libya's foreign policy towards Britain is far from straightforward. Until recently, relatively little attention has been paid to developing countries' foreign policies. The analysis of foreign policy has been long dominated by studies developed basically for Western industrialized countries, where political institutions and organizations have a major influence on making and implementing policy decisions. An example of this is the *realist* approach, which is based on what Hans Morgenthau has described, in his well-known work *Politics among nations*, as power politics. He argues that 'international politics, like all politics, is a struggle for power... statesmen think and act in terms of interests defined as power.'[1] Morgenthau's pioneering effort has been criticized for its lack of adequate discussion of "ends" of foreign policy, its lack of congent definition of the nature of "national interest" under changing environmental conditions, and its lack of clearly set-out criteria for distinguishing between power as an objective and power as a means.[2] Morgenthau's work has been further criticized by scholars from developing countries (among them Korany and Dessouqi) for its view of the foreign policies of developing countries as a function of super-power conflict, implying that third-world states lack autonomy and are affected only by external stimuli.[3] In other words, the 'realist' approach would suggest that developing countries lack purposeful foreign policies of their own and assumes that they only react to initiatives and situations created by external factors. Moreover, the 'realist' approach argues that the character of even key foreign policy decision-makers is not a significant determinant of foreign policy. Rather, the nature of the international milieu

in which they operate imposes certain constraints which channel the actions of states, with foreign policy decision-makers having to act in similar ways despite personal or ideological differences. However, to view Libya's foreign policy simply as a by-product of East-West conflict - the necessary consequence of the 'realist' approach - is indeed to miss a great deal of what has been significant about this country's foreign policy. It is likewise obvious that faced with similar environmental constraints, Idris and al-Qathafi did not act similarly towards Britain and on many other foreign policy issues.

A second approach to foreign policy also views the foreign policies of developing countries as determined by the same factors that shape the foreign policies of developed countries.[4] It argues that all states (big and small, rich and poor, developed and developing) seek to sustain their own power and that all of them are motivated principally by security factors. The only difference is quantitative: the developing countries have fewer resources and capabilities, and consequently conduct foreign policy on a smaller scale.[5] The problem with this approach is clearly that it does not properly take into account the distinctive features of developing countries, the relative lack of effectiveness or indeed actual weakness of political institutions, the low levels of national identity, and the variable impact of processes of social and economic change.

Among the early contributors to the input-output approach was Gabriel Almond. His framework was developed around three major factors: (1) historical background, including the social, economic, and ideological factors affecting a state's behaviour, in addition to the historical tendencies and interests characterising its foreign policy; (2) the policy process, which involves both governmental and non-governmental agencies; and (3) the substance of a state's foreign policy.[6]

This approach was utilized by George Modelski in his study, *A theory of foreign policy*, which focuses attention on four elements or variables: the power input, the power output,

interests which inform the behaviour of states, and their objectives in the foreign policy sphere.[7]

The decision-making approach marks a shifting away from traditional modes of political analysis, which looks on the state as an essentially static unit of analysis, and the beginning of the behaviouralist revolution in the study of politics. The decision-making approach has been dominated by two major frameworks: the psychological-perceptual and the bureaucratic-organizational.

The psychological approach contends that in order to understand a state's foreign policy one should examine the behaviour of official decision-makers and the influences that shape their behaviour. This approach views policy, in significant measure, as a function of the values, dispositions, and indeed idiosyncrasies of particular actors.[8] The psychological and idiosyncratic variables focused on in this approach are concerned with the perception, images, and personal characteristics and experiences of the decision-maker which distinguish his or her foreign policy choices from those of other decision-makers.[9] Korany argues that 'the cornerstone of the school is the proposition that decision-makers respond not to the real world but to their perceptions and images of this world, which may or may not be accurate representations of that world reality.'[10]

The bureaucratic-organizational framework broadens the framework of decision-making analysis by including a range of bureaucratic actors and refuses to view the foreign policy decision-making process as a process of choice limited to or controlled by a few individuals (such as the president or even a coterie of senior decision-makers).[11] In an attempt to explain the Cuban missile crisis, for example, Graham Allison, a prominent member of this school, argues in his study *The essence of decision* that foreign policies are the result of bargaining among the components of the bureaucracy. Instead of assuming control by key leaders at the top of the organization, Allison

identifies a process of intensive competition among the decision-making units.[12] He outlines three models that can be used for analysing the decision-making process. The first one is the 'rational actor' model, which sees foreign policy making as a rational activity pursued by skilled men and women fully aware of all the relevant facts and hence in a position to make the correct decision by carefully assessing all possible options.[13] The second model, which is termed by Allison the 'organizational model', is based on the notion that government is not a totality but the sum of a number of different organizations, each with its own goals and its own procedures.[14] In such a setting, decisions come as a result of debate among different organizations within the government. In the third model, presented as the 'governmental politics model', the fundamental units of analysis are not the organization but individuals who have the objective of maximizing their own job satisfaction and sense of achievement, aims which must be accomplished in active competition with other individuals within the organization of which they form a part.[15]

Yet it is evident that the analysis of foreign policy offers no pre-defined categories which can be simply applied to all societies. The sphere of foreign policy has been viewed from different angles by different scholars, and, as a result, foreign policy has been explained in terms of very different sets of variables. For example, James Rosenau has identified five sets of elements in terms of which foreign policy can be explained: idiosyncratic traits, role-behaviour generated by the decision-making role, governmental variables, societal factors, and systematic characteristics.[16]

The same eclectic approach has been followed by other scholars, for example Coplin and Kegley, who identified four categories to be used in foreign policy analysis, and Hermann and East, who have developed seven theoretical perspectives in terms of which foreign policy behaviour can be explained.[17] With some differences in their subcategories, all these scholars stress either psychological or idiosyncratic factors. According

to Rosenau, 'the idiosyncratic variables include all those aspects of a decision maker—his values, talents, and prior experiences—that distinguish his foreign policy choice or behavior from those of every other decision maker.'[18]

The psychologically oriented scholars are largely agreed on the importance of such factors as beliefs, motives, values, ideologies, and decision style in formulating foreign policy. The question which has created some degree of difference among them is not whether these traits have an effect or not, but the degree of that effect on foreign policy. Among those who see personal traits as having a potentially significant role but as having in practice limited effect on foreign policy is Rosenau. He argues that 'the role model predicts outcomes so well that no individual variable is likely to approach its power.'[19] Here, Rosenau appears to have based his conclusions on Western contexts. Yet in the United States and Western Europe the political system is articulated through well-established political institutions capable of channelling and moulding individual behaviour:

> The individual is identified by the job he is doing; he is constrained by its laws and regulations. Rosenau's conclusions were made from his study of the behavior of members of the U.S. Congress. In the developing states, roles are not highly formalized; therefore, an individual's characteristics are much more influential than the characteristics of the role he is filling in these countries.[20]

Contrary to the experience of developed countries, the foreign policy of developing countries is often determined by an individual or small group within the dominant political elite. Muhammad Haykal observes,

> Unlike developed societies, third world countries have not yet attained the stage where constitutional legitimacy imposes objective constraints on the decision-making process. Developing countries are usually at one of two stages in their social, economic and political development: the traditional or the transitional.[21]

In both stages, according to Haykal, decision-making power is usually held by one person, whether this be a king, prince or sheikh, charismatic leader, or dictator.[22] And certainly

in the Arab countries and the Middle East region in general, foreign policy is normally dominated by a strong and central figure. The centrality of a single leader is especially the norm in the drafting of foreign policy.

Since Max Weber's initial formulation, the idea of the dynamic role played by remarkable personal characteristics (or charisma) has been associated with the populist appeal enjoyed by individual leaders of heroic personality.[23] In societies undergoing broadscale social and economic transformation, where the majority of people are still illiterate, leaders with special skills have enjoyed overwhelming popularity. Indeed, charismatic leaders in developing countries are usually seen by their people as liberators rather than dictators. They often enjoy popular support for their role in leading the struggle against colonialism, dismantling a conservative and narrowly based regime, or placing the country on the pathway of independent economic development. The late President Jamal Abdul Nasser, for example, has been treated as a hero and, even today, many Arab nationalists still hold him in high regard. The same can be said about al-Qathafi.

In 1966, Henry Kissinger pointed out that the charismatic leader needed a perpetual revolution to maintain his position, while at the same time the new states, in so far as their regimes sought to be active in international affairs, had a high incentive to seek in foreign policy an alternative means for the perpetuation of charismatic leadership.[24] He saw the West as deeply committed to Newtonian rationalism, while developing countries had still to free themselves from a revolutionary fervour and dogmatism fuelled by 'cultures which escaped the early impact of Newtonian thinking.' As a result, they were vulnerable to the seduction of leader-prophets.[25]

Earlier work on leadership was concerned with the personality of individual leaders and this line of studies has continued.[26] Stanley Hoffmann has argued that

scholarly concentration on how formal structures shape policies may lead to an underestimation of the role of leadership—a point which has particular relevance in the case of third world states.[27] Recent studies, however, have given particular emphasis to issues of belief systems and ideology and how they affect policy.[28] As far as Arab states are concerned, it is rare to find a work on inter-Arab politics that does not mention the importance, for example, of the ideology of pan-Arabism.[29]

The predominance of personalized leadership in the Middle Eastern countries has made the foreign policy of such countries appear to be subject to a great deal of fluctuation and uncertainty. Once the leader loses power in one way or another, a complete change of policies may occur. Taking just the Arab states and leaders as an example, the emergence of Nasser in 1952, Qassem in 1958, Sallal in 1962, Asad in 1970, and al-Qathafi in 1969 led to radical changes in the foreign policies of their countries. Even Sadat, who was regarded as the most faithful and obsequious of Nasser's associates, wasted no time in completely reversing his predecessor's foreign as well as domestic policies.

The common predominance of the single leader in developing countries, of course, does not totally rule out some role for political institutions and organizations. Yet where such institutions exist, they tend primarily to serve mobilization, control and legitimating functions for the leadership. Although some developing countries have undergone a degree of political liberalization with the introduction of multi-party systems and relatively free elections, these measures have been granted by the leader or the government rather than 'seized from below'.[30] As David Pool points out, it would be wrong to claim that a great deal of power has been gained by parliaments and parties in the Middle East as a result of such reforms, for in many instances 'they have been rather more accountable to government for their performance rather than to an electorate.'[31]

It is true that interest in the systematic study of the foreign policies of developing countries crystallized as much as a generation ago—in the middle 1970s—and that students of the subject have attempted to identify a range of specific features of these societies or relevant to an understanding of the foreign policy behaviour of Third World governments.[32] Yet since decision-making power has so frequently been concentrated in the hands of a single individual leader, the decision-making approach, especially in its psychological dimensions, has remained the most applicable. As Margaret Hermann has written,

> Personal characteristics of political leaders will have more of an impact on national foreign policy behavior if the political leaders are high level policy makers such as heads of state. Moreover, the chances of finding a relationship between a head of state's personal characteristics and his government's foreign policy behavior are enhanced if the situation facing the government is taken into account.[33]

In the case of Libya, special consideration will be given to the role of her first two leaders in formulating and implementing foreign policy by examining their social and educational backgrounds, and their belief systems and ideologies. Idris and al-Qathafi are the ones who have directed the course of the country since independence, although in different directions and under different circumstances. Most of those who have written on Libya are agreed that Libyan foreign policy cannot be understood without understanding both al-Qathafi and his predecessor.[34] Although Idris was aging and progressively less inclined to involve himself in the day-to-day running of the country's affairs, the fact remained that all important decisions were made by him or with his approval.[35] After 1969, the case became even clearer. Al-Qathafi has been the leader of the country, and has had the final say in directing Libya's domestic as well as her foreign policy. Al-Qathafi considers Libya to be in an extended stage of transition as long as the aims of the revolution have not been achieved.

There are also certain basic leadership characteristics and dispositions which influence the conduct of a country's foreign policy. These include interest in foreign affairs, training in foreign affairs, and sensitivity to the policy environment.[36] The first characteristic acts as a motivating force; interest in foreign affairs clearly results in the leader's being consulted and briefed on all foreign policy matters. Training in foreign affairs (or lack of it) also influences the extent to which a leader relies on others in taking decisions in the foreign policy sphere or depends on his or her own experience. Finally, 'sensitive' leaders remain alert to changes in the domestic and external situation, and retain an element of pragmatism and flexibility in their responses to such changes.[37]

If these three kinds of personal characteristics are applied to the Libyan case, they appear to fit well. Firstly, al-Qathafi has been 'the architect of the new Libya and is responsible for all of her recent political, economic and social development.'[38] Secondly, al-Qathafi has been indeed deeply interested in foreign affairs. This interest goes back to his childhood, when concern with political issues was reflected in extensive reading and listening to the radio. Later, his interest in foreign affairs motivated him to instigate the revolution in order to reverse what he viewed as Libya's passive and indeed subservient foreign policy, particularly with the context of a regional setting which had changed dramatically since Idris originally assumed power in 1951.[39] Thirdly, al-Qathafi, as a professional military officer when he came to power, had no formal training in conducting foreign affairs. Contrary to Hermann's analysis, however, he did not rely on others, but rather attacked the conventional diplomatic assumptions as signifying an overly constrained and ineffective approach to conducting foreign policy, and even ordered the transformation of Libya's embassies across the world into People's Bureaus.[40] Also, al-Qathafi's insensitivity to the environmental constraints made him pursue his aims regardless of seeming obstacles. He had strong beliefs which guided him in the choice of his priorities.

Idris, on the other hand, had acquired extensive experience in foreign affairs from his long years of dealing with the Italians as well as the British. He was also a leader who had the final word in domestic and foreign affairs. 'He had played the role of the benevolent monarch and the powerful leader who could call and dismiss cabinets at his own pleasure. He had been reproached for concentrating as much power as possible in his own hands.'[41] In an interview with Ivor Lucas, who had served at the British Embassy in Libya from 1962 to 1966, the former British diplomat pointed out that King Idris was rumoured to keep the signed resignations senior regime figures in a drawer of his desk against the day when he would want to accept them.[42] Idris was neither strongly interested in foreign affairs nor sensitive to the changing external environment to which Libya's foreign policy had to respond. Although all key decisions were made by him or with his approval, he was old and, as his health deteriorated, he tended to lose interest in the day-to-day running of the affairs of the country. His political insensitivity allowed him to continue his pro-Western foreign policy despite the growing public dissatisfaction over such an external posture.

*A Methodological Note*

The primary problem facing the student of international politics in general and foreign policy in particular is the lack of relevant data. Many, if not most, foreign policy files and documents remain "classified" or inaccessible for long periods after the historical events to which they relate.. As a result, the analyst has no alternative but to place heavy reliance on the speeches and statements of those involved in foreign policy decision-making as recorded in newspapers, books, and radio and television broadcasts. An obvious problem with this procedure is that in most developing countries the communication media are carefully controlled by the government, not to mention the gap between what political leaders of these countries say and what they actually do. Given these conditions, what are the sources available to the student of international relations? According to William Coplin,

> First, he may examine written documents produced by governmental action or the action of other actors involved in a particular event... Second, he may examine the public and private statements and writings of those involved in foreign policy decision making. Third, he may look at the publications of organs whose business it is to record activities relating to foreign affairs. These organs range from the hundreds of newspapers operating throughout the world or organisations like the United Nations that seek to monitor the activities of states. Finally, he may turn to experts whose detailed knowledge of specific events or processes is respected enough to allow him to have confidence in their views of the events... Each of these sources contains certain biasing factors that make the international politics scholar's dependence on them unfortunate even though necessary.[43]

In addition to the author's intimate knowledge of Libyan politics, culture, and society, the present study relies on various unpublished sources as well as published ones written in English or Arabic. Discussion of the monarchical period will rely firstly, and most of all, on unpublished Foreign Office documents, such as memoranda, minutes, and correspondence. The Public Record Office in London holds a substantial collection of unpublished files on Libya relating to the period before and during the monarchy. Analysis of Libya's foreign policy during the revolutionary era will rely mainly on al-Qathafi's public speeches and statements. Unlike Idris, whose public announcements were not only scarce but also of only secondary significance, al-Qathafi has been not only a frequent speaker with exceptional rhetorical skills; he has also put his thoughts and ideas into writing, producing what can be considered a formal ideology. For the revolutionary period, the study will rely on al-Qathafi's talks and speeches gathered in *al-Sijill al-Qawmi* (the National Register), which consists at present of twenty-six volumes, and on the *Green Book*. As Coplin pointed out,

> The student of foreign policy must learn to infer the characteristic of a state's foreign policy from the speeches of its leaders, from the laws it makes directed at its own citizens with foreign policy ramifications, from the treaties it signs, from the actions it takes in international organisations, and from the things it says and does to other states in the system.[44]

The original intention was to conduct several interviews with former as well as present top officials of the Libyan People's Bureau for Foreign Affairs, but this proved

difficult as most of those contacted declined to be interviewed. Eventually, however, I managed to meet Mr. Abdul 'Ati al-'Ubaidi Dr. Saleh Ibrahim, and Ali Musbah, while on the British side I managed to interview Sir Donald Maitland, Mr. Peter Tripp, and Mr. Ivor Lucas, all former British diplomats with Libyan experience.

The study is divided into three parts and is preceded by an introductory chapter dealing with the historical roots of Libyan-British relations. The latter chapter examines the legacies that Libya inherited from her past. The first two parts focus on how Libyan foreign policy towards Britain was formulated and conducted from its commencement to its breakdown. The first of these is devoted to Libya's foreign policy during the monarchy from 1951 until 1969. This portion of the study is in turn divided into three chapters. Thus Chapter Two deals with the British role in creating the Libyan state. The third chapter examines the monarchy's alliance with Britain, which materialized in the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance in 1953, and analyses the impact of that Treaty on Libya's foreign policy. Chapter Four takes the Suez Crisis and its repercussions on Libyan affairs as an example of the dilemma that had been facing the monarchy's foreign policy. The chapter ends with a discussion of how the monarchical period came to an end.

Having dealt with Libya's foreign policy towards Britain during the monarchical era, the second part deals with the Revolution, which marked a turning-point in Libya's domestic and foreign affairs. This section of the study is in turn divided into two chapters. Whereas Chapter Five provides an account of the nature and unique political system of the Libyan Revolution, Chapter Six examines how the relations between Libya and Britain evolved (and deteriorated) between 1969 and 1984. The discussion centres on an analysis of Libya's foreign policy towards Britain as it was affected by a range of issues which prevented the two countries from establishing a friendly relationship; these issues includethe British military presence in Libya, the nationalization of the British Petroleum Company, Libya's support for liberation movements abroad, the neutralization of the

Mediterranean Sea, and the campaign to 'liquidate' political opponents abroad. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of the controversial breakdown of relations between the two countries in 1984.

Having examined how Libyan foreign policy towards Britain was formulated and conducted in the monarchical and revolutionary periods in the first two parts, the third part deals with the question why these relations took the form and developed in the manner they did. Since her independence in 1951, the two major changes Libya witnessed were the advent of oil in 1959 and the arrival of al-Qathafi in power in 1969. Therefore, Part Three is devoted to an examination of both changes and their impact on Libya's foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular. This part consists of three chapters. The seventh chapter discusses Libya's oil policy and its impact on her foreign policy. The last two chapters examine the role of leadership on Libya's foreign policy. Whereas Chapter Eight discusses Idris's and al-Qathafi's socio-educational backgrounds and how these have affected Libya's foreign policy, Chapter Nine examines Idris's belief system and al-Qathafi's ideology and their impact on formulating and conducting Libya's foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular.

**NOTES**

1. Morgenthau, *Politics among nations*, 5, 25.

2. Brecher, Stenberg, & Stein, "A framework for research on foreign policy behavior", *Conflict resolution*, XIII (1), 76.

3. Korany & Dessouqi (Dessouki), *The foreign policies of Arab states*, 5.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, 6.

6. Almond, "An introductory comparative study of foreign policy", in Macridis (ed.), *Foreign policy in world politics*, 1-8.

7. Modelski, *A theory of foreign policy*, 39-87.

8. Korany & Dessouqi (Dessouki), *The foreign policy of Arab states*, 5-6. See also Korany, "The take-off of Third World studies? The case of foreign policy", *World politics*, XXXV (Oct. 1982-July 1983).

9. Among the useful surveys on perception, personality, and the effect of the psychology of an individual leader, senior policy maker or policy making group on foreign policy, see Singer and Hudson (eds.), *Political psychology and foreign policy.*

10. Korany *et al.*, *How foreign policy decisions are made in the third world: a comparative analysis*, 51.

11. *Ibid.*, 53.

12. For more details on Allison's three models, see Allison, *Essence of decision: explaining the Cuban missile crisis* (1971).

13. Calvert, *The foreign policy of new states*, 7.

14. Allison, *Essence of decision*, 67-96.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Rosenau, "A pre-theory of foreign policy", in Coplin & Kegley jr. (eds.), *Analyzing international relations: a multimethod introduction*, 39.

17. For more details, see Coplin & Kegley, jr. (eds.), *Analyzing international relations: a multimethod introduction* (1975). See also Hermann, "Effects of personal characteristics of political leaders on foreign policy" in East, Salmore & Hermann, (eds.), *Why nations act*, 22-23.

18. Rosenau, "A pre-theory of foreign policy", 39.

19. Quoted from Arab, "The effect of the leader's belief system on foreign policy", 49.

20. *Ibid.*, 49-50.

21. Haykal (Heikal), "Egyptian foreign policy", *Foreign affairs*, LVI (1977-8) 714.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Weber, *The theory of social and economic organisation* (1947) (translation).

24. Quoted in Clapham, *Foreign policy making in developing states*, 6.

25. *Ibid.*

26. See, for example, Clark, *A question of leadership: Gladstone to Thatcher* (1991); Crabb jr. & Mulcahy, *Presidents and foreign policy-making: from FDR to Reagan* (1986); Ionescu, *Leadership in an interdependent world: the statesmanship of Adenauer, de Gaulle, Thatcher, Reagan, and Gorbachev* (1991).

27. Hoffmann, "The case for leadership", *Foreign policy*, no. 81 (Winter 1990-1) 20-28.

28. See Little & Smith (eds.), *Belief systems and international relations* (1988). See also Carlsnaes, *Ideology and foreign policy: problems of comparative conceptualization* (1986).

29. As an example of such studies, see Pritchett, *The language of Arab nationalism and Arab foreign policy: the relation of Egypt, Libya and Syria, 1969-1981.*

30. Pool, "Democratization and its limits in the Middle East", 2.

31. *Ibid.*

32. See, for example, Salameh, *Al-Siyasa al-kharijiya al-Sa'udiya mundhu 'am 1945: dirasat fi al-'alaqat al-dawliya*; Clapham (ed.), *Foreign policy making in developing states*; Aluko, *The foreign policies of African states*; Shemlan, "The foreign policy of developing countries in the 1980s" *Journal of international affairs*, XXXIV (Spring 1980) 161-178; and Korany & Dessouqi (Dessouki), *The foreign policy of Arab states.*

33. Hermann, "Effects of personal characteristics of political leaders on foreign policy", in East, Salmore, & Hermann (eds.), *Why nations act*, 53.

34. Among these writers are Khadduri, *Modern Libya*; Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*; Zartman, "Heroic politics", in Korany & Dessouqi; El-Khawas, *Qaddafi: his ideology*; and Harris, *Libya: Qadhafi's revolution.*

35. See Shembesh, "The analysis of Libya's foreign policy", 161.

36. Hermann, "Effects of personal characteristics of political leaders on foreign policy", 49.

37. *Ibid.*, 56-57.

38. El-Khawas, *Qaddafi: his ideology in theory and practice*, 6.

39. Arab, "The effect of the leader's belief system on foreign policy", 51-52.

40. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi* (The National Registry), vol. xi, pp. 43ff. See also the *New York Times*, 3 September 1979.

41. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 320.

42. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

43. Coplin, *Introduction to international politics*, 17.

44. *Ibid.*, 126.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Historical Roots of Libyan-British Relations

*1.1 Introduction*

As a preliminary to analysing any country's foreign policy, it is important to take account of those historical forces which continue to affect contemporary policy. This is especially valuable when dealing with developing states, simply because most of them are still struggling with the legacy of their past and that often determines the confines within which current policies evolve.

In the case of Libya, the foreign policy pursued by both the monarchical and revolutionary regimes has been strongly influenced by the history of the country's three provinces: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fazzan.[1] Indeed, the key influence on Libya's foreign policy since its independence has been a long and difficult experience with colonialism and neo-colonialism, which did not end until the revolution of September 1969.

Almost the whole history of Libya has been one of colonialism and neo-colonialism, as succeeding waves of Greeks, Romans or Byzantines, Ottoman Turks, and Italians have occupied the country. Of all these foreign occupations, undoubtedly the brutal Italian occupation had the most devastating effect. The decades of almost continuous war destroyed the Libyan economy and cost the country half her population including the entire educated elite.[2] Those who were not killed were herded into concentration camps or were forced to emigrate. Moreover, about 100,000 Italian settlers

in a total population of 700,000 drove Libyan farmers from their land into the desert. This brutality perpetrated by a Christian enemy led to the revival of Pan-Islamic and Arab nationalist feelings among the native Libyan population. Indeed, the struggle against Italian colonialism played a vital role in reviving these national feelings which were symbolized by the slogan of the struggle: *Allah wa'l-Watan* (God and the Homeland).[3]

When in 1942 it appeared that three decades of hateful Italian occupation had come to an end, the unfortunate Libyan people then found themselves under not one occupier but under two: Britain in Tripolitania and Barqa, and France in Fazzan. Libyans in exile allied themselves with the British and fought side-by-side with them against the Italians, hoping thereby to win freedom and independence. Instead, their country was treated as occupied enemy territory by their ally and became only a small piece in world bargaining which had to fit in with Britain's overall global strategy. This treatment by Britain disappointed the Libyans, particularly when they discovered Britain's secret plan to partition Libya with Italy. A combination of Italy's brutal colonialism, the devastation and hardship imposed by the Italians, Germans, and British during the Second World War, and what was regarded by the Libyan people as British betrayal appear to have planted the seeds of animosity towards Western colonialist powers.

In general, Libya's colonial experience implanted in its people and its leaders after the Revolution a rather cynical attitude toward the intentions of Western colonial powers. The indignities and humiliations suffered under colonial rule are an irreducible element of Libya's historical encounter with the West and its agents. During the Monarchy, the desire for revenge against those who had humiliated the Libyan and all the Arab people was subdued since the regime was under British domination. This desire had to wait until 1969 when the Revolution was quick to voice it in its first *communiqué*, which stated, '...At a single stroke by your heroic army... the darkness of ages has been dispelled: from the rule of the Turks to the tyranny of the Italians, to the era of reaction... We shall build

glory, revive a heritage and avenge a wounded dignity and a usurped right.'[4] As an indication of the pride taken in Libyan resistance against the foreign invaders, the revolutionary leaders appealed in their *communiqué* for support from those 'who have shared with 'Umar Al-Mukhtar a holy war for Libya, Arabism and Islam... who have justly fought with Ahmed Al-Sharif...'[5]

Thus, it becomes clear how an analysis of Libyan history helps to place the country's political, economic, and social development in a broader context and provides a better understanding of the internal and external forces that have shaped the Libyan state and its foreign policy.

It is intended in this chapter to examine briefly the legacies that Libya has inherited from its colonial experiences, but to precede this with an examination of the two key forces which had struggle to establish a tradition of autonomous rule within Libya prior to independence: the Qaramanli rule and the Sanusi movement. These were both of great importance, but especially the Sanusi movement, which led the struggle against the Italians in Barqa and later became the political and religious base of the first King of Libya. This chapter will also devote some space to an examination of Britain's involvement in Libyan affairs. It will start by focusing on the British reaction to the Italian invasion in 1911 and the early Sanusi-British relationship, including the Sanusi-British war and the British role in cultivating the young Idris to assume the Sanusi leadership. Then, the focus will shift to political development during this early period of Libya's history. Special consideration will be given to two political entities that are thought to have created an early kind of nationalism: the Sanusi Emirate and the Tripolitanian Republic. Finally, the chapter will deal briefly with the Libyan role in the North African Campaign and the British Government's statement on the future of Libya on the 8th January 1942, which set the basis for Britain's policy towards Libya for years to come. The chapter will end with a brief discussion of the British Military Administra-

tion in Libya and its role played in forging the new Libyan state in a form that would serve the interests of Britain.

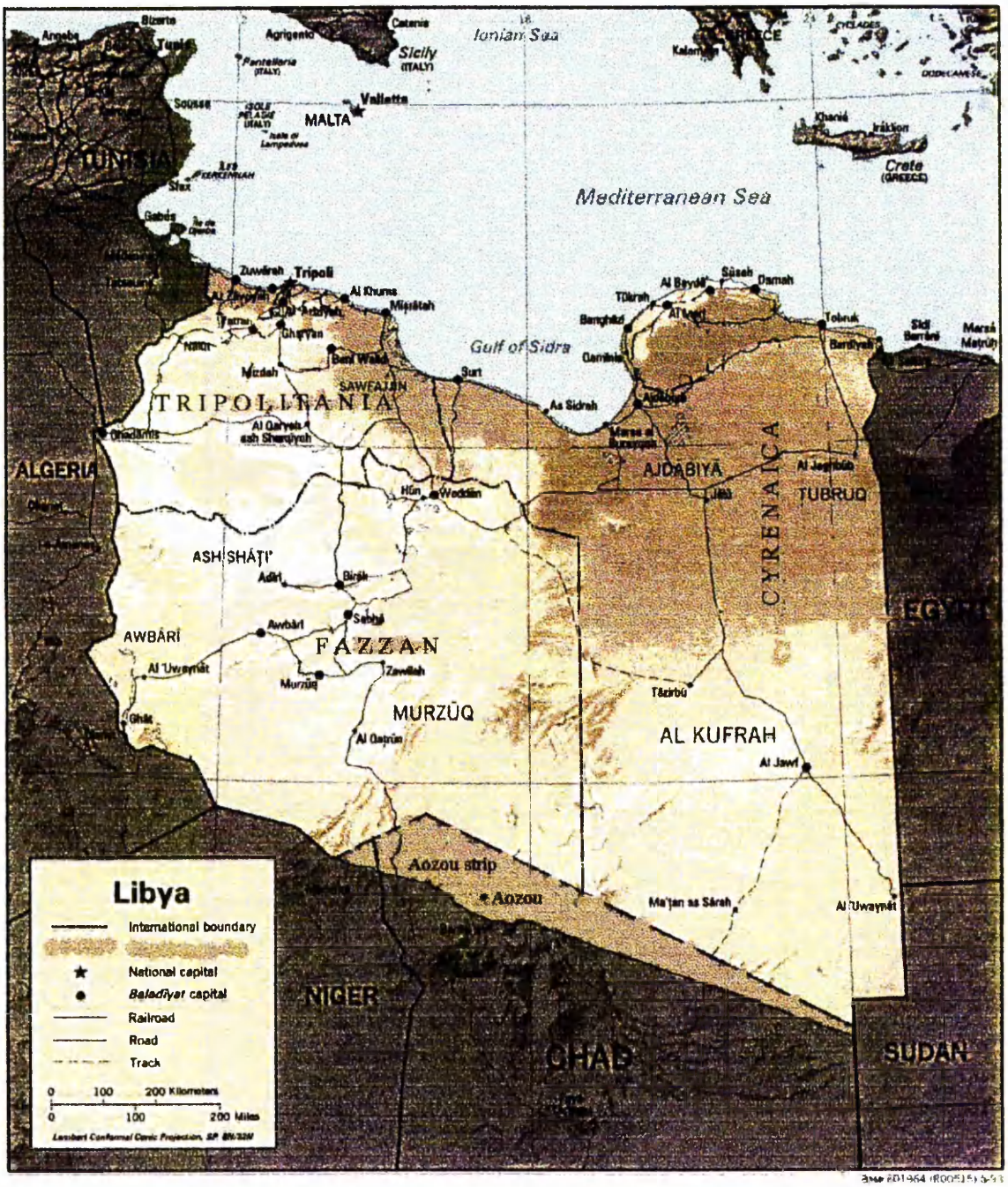
Before proceeding, however, it will be useful to take note of the country's demographic aspects. Libya's strategic location at the confluence of three worlds—Arab, African, and Mediterranean—has obliged the country throughout its history to affect and be affected by the politics of the Arab, African, and Islamic spheres. The Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya[6] is located on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, with a coastline extending about 2,000 kilometres, which has earned the country the name 'the gateway to Africa'. Libya is bordered on the east by Egypt, on the west by Tunisia and Algeria, on the south by Niger and Chad, and on the south-east by Sudan (see Map 1).

Comprising nearly 1,760,000 square kilometres, Libya is both the fourth largest country in Africa and the Arab world. It is about one quarter of the size of the USA and larger than France, Spain, Italy, and the former West Germany combined. Despite its size, Libya is sparsely populated, inhabited by less than 5.05 million people (in 1994), concentrated in a few main cities on the coast.[7] The overwhelming majority of the population consists of Muslims of Arab origin, who live within a coastal strip about a hundred kilometres wide stretching from Tunisia to Egypt. Beyond that to the south lies the largest desert in the world: the Sahara.

Libya consists of three geographical areas: Tripolitania, Barqa, and Fazzan. The two main settled areas in the north are separated from each other by 650 kilometres of desert, whose sands meet the waves of the Mediterranean Sea at the Gulf of Sirt. Tripolitania and Barqa are also separated from Fazzan by seas of sand. These natural barriers kept the inhabitants of the three regions apart from each other for some time, which produced a divergence in their political outlook that has persisted after indepen-

**Map 1**

**Libya's Traditional Regions And Bordering Countries**




Source: Adapted From The Inter.Net. Computer Service.

dence, but thanks to such modern means of transport as aeroplanes, highways, and trains, these natural barriers are now of less significance. As has been mentioned earlier, until the seventh century AD, the control of Libya changed hands, from Greeks, to Romans, to Vandals, and finally to Byzantines. In 642, the Arabs, inspired and united by Islam, conquered Libya.[8] The seventh-century conquest was relatively confined to the coastal region, leaving the interior to the native inhabitants. The situation was not to change until the tribes of Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym migrated from Arabia, via Egypt, into Libya and, from there, to the rest of North Africa.[9] This great incursion comprised not only warriors but entire social groups, as no less than 200,000 families moved into the region of Tripolitania over the period of only a few months.[10] It was this mass migration across North Africa that completed the Arabization of Libya and the whole of the Maghrib.[11] Libya is now wholly Islamized and the most thoroughly Arabized country outside the Arabian Peninsula.[12] The resultant sense of homogeneity among the majority of the Libyan people, as descendants of Arab conquerors and migrant Arab tribes, helps to explain the emphasis on Arab and Islamic culture in Libya throughout its recent history.

The Arab-Islamic state continued until 1510, when the Spanish captured Tripoli and eventually handed it over for administration to the Knights of St. John of Malta. In 1551, the city was rescued by the Ottomans and joined the rest of Libya under their control. Like the rest of the Arab people, the Libyans experienced Ottoman protection as well as Ottoman instability and abuses which eventually led to the seizure of power by the Qaramanli family.

### *1.2 The Qaramanli Family*

The partly native Qaramanli dynasty managed to break away from the imperial Ottoman administration and ruled Tripolitania independently for a hundred and twenty-five years. During this time, the Qaramanlis also extended their control to Barqa and Fazzan, thereby laying the foundation of the twentieth-century Libyan state. Among all

the Qaramanli rulers, Yusuf has remained the most remembered one in Libyan history. This was owing to what Libyans have regarded until today as their great victory over the USA. During Yusuf's reign (1795-1832), the first bitter confrontation between Libya and a Western power occurred. When he raised the Americans' annual tribute to $250,000, President Thomas Jefferson sent a sizeable US fleet to punish Libya. Outside Tripoli harbour, however, the frigate USS *Philadelphia* was captured and its crew were taken prisoners.[13] The incident of capturing the *Philadelphia* has been celebrated every year in Libya since the revolution as a great victory against the Western powers. In his speeches, the leader, Muammar al-Qathafi, regularly draws the historical lessons that should be learned from that incident.[14] As early as 1979, he reminded the Libyans that 'once more, after over 170 years, the United States fills the Mediterranean with its fleets and practices international terrorism against the people.'[15]

Like al-Qathafi, Yusuf, about two hundred years ago, tried to pursue an independent foreign policy based on the principle of playing off one European power against another. But with the defeat of Napoleon, the Western powers felt more confident in confronting the Qaramanlis and decided to end the payment of tribute. They also demanded immediate repayment on behalf of Tripoli's creditors, but the Tripoli budget could not afford to accede to these demands. Threatened by the British Navy, Yusuf tried to raise the money by taxing the already over-taxed population. This led to an outbreak of rebellions and the restoration of Ottoman rule in 1838.

In addition to the corruption of Turkish rule, the change in trade patterns had a negative effect on the Libyan economy. With the marginalization of both Western and Eastern trans-Saharan trade routes, as a result of the establishment of sea trade routes with West Africa and the opening of the Suez Canal, Libya lost its position as a transit centre and, thus, became deprived of an important source of income. Both routes had been vital for Libya's economy.

In general, the Ottomans' legacy to Libya was largely negative. Their rule was rather nominal, confined to the main coastal towns. As long as Libyans paid their taxes, the Ottomans did not bother to give much attention to the rest of the country. On the other hand, Ottoman rule in Libya was far from popular and voices of criticism of their misrule had been raised. In the second period of Ottoman rule, Arab tribesmen started to demand tax reform, political autonomy, equal participation, and recognition of Arabic as the official language of administration. This early sense of nationalism was mitigated by the religion that Turkish rulers and Arabs had in common. Although the Libyans were critical of the Turkish rule, the ties of religion were strong enough to induce them not to disobey the *Khalifah*, the Muslim ruler. But later in 1908, when the Young Turks started their programmes of Turkification and centralization, the feeling of Arab nationalism started to grow stronger, although not enough to make Libyans prefer a foreign, non-Muslim occupation to the rule of the Muslim Ottomans.[16] This factor seemed to have been overlooked by the Italians when they invaded Libya. As we shall see, they thought that they would be welcomed as liberators, but they were mistaken.

### *1.3 The Sanusi Movement*

In the period of decay and fragmentation, during the late days of the Ottoman rule, a new force emerged in Libya, taking the form of a religious movement under the name of the Sanusiyah *Tariqah*.[17] Although a number of religious movements had apparently existed in Libya since the sixteenth century, the Sanusi Order was the largest, the most active, and the one which had a profound effect on Libyan history. Its importance springs from the role it played in shaping the characteristics of the modern state of Libya; during peace and war the Sanusi movement created a sense of unity and provided guidance and leadership. At first, this role was based on religious commitment, but eventually it expressed itself in political, military, and nationalistic dimensions, aspects which became clearer during the Italian invasion when the Sanusis led by example in the resistance movement. As a result, the order became the focus of Libyan nationalism.

Since a full description of this Islamic movement would exceed the limits of the present study and since details on the movement can be found elsewhere,[18] the following discussion is intended simply to set the background to the monarchical foreign policy in general and that policy towards Britain in particular, since the movement not only provided the country with the first leader but also continued to be the basis for his legitimacy.

The Sanusi movement was founded by Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Sanusi in the 1840s. He was born about 1787 to a family claiming descent from the Prophet's daughter Fatima, which gave him the status of *murabit*, one who possessed a religious blessing or *baraka*.[19] The Grand Sanusi, as he came to be known in Libya, travelled widely in the Arab world, from North Africa to the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. During his travels he not only became aware of the weakness and division of the Muslim people, but also found some 'Muslims fallen into heresies and to be in danger of rapid religious degeneration.'[20]

On his way back from Hejaz, the Grand Sanusi was prevented from reaching his home town, in what is today Algeria, by the French authorities and decided to stay in Libya, and Barqa in particular. He was a remarkable man: a mystic, a missionary, and a great scholar. His simple life-style and straightforward religious message found receptive ears and hearts among the Arab bedouin of Barqa, where he built his first Libyan *zawiyah*, or lodge, in 1843.[21]

The Grand Sanusi devoted his life to his mission. He advocated a return to the basic Islamic ideas and practices, freed from all dogmas and myths, which is strikingly similar to the message that al-Qathafi is trying to deliver today. The Grand Sanusi also called for the restoration of unity and strength of Islam by uniting all religious orders and abolishing all causes of friction. He found in Barqa a simple kind of tribal structure on which he successfully built a missionary organization. He was assisted by the fact that he

was a 'foreigner' to the people of Barqa, with whom he had no ties of kinship, so that he always stood outside the tribal system and was not involved in the ancient loyalties and feuds inherent in the relations between the tribes of Barqa. This enabled him to guide the rival tribes spiritually as well as temporally.

Following the death of the Grand Sanusi in 1859, the leadership of the order passed to his first-born son, Muhammad al-Mahdi. Thanks to al-Mahdi's astonishing organizational talents, under his leadership the order flourished. Within a short period, a network of *zawiyah*s stretched from Arabia to the Ivory Coast, and from Istanbul to India. This network of *zawiyah*s not only proved to be effective in spreading Islam, but also functioned as cultural, social, economic, political, and military centres of the Sanusi movement. They served, in addition, as mosques for prayers, as schools for educating children, as gathering places for *dhikr* (religious chants), as rest stations for the caravaneers, and as guest houses for students, travellers, and the poor.[22] *Zawiyah*s also served as banks and commercial centres. Furthermore, the sheikhs of the *zawiyah*s would act as mediators between warring parties, would collect taxes, and would even administer agriculture.

*Zawiyah*s were often built at tribal centres or around a central well of spring on trade and pilgrim routes, which gave them great economic value. But *zawiyah*s were also built next to holy places. The first Sanusi *zawiyah* in Libya, *al-Zawiyah al-Bayda*, was established near the tomb of Rafi' al-Ansari, one of the Arab conquerors of Libya and a Companion of the Prophet Muhammad. This played its part in the acceptance of the order in Libya since *murabit*s, or saints, had a long tradition in the region. Most people respected *murabit*s, but some of them seemed to go too far in their demonstration of respect. In this matter the Sanusi movement took a moderate position, which is not of course to suggest that the Sanusis had a different point of view from the scholars of orthodox Islam but rather that, unlike the Wahhabis, they did not go to the extreme of

destroying all *murabits*' tombs since the Sanusis themselves were regarded as *murabits*. This issue had far-reaching consequences when, later, less pious heads of the order 'pragmatically exploited this "accumulated capital of the marabuts" in order to bind the tribal communities more closely to their political leadership.'[23]

Because the death of al-Mahdi coincided with the French threat from the south, the situation required a leader of special skills. Yet, since the two sons of al-Mahdi, Idris and Rida, were still minors, practical responsibility was given to Ahmad al-Sharif, al-Mahdi's nephew. The new leader maintained an uncompromising attitude toward colonialism, whether it was of the French, Italian, or British variety. He was the last of the great leaders of the Sanusi Order and is still remembered today as a national hero.[24]

*1.4 The Italian Occupation*

From the point of view of the present study, the importance of the Italian colonial period lies in the impact it had on the political development in Libya and the political attitude of its people on the one hand and, on the other hand, the effect that it produced on the relations between Britain and the two main Libyan provinces: Tripolitania and Barqa.

This section will not therefore focus on the military occupation, but rather on two different but overlapping themes. First, it will examine the British involvement in Libyan affairs during the period between the Italian invasion and the outbreak of the Second World War, an involvement which started with a positive reaction to the invasion, followed by war with the Sanusis in the Western Desert, and developed into a mutual understanding with Idris. Second, it will go through the internal political development that occurred as a reaction to the Italian occupation and manifested itself in the Tripolitanian Republic and the Sanusi Emirate. These two separate political entities reflected the rift between

republican and monarchical tendencies in Tripolitania and Barqa, which continued until the overthrow of the monarchy in 1969.

*1.4.1 The Italian Invasion and the British Reaction*

Despite the series of diplomatic understandings and agreements Italy had with the European powers regarding its so-called right to Libya, she was understandably anxious to receive the consent, at least, of one particular power, namely Britain. Italy's anxiety may be attributed to two factors: the strong British presence in the Mediterranean and the British control of Egypt. Obviously, therefore, Britain's consent would mean for the Italians the neutrality, if not the support, of the British fleet in the Mediterranean and the prevention of any Ottoman assistance to Libya through Egypt, since Britain was in actual control of Egypt.

But Britain had her own calculations; she occupied Egypt, which was still nominally under the Ottoman Sultan's rule, and therefore could not openly support Italy without endangering her own rule in Egypt. Therefore, Britain advised the Italians to be patient until the proper time came.[25] In a telegraph to the Italian government in 1889, the British Prime Minister, Salisbury, reminded the Italians that Turkey would declare war on Italy if the latter took Tripoli. An attack on Tripoli, he added,

> would be the signal for the dismemberment of Turkey. That will come about later, but public opinion in England is not yet prepared for it. Italy will lose nothing by waiting. She will have Tripoli in the end, but the huntsman does not fire till the stag is within range of his rifle.[26]

When Italy claimed that she had been treated unfairly by the Ottoman authorities with regard to her economic interests, the British worried that Italy might take that as an excuse to invade Libya. Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, expressed sympathy with the Italians at the end of July 1911 in the following manner:

> If it really was the case that Italians were receiving unfair and adverse economic treatment in Tripoli... and should the hand of Italy be forced, I would, if need be, express to the Turks the opinion that in face of the unfair treatment meted out to Italians, the Turkish Government could not expect anything else.[27]

Perhaps the fullest explanations of the British Government's attitude was made by Winston Churchill in September 1911, when he related to the British Under-secretary for Foreign Affairs the implications of the then imminent Italian invasion:

> Italy-Tripoli... Will it not... throw Turkey into German arms more than ever—thus making the complete causeway: Germany-Austria-Roumania-Turkey. Will it not... detach Italy openly from the Triplice, and consequently make her desirous of the support of France and England... The reactions of this Italian adventure threaten to be deep, and we stand both to gain and lose by it. But clearly we must prefer Italy to Turkey on all grounds—moral and immoral... on the whole the balance seems to turn to our advantage.[28]

When Italy declared her intention of attacking Libya, the British Foreign Secretary, after meeting with the Italian ambassador on the 29th September 1911, declared his government's attitude as follows:

> In 1902 we had made an agreement with Italy respecting Tripoli. From this we realized that in Tripoli especially Italy could not tolerate her interests being thrust aside or unfairly treated. Besides that the traditional friendly relations between England and Italy, the friendly feelings of the two peoples were such that steps which were forced upon Italy in any part of the world to redress the wrongs of Italian subjects or protect Italian interests from unfair treatment would have our sympathy. But the outright and forcible annexation of Tripoli was an extreme step that might have indirect consequences very embarrassing to other powers, and amongst others to ourselves who had so many Mohammedan subjects. I hope, therefore, that the Italian Government would conduct affairs so as to limit as far as possible the embarrassment to other powers.[29]

Thus, it is clear that while Britain did not wish to antagonize Turkey by openly supporting Italy, she would show her friendliness to Italy be holding Egypt neutral. Therefore, on the 3rd October 1911, Britain declared her neutrality:

> to observe a strict neutrality in and during the aforesaid war, to abstain from violating or contravening either the laws and statutes of the realm in this behalf, or the law of nations in relation thereto, as they will answer to the contrary at their peril.[30]

Unsurprisingly, Italy welcomed the British policy and requested Britain to prevent any passage of Turkish troops through Egypt or any assistance being given by the Egyptians to their brothers in Libya. This so-called neutrality was, as a mattter of fact, a clear indication of Britain's favouritism shown towards Italy since religious ties between Muslim people compelled them to help each other and since Egypt was the only avenue through which assistance might reach Libya.

*1.4.2 The Italian Invasion and the Popular Resistance*

On the 29th September 1911, Italy declared war on the Ottoman Empire. Several days later, on the 3rd October, the Italian fleet began a heavy bombardment of the main coastal cities of Libya. The Italians did not expect a long war and were encouraged by certain initial successes. They somewhat naively presumed that the internal tension between Arabs and Turks would make themselves welcomed as liberators. That, of course, proved not to be the case; the religious ties were strong enough to hold both Arabs and Turks together in facing the Christian foe. The Ottomans, however, were too weak to resist the Italian aggression and so they were compelled to sign a peace agreement with Italy on the 18th October 1912. The Treaty of Lausanne ostensibly granted Libya independence and yet recognized Italian sovereignty over the country. Although the Treaty provided for the withdrawal of the Turkish troops, it did not end the Arab resistance. Ahmad al-Sharif and the Tripolitanian leaders took matters into their own hands and continued the struggle. In Tripolitania, Italian troops were routed more than once, but internal differences and the absence of one undisputed leader enabled the Italians to regain the initiative. In Barqa, by contrast, the Arab force was unified and better organized under the leadership of Sheikh Ahmad, who regarded the Treaty of Lausanne as a declaration of the country's independence.[31]

Italian colonialism, however, had disastrous social, economic, and demographic effects upon the Libyan people. During the first ten years of the Italian occupation there were more than 240 military confrontations between the invaders and the Libyan fighters, with roughly one battle every two weeks.[32] As a result, agricultural and pastoral lands were devastated when not confiscated and large numbers of the population were either killed, forced to flee, or moved to concentration camps; large numbers of mosques and *zawiyah*s were closed.[33] When the Italians were finally driven out during World War II, they left the country in a very bad condition. Libya was bankrupt and impoverished. Its *per capita* income was estimated at $35 per annum, malnutrition was widespread, and the majority of the people were illiterate.[34] Most of what Italy had spent in Libya was for the benefit of her own people; in any case, the infrastructure the Italians had put in place was extensively damaged during the war. This gloomy picture appeared to have left its imprint on al-Qathafi, who said,

> In 1911, Turkish imperialism handed the country over to Italian imperialism, which oppressed this people savagely and erected gallows everywhere. The concentration camps of Al-'Aqala (Ouqayla) are not an old memory, and the gallows erected in every village and town of our beloved homeland are not forgotten. They are still before us in our mind's eye.[35]

*1.4.3 The Sanusi Government (Al-Hukumah al-Sanusiyah)*

Although it was not a government in the generally accepted sense of the word, the Sanusi government was a clear expression of an Islamic-based nationalism. From the very beginning, Sheikh Ahmad was involved in the struggle against the Italians. A short while after the war broke out, he used his position as the Head of the Sanusi Order to call for a *jihad* (holy war). He sent letters from his headquarters in al-Kufra to Ottoman and Libyan leaders, calling on them to unite and fight against the infidels. To make the position of the Sanusi movement clear, he sent numerous Sanusi flags displaying Qur'anic verses as proof that the order, as it had done against the French in the south, was leading the resistance against the Italians, spiritually, militarily, and politically.[36] In summer

1912, Sheikh Ahmad moved his headquarters further north, to al-Jaghboub, and formed the framework of a government, or at least a semi-autonomous state. Documents issued were stamped *Al-Hukumah al-Sanusiyah* (The Sanusi Government). This development marked the beginning of the transformation of the Sanusi movement from a religious order to a political entity trying to establish an autonomous state. In order to be at the centre of the armed resistance, Sheikh Ahmad moved from al-Jaghboub to al-Jabal al-Akhdar (the Green Mountain). His arrival there raised the morale of the *Mujahidin* (Holy Fighters), who inflicted several sharp defeats on the Italians. It was the memory of this courageous resistance that, about fifty-five years later, al-Qathafi evoked as an antecedent of the revolutionary triumph in 1969, when he addressed the Libyan people as 'you who fought the good fight with Ahmad al-Sharif.'[37] Indeed, the Libyan struggle against Italian colonialism was consistently used by the Libyan revolutionary leaders to consolidate nationalism and justify their anti-colonialist policies.

*1.5 The Sanusi-British War*

The importance of the Sanusi attack on the British forces in Egypt in 1915 stems from two factors. First, it drew the attention of the British to the connection between their safe presence in Egypt and the situation in Libya and, second, it marked the end of the leadership of Sheikh Ahmad and the emergence of Idris al-Sanusi. These two elements were closely connected since the second was the result of the first.

Although the Turkish Government's assistance to the Libyan resistance was either stopped or discouraged as a result of the Treaty of Lausanne, the outbreak of the First World War brought the former to a state of war with Italy once again. In this climate Turkey started providing arms and money to the Sanusis to mobilize them against the Allies, particularly against the British in Egypt as part of the Axis powers' strategy which aimed at attacking the British from the east, the west, and the south.[38]

Sheikh Ahmad and his cousin Idris wanted to remain outside the international conflict over Egypt, though not necessarily for the same reasons. Although Idris's attitude may have been influenced by the British, Sheikh Ahmad had perhaps arrived at the conclusion independently. He realized that he was in no state to open a third front, in addition to the other two with the Italians and French. Ja'far al-'Askari, who had fought under Sheikh Ahmad's leadership, later, as Iraqi ambassador in London, commented that Ahmad al-Sharif had not really been anxious to fight against the British, knowing that he had first to deal with the Italians in Barqa and Tripolitania, and the French in Fazzan.[39] What seemed to make Sheikh Ahmad more reluctant was the fact that the Sanusis had no significant quarrel with the British and more than once he expressed his desire to continue on friendly terms with the British.

However, in November 1915, Sheikh Ahmad, acting under Turkish pressure, launched an attack on the British in Egypt. The campaign was a series of skirmishes, but the Sanusis could not hope to defeat the strong British army. They were defeated and forced back to Barqa. For the Sanusis, this war was a painful blow, particularly for Sheikh Ahmad, who left for Turkey and never returned. The British were relieved to see the war over. They had to concentrate some 40,000 troops in the Western Desert for many months when they were badly needed on the European and Palestinian fronts. The lesson the British learned from the war was that they should prevent any Sanusi influence along the border with Egypt and so, once the war was over, they were quick to demolish all the Sanusi *zawiyah*s in the Western Desert and started to work seriously to change the Sanusi leadership.[40]

Despite allegations that the motivation for the attack had been Sheikh Ahmad's character as a headstrong and warlike man, and an avaricious person so eager for luxuries that he had been compelled to surrender to Ottoman pressure, much of the evidence does not support this argument at all.[41] The principal motives seem to have been religious

and economic factors. The religious ties bound Sheikh Ahmad to obey instructions from the Sultan to ease the pressure on the Turkish forces operating in Palestine by attacking the British from the west. His cousin Idris later told De Candole (the British resident in Libya) that while he had been staying with Sheikh Ahmad in Musa'id, the Turkish Sultan had instructed Sheikh Ahmad to declare war against the British. He added that 'Shaikh Ahmad considered himself bound to obey instructions of the Sultan and acting as always in good faith, declared war.'[42] A combination of the closure of the border with Egypt and the tight control and surveillance on the Libyan coast must have been another reason for the attack. The livelihood of the population of eastern Libya had been largely based on free trade with Egypt. Barqa's links with Egypt were strong and became stronger when the region was cut off from its traditional markets in the south by the French and in the west by the Italians.

As a result of the Sanusi-British war, the British not only were able to eliminate any threat from the west to their presence in Egypt but also managed to undermine the position of Sheikh Ahmad and promote the status of their man, Idris. Although the transition to power was facilitated by Idris's position as the first-born male of al-Mahdi, British backing of Idris and discrediting of Sheikh Ahmad were vital.[43] Early in 1915, a number of prestigious British figures, including Lord Kitchener and the Commanding Officer in Egypt, met Idris in Cairo and seemed to have won him over to their side.[44] During the Sanusi-British war, Idris dissociated himself from Sheikh Ahmad and withdrew from the battle front with his followers, and started consolidating his position as the Head of the Sanusi Order.[45] In their attempt to cultivate the young Idris, the British undermined the authority of Sheikh Ahmad after they had defeated him.[46] They even refused to deal with him when he tried to make peace on the Egyptian border. With the defeat of Sheikh Ahmad, the British and the Italians seemed to have asked Idris to take upon himself the leadership of the order. Thus, while Sheikh Ahmad was fighting in Egypt, a new leadership was being consolidated. The new leader, however, chose to

change the orientation of the order from the mode set by his predecessor and concentrated instead on peace settlement.

*1.6 Temporary Self-determination*

Exhausted by the war in Europe, the Italians were desperate for a period of peace as a breathing space within which to resolve their difficult situation in Libya. In the immediate post-war period, their holdings in Libya were reduced to a number of cities, which rendered their rule extremely minimal since most Libyans were nomads and had no use for cities. This weak Italian position coincided with the emergence of a wave of Arab nationalism in Egypt and the Fertile Crescent, and the enunciation of the Wilson principles of self-determination, which increased the local demands for self-government. These factors culminated in the issuing of the 1919 declaration granting a limited self-government to Tripolitania on the 1st June and then extending it to Barqa on the 31st October. The Sanusi Emirate in Barqa and the Republic of Tripoli were to play a significant part in the Libyan history. Although they both lasted only a short period, the Emirate and the Republic became two contending legacies which persisted in Libya through the monarchy and until the Revolution of the 1st September 1969.

*1.6.1 The Sanusi Emirate*

The importance of the Sanusi Emirate derived from the fact that it was the nucleus of the Libyan monarchy and constituted the origins of Idris's power base and position. By the time of Idris's take-over from Sheikh Ahmad, all parties were looking for peace, although from different perspectives. The British wanted to put an end to the Sanusi threat to their presence in Egypt. Italy was not in a position to fight and therefore believed that she could govern the province indirectly through Idris's influence. Idris, in turn, wanted any settlement that might put an end to his people's suffering.

Early in 1916, however, Britain and Italy signed an understanding in which they agreed to recognize Idris only as a spiritual leader and to sign no pact with him without each other's consent. The British made it perfectly clear to Idris that 'he was to be recognized only as the religious leader of his sect and not as chief of a political entity, and second, that he must make peace with both powers (Britain and Italy) or with neither.'[47]

The desire for peace by all parties was reflected in a series of accords. These began at al-Zuetina, a small town to the south-west of Benghazi. Idris's intention was to negotiate separately with the Italians and the British, but the latter insisted on the former's participation. Through these negotiations, Idris hoped to play in Barqa a similar role to that played by the Sharif of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula, or by Muhammad 'Ali in Egypt.[48] He also asked for the end of hostilities, the resumption of trade with Egypt, Muslim jurisdiction in territories under the Italian rule, and the return of the *zawiyah*s to the authority of the Sanusi Order.[49] In return, he offered to hand over the Italian prisoners of war and to expel all the Turkish officers in Barqa. But Italy was only playing for time; the Italian Government at Rome claimed that its representatives had not been empowered to sign any agreement.[50]

Despite his disappointment, Idris, under British pressure, was determined to reach a settlement before Sheikh Ahmad returned and made peace negotiations difficult. In 1917, he concluded separate agreements with the British and Italians. The clauses of the British agreement reflected Britain's concern for her security in Egypt. The main clause prevented the Sanusis from maintaining *zawiyah*s in Egypt as an attempt to stop the Sanusi influence. Although this truce, which became known as the Truce of 'Akrima (or 'Ikrima), was a final settlement with the British, by which they obtained the security of the Egyptian border, it was not exactly so with the Italians. It did not attempt to settle the question of the sovereignty of the province. If, indeed, there was any significance in the Truce, it was no doubt the growing political authority that it gave to Idris. Although the

Italians did not want to recognize him as the political leader of his people, their attempts to extract from him a recognition of Italian sovereignty over Barqa meant only that he was a secular as well as a religious leader. Otherwise, as one observer of Libyan politics has put it, 'How indeed could the Italians exact a recognition of sovereignty from Idris unless he was in a sovereign position over the people of the inland east?'[51] Thus, Idris came to act, and was treated, as a head of state, which gave him enhanced recognition among his people, but this should not lead one to assume that all the tribal warriors shared his views of peaceful settlement. Indeed, when the Italians tried to extend their influence further south, a group of about a hundred sheikhs met at Ajdabya (Agadabiya) and issued a manifesto declaring that they would tolerate the Italians outside the coastal towns only as traders.[52]

The most explicit recognition of Idris and the Sanusi movement as a political authority in Barqa came in the Truce of al-Rajma (Regima), signed in October 1920. By virtue of this new truce, Idris was granted the title of Amir, or Prince, and recognized as the ruler of the oases of al-Jaghboub, Awjla, Jalu, and al-Kufra, with his headquarters in Ajdabya.[53] On his side, Idris agreed to help in the application of the new constitution and to suppress the armed camps and posts under his control.[54] But the people of Barqa were unwilling to give up their arms and to place themselves at the mercy of the Italians. As a result, a new truce, called the Truce of Abu Maryam (Bu Maryam), was signed on the 11th November 1921. By this truce the disbandment of armed camps was confirmed, but it was postponed until the Italians had strengthened their administrative control and political influence in the country. During the intervening time, camps would be controlled jointly by Italian and Sanusi soldiers.

The position of Idris as political leader was enhanced by the offer of the Emirate of all Libya made to him by the Tripolitanian leaders. Although the offer of leadership appeared to be a tactical move, it gave a clear indication that the desire for self-

determination and unity was widespread across the country. Idris, however, reluctantly accepted the offer, but did not stay in the country. He left for Cairo in December 1922 and did not return to Libya until 1943. The Sanusi Emirate did not last for long after Idris's departure. In March 1923, following the Fascist Revolution, the new Italian government disbanded the parliaments that had been granted in 1919. It also carried out what appeared to be a long-prepared plan to seize the joint camps, taking about half the Sanusi soldiers prisoners and declaring null and void all accords and conventions made with Idris.[55]

*1.6.2 The Tripolitanian Republic (al-Jumhuriyah al-Tarabulsiyah)*

The importance of the Tripolitanian Republic stemmed from the fact that, contrary to the Emirate, it planted the seeds of republican tendencies in the western part of Libya. If the Sanusi monarch can be seen as having been based in the Sanusi Emirate, revolutionary Libya after 1969 has more links with the Republic in terms of tendencies and aspirations.

Proclaimed in 1918, the Tripolitanian Republic was the first indigenous political entity to emerge in Libya since the fall of the Qaramanli state and the first republic in the Arab world.[56] Although it lasted only a few years and was rather a coalition of sheikhs and notables, it represented a strong tendency towards self-determination and independence.

Although it was officially proclaimed in 1918, the Republic's roots go back to 1912. Following the withdrawal of Ottoman forces from Tripolitania, the region's notables met and decided to declare their country's independence. As Sheikh Ahmad tried to win autonomy for Barqa, the notables of Tripolitania, led by Sulayman al-Baruni, met at al-'Aziziyah and decided to establish a national government. This national government was,

however, short-lived. By March 1913, Italian troops occupied al-Baruni's headquarters and forced him to escape to Istanbul.

However, the aspiration for independence did not evaporate and the idea of creating a national government emerged naturally again in 1918, when the notables of Tripolitania met in Misallata. In this meeting, 'Abd al-Rahman 'Azzam, the Arab nationalist and subsequently secretary of the Arab League, proposed the establishment of a republic under a national government for the whole of Libya. A Council of Four was set up under the chairmanship of Ahmad al-Marayyid, with the membership of Sulayman al-Baruni, 'Abd al-Nabi Bilkhayr, and Ramadan al-Suwayhli, and with 'Azzam as an adviser. These leaders agreed to continue the resistance to the last, until Italy recognized Libya's independence. Italy, for her part, regarded the Council of Four as rebels and refused to recognize their proclamation of independence. But shortly afterwards, in line with her conciliatory policy and as a result of the resolution of the Tripolitanian leaders, Italy agreed to recognize the Republic and a statue was issued on the 1st June 1919 giving Tripolitania the right to a parliament and all the benefits of Italian citizenship.[57]

But the weakness of Tripolitania as a national entity had always been her inability to recognize one national leader. Tribal and familial rivalries, manipulated by the Italians to prevent any united opposition, badly weakened the Republic. It was not long before fierce fighting broke out, both among the Tripolitanians themselves and between them and the Italians. With al-Suwayhli dead and al-Baruni out of the country, the major opponents to a Sanusi leadership over the whole of Libya seemed to have gone. Therefore, the Tripolitanian leaders decided to put forward the decision they had reached in the Gharyan Conference in 1920, declaring their agreement to establish a legitimate and capable government under the authority of a Muslim Amir.[58] At Sirt, in January 1922, the Tripolitanian notables met a delegation from Barqa and announced their intention to elect a Muslim Amir to represent the entire country. In July 1922, a delegation headed by

Bashir al-Sa'dawi went to Ajdabya and formally invested Idris with the emirate over Tripolitania.

The offer of leadership to Idris seemed to be a change of tactics rather than a change of heart. Neither the Sanusi family nor the Sanusi Order had been accepted in Tripolitania, but the Tripolitanian leaders, led by 'Azzam, wanted to save the unity of Libya. They also appeared to have realized that unless they allied themselves with Idris, they would lose not only the unity of the country, but also the chances of independence for Tripolitania. Therefore, they swallowed their pride and came to terms with Idris. This sense of nationalism and practicality was promoted by men like 'Azzam and Sa'dawi, who had a long history of Arab nationalism. 'Azzam in particular appeared to have been the driving force behind the Republic's Pan-Islamic and Pan-Arab policies. In a private communication to Adrian Pelt (the UN Commissioner to Libya) in July 1966, 'Azzam said that the Republic's declaration of independence and practically every other document in that period had been prepared by himself.[59] Pelt concluded that Azzam had been moved above all by a strong sense of Arab nationalism.[60]

However, Idris was reluctant to accept the offer and found himself in a difficult position. On the one hand, how could he possibly turn down a call to a patriotic and religious duty? Yet, on the other, he did not want, as he put it, 'to compromise... [his] relations with the Italians.'[61] As usual, he found it difficult to reach a decision and, when he did, it appeared to be negative. As he pointed out to De Candole,

> I refused to give a decision but asked the Italian government for permission to mediate between them and the Tripolitanians... I again requested to be allowed to mediate but was refused, I returned to Ajedabia and advised the Tripolitanians to approach the Italian government themselves. I can do no more.[62]

Eventually, however, Idris accepted the offer from the Tripolitanian leaders following their persistence in their demand. By October 1922, Idris seemed to have realized that Italy's soft approach had come to an end and war was imminent no matter what position he took. He therefore accepted the offer and fled to Egypt in December 1922.

*1.7 World War Two and the British Occupation*

It was the Second World War that provided the catalyst cementing the relationship between Britain and Libya which endured from independence to the overthrow of the monarchy in September 1969. Also, although the war brought the end of Italian occupation, it marked the commencement of British occupation and long direct involvement in Libyan politics. This direct involvement in the internal and external affairs of the country had far-reaching effects in shaping the new Libyan state and consequently the country's foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular. British involvement placed priority on the exclusion of nationalist leaders from holding any high government position and the appointment instead of pro-British figures. Even further, when independence later became inevitable, Britain stipulated that the new state had to be a federal one under the leadership of Idris.[63]

With the execution of 'Umar al-Mukhtar and the break-down of the resistance movement, the Libyan people, both under the occupation and in exile, realized that they could not by themselves defeat a modern sophisticated army like that of the Italians. But when the Second World War broke out, they seemed to have found the opportunity they were looking for. The Libyans in exile saw Italy's expected involvement in the war as a chance to obtain foreign help in ridding their country of the Italian rule.

Following the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Britain realized that Italy could constitute a threat to her colonial holdings. Concerned with her security in Egypt in particular, the British Government became alert to the need for precautionary measures

in the case of an attack on Egypt by Italy. It therefore asked its military authority in Egypt to give its opinion on the possibility of raising a tribal force from Libyan exiles in Egypt and the answer it received was favourable to the proposal.[64]

The Libyan leaders in exile appeared willing to bridge their differences in order to take advantage of the new circumstances. Between the 20th and 23rd October 1939, a group of Libyan leaders met in Alexandria and discussed how they could exploit the opportunity that the war situation presented. In the meeting, Idris was entrusted with the responsibility of advancing the question of Libyan national interests, providing that he agreed to appoint a joint advisory committee of local leaders.[65] After talks with the British officials in Cairo, Idris called for a meeting on the 8th August 1940 between Libyan leaders and General Maitland Wilson, the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in Egypt. In this meeting, Idris urged those present to take part in the military operations for the liberation of their country. The conference adopted a set of resolutions expressing confidence in the leadership of Idris and pledging Libyan military assistance to Britain in the war.[66]

During this meeting, the old dispute between leaders from the three provinces was revived again. It had been hoped that all representatives would endorse the document, but the important Tripolitanian sheikhs—Ahmad al-Murayyid and Ahmad al-Suwayhli—declined to do so. They remained critical of Idris's decision to collaborate with the British without any written assurance of future independence and they were also reluctant to accept the leadership of Idris. Their reluctance to commit themselves to Britain may also have been attributable to their doubt about British victory, a doubt which was prevalent in the Arab world and probably also in the entire world.[67]

Idris, however, believed that Libya had nothing further to lose if Italy won the war and probably everything to gain if she did not. In Idris's view, if Britain won, the country

would be freed and, if she did not, nothing would have been lost since Libya was already under the Italian occupation.[68] He therefore opted for full alliance with the British in the hope that Britain, as she had won the First World War, would likewise win the Second and remember her allies.

The Cairo meeting also marked the beginning of co-operation between Idris and the British, with increasing mutual trust. This co-operation was evidenced in the creation of the Libyan Arab Force. Shortly after the Cairo meeting, a recruiting office was opened in Egypt by the British under the command of Colonel C.O. Bromilow, assisted by Captain J.N.D. Anderson and 'Umar Shinnib (a former member of the Barqa-Tripolitanian Defence Committee) as liaison officers.[69] Five battalions, each of five hundred men, were organized and trained for guerrilla warfare. They were mainly recruited from among the Barqa exiles who had escaped the Italian oppression and later from among Libyan prisoners of war taken from the captured Italian troops. During the campaign, the number of troops increased to 14,000 soldiers and 120 Libyan officers.[70] Later, the Tripolitanian leaders offered to form a separate force without the knowledge of Idris, but the British refused the offer, clearly indicating thereby her own intention of cultivating Idris as the only spokesman of his country. This British support for Idris's leadership and the Tripolitanians' refusal to accept it exacerbated tensions that would plague Libya even after independence.

After the liberation of Libya, Idris came under pressure from his followers as well as from the Tripolitanian leaders to raise the question of independence. Empowered by the resolution of the Cairo Conference to negotiate with the British on behalf of the whole of Libya, Idris wrote several times to the British authority proposing limited autonomy for Barqa, but all his overtures were rejected on the grounds that Britain was not prepared to make any pledges until the war was over. In the face of this British refusal of any kind of commitment beyond the level of personal verbal assurances, Idris was in a weak

position as he had no definite assurance of future independence nor was able to go back unless at terrible personal cost. But he was lucky in that Britain did not want to lose him, nor want to lose Barqa. At that time Britain seemed to have started taking into account what might be the post-war arrangements for the maintenance of the British army in Egypt. Thus, the creation of a Sanusi Emirate in Barqa seemed to guarantee the province as a future alternative placement for the British troops presently in Egypt.[71] On the 6th October 1941, the War Office approved the presenting of a declaration to Idris. Accordingly, Antony Eden, then Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, made the following statement on the 8th January 1942 in the House of Commons:

> The Sayyid Idris al-Sanusi made contact with the British authorities in Egypt within a month of the collapse of France, at a time when the military situation in Africa was most unfavourable to us. The Sanusi force was subsequently raised from those of his followers who had escaped from Italian oppression at various times during the past twenty years. This force performed considerable ancillary duties during the successful fighting in the Western Desert in the winter of 1940-41, and is again playing a useful part in the campaign now in progress. I take this opportunity to express the warm appreciation of His Majesty's government for the contribution which Sayyid Idris al-Sanusi and his followers have made and are making to the British war effort. We welcome their association with His Majesty's forces in the task of defeating the common enemies. His Majesty's government... is determined that at the end of the war the Sanussi in Cyrenaica will in no circumstances again fall under Italian domination.[72]

This statement became the basis for British foreign policy in relation to Libya after the war. However, it was disappointing to both Idris and Libyan nationalists since it neither recognized Idris as Amir in Libya or even Barqa, nor assured the country of independence. Clearly, the promise that the Sanusis in Barqa would not again fall under Italian domination did not mean that they would have independence. The statement also contained the threat of intended domination by Britain, which was reinforced by Britain's activism in the region. It was in addition a threat to Libyan unity as it completely ignored the two other provinces and referred only to Barqa. So, the best it could do was to pledge

that the pre-war situation would not be revived. Idris, however, since he had put all his eggs in the British basket, had to swallow his pride and rely wistfully on 'British nobility'.

Practically, however, the outbreak of the war brought an apparent coincidence of interests between British and Libyan leaders as both wanted the Italians defeated. This view was firmly adopted by Idris, who continued to believe in co-operation with Britain even after the Italians' defeat. In contrast to this view, nationalists and the younger generation saw Britain only as another occupier, especially when Britain declined to guarantee immediate independence for Libya. This view became stronger after the revolution, which blamed Britain for having governed Libya through a monarchy she had created. Al-Qathafi said,

> ...In 1952, and with the intention of deceiving the people and of preventing them from rising in rebellion against this veiled imperialism, the [British] imperialists created a myth of independence by manufacturing a throne in Britain and exporting it to Libya, where they endowed it with an emblem that symbolized deceit, reaction, defeatism and backwardness. Nationalist slogans were invented for it through which they thought they could deceive and divert the people, while they and their agents continued to colonize this people and control their destiny.[73]

To many Libyans, the liberation of their country was not a present from Britain; they believed rather that Britain's victory would have been in doubt without the Libyans' participation. Indeed, during the North African Campaign, the Libyan Arab Force came to the help of the British in many desperate situations. More than once Libyan fighters successfully crossed the Italian and German lines, attacking patrol units, and setting fire to petrol dumps. Civilians also came to the help of the British troops despite the threat of the death penalty against anybody collaborating with the Allies. De Candole pointed out that 'many British soldiers, including escaping prisoners, were given shelter and food, even guidance to rejoin their units by Cyrenaican tribesmen.'[74] Indeed, hundreds of British wounded or lost soldiers and escaped prisoners found Libyan tents in Barqa a safe shelter. They were looked after and guided safely back to their bases. Sheikh Sakit Abu

Ghalia sheltered a British major for six months while he was sending back military information. The British government recognized his services by bestowing on him the award of membership of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.[75] The Libyans were also a reliable source of information for the British on the Axis troops' movements. Vladimir Peniakoff, who operated inside Libyan territory as Commander of the Long-Range Desert Group, pointed out that the information sent daily by wireless to the Second Army was of great importance.[76] He even admitted that the Desert Campaign could have taken a different pattern without the invaluable information which was gathered by the Libyans watching enemy movements.[77]

Although the war presented the Libyan people with the opportunity to free themselves of the Italian occupation, it proved disastrous for Libya in terms of economy and society. The country emerged from the war appallingly devastated. During the North African Campaign, the eastern part of Libya had experienced five changes of occupation until finally the British firmly established their control in 1943. As a consequence of the fierce fighting, cities such as Tobruq and Benghazi were razed to the ground; Benghazi alone endured more than a thousand air raids. Communications, installations, and other infrastructures had been destroyed. Furthermore, Libya was littered with landmines and anti-personnel devices, making farming, pasturing, and, later, oil-mining risky enterprises. It has been estimated that no less than 68 per cent of all agricultural land was mined.[78] Hundreds of Libyans lost their lives or became handicapped through previously unexploded bombs and minefields after 1943.[79] In this regard it has been rightly observed that

> the desert battles of the early 1940s were reported and celebrated by the Allies as though such massive conflicts occurred in a featureless terrain bereft of local people; in fact, the battles totally disrupted what little agricultural progress had been made in the region bringing famine and desolation to tribes that had already been made to suffer greatly by the many foreign incursions throughout the twentieth century.[80]

*1.8 British Military Administration in Libya*

Throughout the period of occupation and until the war was over, Britain's policy towards Libya was one of strict 'care and maintenance' in line with the Hague Convention of 1907. According to the Hague Convention, military government had to be a temporary arrangement, which should give place to a civil administration as soon as military exigencies permitted.[81] But Tripolitania and Barqa continued to be administered by the War Office until 1949 when the Foreign Office took over.

The nucleus of the British Military Administration (BMA) went back to 1940 when General Wavell, the British Commander-in-Chief, anticipated the coming events by advising his government to give attention to the question of administration of the territory to be occupied in Africa.[82] He had proposed that Britain could follow the form of military government used in the Middle East during the First World War, when the responsibility had rested with the military commander in order to prevent any conflict between the administration of policies and the military exigencies.

Following the third and final British occupation of Barqa, in November 1943, General Montgomery declared the formation of a military government to administer the province. A month later, he did the same thing for Tripolitania. These arrangements were acceptable at the time, but when the British occupation continued longer than had been expected by the Libyan people, signs of frustration began to surface. Politically-aware Libyans just did not understand why Britain continued to honour Italian sovereignty over Libya and treated it as enemy territory when Italy was no longer in control of the country.[83] Although grateful to the British for their help, they became impatient, restless, and uncertain of the British intention, especially when the Italians continued to dominate business as well as administrative and judicial positions. In August 1943, a demonstration took place in Tripoli and a petition was presented to the British authorities asking for the return of land to the Arab farmers, the removal of Italian officials, and

training for self-government.[84] In 1944, political groups started describing the BMA as 'colonization by foreigners'.[85] By 1945, the frustration of some political parties became noticeable. The *Kutla*, the Free National Block, sent a telegram to Attlee and 'Azzam, who had become Secretary of the Arab League, urging action against the BMA, 'through whose neglect the country was in agony.'[86] It also organized strikes and demonstrations.

It has to be noted that during its nine years of direct administration, the BMA used its position to interfere in the internal dynamics of Libyan politics in order to further the British interests. Political parties were harassed, nationalist and patriotic groups were banned, and activist leaders were expelled on the ground of their disapproval of the British occupation.[87] The BMA also tried to divided the country by treating each province separately. The British and the French even drew up boundaries and posted guards on the gates between the three provinces, and the Libyan people had to obtain permission from the BMA for their commerce and travel from one province to another. The degree of interference went to the point of manipulating the selection of candidates of the Preparatory Committee and the National Assembly, and appointing pro-British figures to the highest governmental positions.

In short, the long and difficult colonial experience has affected Libya's relations with other countries by helping instil a sense of patriotism among many of the Libyans on the one hand and hatred and distrust of Western colonial powers on the other. This phenomenon was clearly expressed by al-Qathafi when he said,

> For the past 460 years, this country has not enjoyed freedom and independence. The imperialist states have conspired against our people during those long years, trying continuously to subject our people and to suppress our will, to rule and enslave us.[88]

Regarding British colonialism he observed,

> Italian imperialism continued to try to colonize this land until 1943, when Fascist Italy was defeated and our beloved land was given to the Allied powers. Britain and France divided the country between them and, once more, the country was placed under a new imperialistic rule, known as the British Administration. This new and veiled imperialism continued to rule the country with the intention of deceiving the people into accepting a new image of imperialism. But this people, anxious to safeguard their Arab and Islamic identity, this people who value their dignity above all else, refused to tolerate any kind of imperialism, oppression or enslavement.[89]

*1.9 Conclusion*

Libya's foreign policy, under both the monarchical and revolutionary regimes, has been influenced by the country's history, although not on the same scale as history was interpreted differently from one regime to another. The salient feature of Libyan history was the long and bitter experience with colonialism and invasions. This difficult experience has influenced Libya's foreign policy in two ways. First, the country's struggle against foreign invaders, especially the recent ones, has played a vital role in creating a sense of patriotism and, consequently, nationalism. Second, it has created in the Libyan decision-makers, particularly during the revolutionary era, a rather cynical view of the intentions of Western colonial powers.

National awareness was manifested in the shape of the Qaramanli state, which ruled Tripolitania and parts of Barqa and Fazzan independently for a hundred and twenty-five years and set the basic form of the new Libyan state in the twentieth century. This period of Libyan history has had a strong effect on the country's foreign policy during the revolutionary era in particular. Although it occurred nearly two hundred years ago, as has already been mentioned, the Libyan people and their leaders still remember the first confrontation with the USA in 1805 and regard the capture of the *Philadelphia* as a great victory over a Christian Western power which wanted to control Libya even before the emergence of al-Qathafi or the discovery of oil.

Another manifestation of modern awakening and the growing sense of nationalism in the nineteenth century was the Sanusi movement. Although it started as a religious order, it eventually became a national movement. It created a sense of unity and provided guidance and leadership during times of peace and war. During the Italian occupation in particular, the movement expressed itself in political, military, and nationalistic ways and, as a result, became the focus of Libyan nationalism. In 1920, the movement was transformed into a new political and secular entity. The Sanusi Emirate in Barqa and the Republic in Tripolitania were further manifestations of the enhanced sense of Libyan nationalism. Although each lasted only a short period, the Emirate and the Republic became the nuclei of monarchical and revolutionary Libya respectively.

Although different from the Italian overlordship, the British colonial experience had a deep impact on Libya's political and economic development, and, consequently, on her foreign policy. During the Second World War, Idris allied himself with the British and the Libyan forces fought alongside them in order to liberate Libya. At the end of the war, the Libyans were disappointed and angry to see their country once again being placed under a new occupation. Although Idris had to continue his alliance with Britain, since he had put all his eggs in the British basket, Britain's reluctance to guarantee Libya's immediate independence cultivated in the younger generation a cynical view of the British intentions. During her occupation of Libya, Britain used her military administration there to forge the country in a mould best suited to British interests. The British excluded nationalist leaders from holding any important governmental position and relied only on definitely pro-British figures. More important, later when Libya's independence became inevitable, Britain stipulated that the new state should be a federal entity with Idris as its king. By creating the kind of state she wanted, Britain hoped to ensure that Libya would henceforth follow Britain's guidance in domestic and foreign policies.

# NOTES

1. Since Cyrenaica is today an integral part of an Arab country, I shall use the Arabic name of the region, Barqa.

2. Anderson, "Assessing Libya's Qaddafi", 198. John Wright has pointed out that the Italians were executing 12,000 Libyans annually. See Wright, "Libya promised land", .

3. This term was widely used during the years of the resistance. See, for example, Al-Zawi, *Jihad al-abtal*, 117, 131, 141.

4. See *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi* (The National Register), 1969-1970, I, 9 f.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Since independence, Libya has been through a number of name changes. The United Kingdom of Libya was followed by the Kingdom of Libya. This was changed by the revolution of 1969 to the Libyan Arab Republic, only to be replaced by the name the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in 1978 after the announcement of the 'Authority of the People'. The latest addition to the above in 1986, after the American attack on Libya, is the term Great, making the official name of the country the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. The term Jamahiriya is equivalent to 'state of the masses'. For the sake of convenience, we will refer to the country as Libya.

7. The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), *Country profile: Libya*, 1994-5, 11.

8. For a good historical analysis of the first Arab invasion of Libya, see Miftah, *Libya mundh al-fath al-'Arabi.*

9. See al-Barghouthi, *Tarikh Libya al-Islami*, 329-359.

10. Simons, *The Struggle for survival*, 84.

11. The term *al-Maghrib* refers to the part of North Africa which lies west of Egypt and north of the Sahara. It means the Occident, where the sun sets, as opposed to *al-Mashriq*, the Orient or Levant, where it rises.

12. The tiny minority of 'Berbers', or native speakers of Berber dialects, are thoroughly Arabized and live in general amicability with their Arab brothers. More important, the educated young generation trace their roots to Arab origins through their ancestors who left the Arabian Peninsula before the later Arab conquests and migration. This belief is based on similarity in language, culture, and physical appearance.

13. For full details of the incident, see Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 26-28. See also *The Guardian*, 9 Jan. 1986.

14. There has been no agreement on the proper transliteration of al-Qathafi's name. It has been transliterate in at least six different ways in Roman script. In this study I will use the form al-Qathafi, as that is the way in which it is written in the English version of his own *Green Book.*

15. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, X, 457.

16. For more details on the politics of the Young Turks and the Arab national response in Libya, see El-Bhloul, *Italian colonialism, the Young Turks, and the Libyan resistance*, 261-285.

17. *Tariqah* means 'a road, path, or way' and so the Sanusi *Tariqah* was a way of life.

18. Among the important works on the Sanusi Movement are those by Ziadeh, *Sanusiyah*; Evans-Pritchard, *Sanusi of Cyrenaica*; al-Ashshab, *Barqah al-'Arabiyah*; and al-Hashayshi, *Jala al-Karb*. See also PRO, *The Consulate* in Benghazi to the Foreign Office, 7th January 1920, F.O. 371/3813 (a translation of an Italian survey on the Sanusiya).

19. *Murabit*s usually trace their line of descent from the Prophet's family, a descent which commands respect among Muslims.

20. Hassanein, *Lost oases*, 58.

21. A *zawiyah*, or lodge, was the Islamic equivalent of the Christian monastery and centre of learning.

22. El-Bhloul, *Italian colonialism*, 206.

23. Robins, *The establishment of the monarchical system in Libya*, 13 f.

24. Details of the life and times of Ahmed al-Sharif can be found in A. El-Horeir, *Social and economic transformation in Libyan hinterland during the second half of the 19th century: the role of Sayyid Ahmed al-Sharif al-Sanusi*, Ph.D. dissertation, 1981.

25. Gooch, *History of modern Europe*, 267.

26. *Ibid.*

27. F.O. 371.29707/11/44. F.O. telegram no. 119, Grey to Rodd, 27/7/1911. See also *British documents*, IX, 264, Grey to Rodd, 22nd July 1911.

28. F.O. 371.37750/11/44. W.O. telegram no. 240, Churchill to Nicolson, Under-secretary at the F.O., 20 Sept. 1911.

29. F.O. 371.38157/11/44. F.O. telegram no. 178, Grey to Rodd, 29/11/1911.

30. *State papers*, 1911, CIV, 207-212.

31. For more details on the Italian invasion and the Libyan resistance, see El-Bhloul, *Italian colonialism, the Young Turks, and the Libyan resistance*, 298-375.

32. El-Bhloul, *Italian colonialism*, 415.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Wright, *Libya: a modern history*, 37-41.

35. *Aljamahiriya*, 27.

36. For more details, see De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*. De Candole provides one of the best sources on the British administration in Libya and the private life and politics of Idris.

37. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I (1969-70) 9 f.

38. There were reports that Sultan 'Ali Dinar of Darfur might join in.

39. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 27.

40. For more details on the war and the rise of Idris to power, see Simon, *Libya between Ottomanism and nationalism*, 268-290.

41. See *Ibid.*, 262.

42. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 31.

43. See Simon, *Libya between Ottomanism and nationalism*, 278-290.

44. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 24.

45. Idris not only did not participate in the war, but he withdrew to the west with three hundred of his followers (F.O. 371/2357, MacMahon to the Foreign Office, 21/12/1915).

46. Simon, *Libya between Ottomanism and nationalism*, 278.

47. W.O., 106/1532.

48. F.O. 371/2670, Idris to MacMahon, 9/9/1916; also F.O. 371/2670, Talbot on Idris's character and status, 22/11/1916.

49. For more details on al-Zuetina truce and other accords, see Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 16-20; De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 31-37.

50. *Ibid.*

51. Robins, *The establishment of the monarchical system in Libya*, 21.

52. Hayford, *The politics of the Kingdom of Libya*, 74.

53. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 19.

54. *Ibid.*

55. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, 156.

56. For more details on the Republic, see Anderson, *The state and social transformation*, 213; Roumani, "From Republic to Jamahiriya", 159 f.

57. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 21.

58. *Ibid.*, 22.

59. Pelt, *Libyan independence*, 74.

60. *Ibid.*

61. For a full description of Idris's response to the offer of the *bay'ah* (oath of allegiance), see De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 41 f.

62. *Ibid.*

63. See Louis, "American anti-colonialism", 406.

64. See F.O. 371. J1627/77/166. 21/4/1939.

65. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 28.

66. For the full text of the resolutions, see F.O. 371.J1830/51G.9/8/1940. See also Shukri, *Milad dawlat Libya*, I, 271.

67. For further details on the Tripolitanian leaders' position, see Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 28-33.

68. For a full account of Idris's own evaluation of the situation, see De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 35.

69. For more details, see Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 32; De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 65 f.

70. F.O. 371.J3045, Note by L.L.C., May 1947, Appendix 2, 11.

71. F.O. 371.J2841/368166, "The Sanusi", Memorandum by the Minister of State in Cairo, 21.8.1941.

72. F.O. 371.J143/143/66.8.1.1942.

73. *Aljamahiriya*, 27.

74. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 66.

75. F.O. 371.69404/304-5, Historical background on Libya, by L.L.C. in Cairo, 23/5/1947.

76. Peniakoff, *Popski's private army*. See also Shukri, *al-Sanusiyah*, 384.

77. *Ibid.*

78. Paper presented by the Institute of Diplomatic Studies to a Geneva-based seminar on 'War remnants in Libya', May 1981.

79. After the Revolution of the 1st September 1969, Libya insisted that the Second World War combatants, especially Italy, Germany, and Britain, should pay reparations for the minefields and unexploded bombs and shells that had taken many thousands of Libyan dead and injured since 1943.

80. Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 164.

81. For more details on the Hague Convention of 1907, see State Papers 1907, C, 422.

82. Draft white paper on BMA in Africa, 1942, 3.

83. Rennell, *British military administration*, 288.

84. Lord Rennell stated,

> The petition lamented the fact that Tripolitania was still treated as an enemy territory and that high Italian officials were working in depart-

> ments dealing with native affairs: it asked for the employment of more native officials and equal salaries for them and Italians. It went on to ask for wider concessions of a peacetime nature, such as commerce with neighbouring countries, the provision of transport and the granting of permission for pilgrims to go to Mecca, and the opening of primary schools for Moslems. Lastly the petition pointed out that certain taxation was a burden in that, whereas the lire had been devalued five times and direct taxes had been increased by the same amount, wages had not undergone equivalent change (*British military administration*, 288).

The work cited above is a another good source of information on the British administration in Libya. In addition to Libyan matters, the book deals in addition with Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, but the greater part of it is devoted to Libya. Although the study was not a government document, the author held an important post in the administration and had access to government papers. He prepared his book with the permission of the Army Council and it can be considered close to being an official account.

85. F.O. 371.J1019/21, Report on 'Umar al-Mukhtar Club, B.M.A. Benghazi 1951.

86. F.O. 371.J1647/122/66.

87. For instance, the B.M.A. banned the 'Umar al-Mukhtar Club, rejected the nomination of 'Umar Shinnib for the National Assembly, and jailed the leader of the *Kutla*, Al-Faqeh Hassan.

88. *Aljamahiriya*, 26.

89. *Ibid.*, 27.

# PART ONE: THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE MONARCHY

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# CHAPTER TWO

# THE BRITISH ROLE IN CREATING THE LIBYAN STATE

*2.1 Introduction*

The Kingdom of Libya, which endured for about eighteen years under the leadership of Idris, was essentially a British creation although under the aegis of the United Nations. Thus, despite the sacrifices of the Libyan people, made with the goal of national freedom before them, they were denied by the Big Powers their right to shape their own future. When Britain, and other Western states, saw that it was only a matter of time before Libya must follow other states in winning her emancipation, she prepared for this development in such a way as to pre-empt the full independence of the country by shaping the administration of the state in ways that would perpetuate her own dominion for as long as possible. Although the so-called 'Big Four' powers, which were responsible for the post-war arrangements, agreed that, under the Peace Treaty, Italy would renounce all her assumed rights in Africa, they did not agree on a solution to the Libyan question. They apparently viewed Libya as war booty of which each wanted a share. The issue of Libya was raised at both the Potsdam and San Francisco Conferences, but without its being settled. The matter was then referred to the Council of Foreign Ministers, who also failed to find a solution in their meetings in London and Paris, and so the issue was referred to the United Nations. In all of these meetings the major part of the debate between the Big Powers showed little or no concern for the interests of the Libyan people. Just as they had raged over the country as if it had been empty of inhabitants during the North African Campaign, so now the Big Powers' debate over the

future of Libya was essentially motivated by no more than where they perceived their own interests to lie.

Among these powers, the concern of the present study is with the role of Britain. This chapter will therefore examine the British policy in the key international circles, namely the Council of Foreign Ministers' Conferences and the General Assembly of the United Nations. Special consideration will be given to the Bevin-Sforza Plan, the Libyan reaction to it, and its implications for the future of Libya. The principal argument of this chapter is that Britain shaped the Libyan state in a form that would serve her own interests in the region by insisting on federalism and placing Idris at the head of the new state.

*2.2 British policy at the Council of Foreign Ministers' Conferences (1944-1948)*

In the post-war period, Britain seemed to have no clear long-term policy relating to the future of the whole of Libya. This lack of clarity could be attributed to the complexity of interests in which Britain found herself, a complexity summed up at the time by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Colonies, Mr. Thomas, who asked,

> What do we mainly want? Is it strategic rights in Cyrenaica? Or the exclusion of Russian influence from Africa? Or the friendship of the Arabs of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica? Or the restoration of good Anglo-Italian relations? Or the maintenance of the Entente cordiale with France?[1]

It appeared that Britain wished to reconcile all these apparently irreconcilable aims by the mere passing of time.

Prior to 1949, British policy under Ernest Bevin had essentially pursued the tactic of partitioning Libya. As early as the Potsdam Conference, the British objectives concerning Libya were ordered along the following lines:

> (a) Cyrenaica placed under international trusteeship with Britain as the administering authority. (b) Tripolitania and Fazzan placed under international trusteeship, possibly with Italy as the administering authority in the former and France in the latter, but with the Sayyid Idris acknowledged as the supreme ruler.[2]

The problem with these guidelines was that Italy could return to Tripolitania. Although Britain tended toward a policy of placating the pro-Western Italian government that had taken over from Mussolini, she feared a threat to her own interests in the Arab world. The British authorities in the Middle East were aware that 'the restoration of Italian rule would be deeply resented in Tripolitania [and] would probably be resisted by force of arms and would be likely to arouse much criticism throughout the Arab world with possible repercussions on...[Britain's] whole position in the Middle East.'[3] Britain had considerable political and economic interests in the region and obviously did not want to put them in jeopardy. Indeed, for more than a century, Britain had been considering her interests and 'responsibilities' in the Middle East as paramount to those of all other colonial powers. When the possibility of losing her stronghold in Egypt was raised, Britain became keen to develop a Middle East defence system as close as possible to the Suez Canal. In doing so, Barqa appeared to be an ideal alternative to compensate for any possible losses in the eastern Mediterranean.[4] It could provide a strategic outpost for the control of northern Africa and the eastern basin of the Mediterranean. The Second World War had demonstrated this very well. The war had made it clear that the possession of the Tripoli-Tobruq-Sicily triangle, together with control of the Aegean, was an effective counter-balance to any sea power in the eastern Mediterranean.[5]

However, at the first meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers (C.F.M.) in London, there was a general consensus among the delegates that Libya, as well as the other Italian colonies, should be placed under some form of trusteeship, but there was a division on who should be the trustee and what principle of trusteeship should be applied. During the third session of the C.F.M.'s meeting in London in September 1945, the USA proposed

a collective trusteeship of ten years' duration under the United Nations' auspices, after which Libya would become independent.[6] The French were reluctant to withdraw from Fazzan and preferred Italy to be placed in charge of Tripolitania.[7] They were wary of any move towards granting Libya independence because they wished to retain hold of Fazzan, as this territory was a very important strategic station between her own colonial posts in Central and North Africa, and in order to prevent any impact that the independence of Libya might have on the Arab people in Tunisia and Algeria. Even at this stage, Italy had not abandoned her dream of a colonial presence in North Africa. The USSR had already expressed her willingness to acquire a part of one of the Italian colonies, preferably Tripolitania, as the Soviets were desperate to obtain a sea outlet in the Mediterranean.[8]

At the Paris meeting in April 1946, it became evident that the gap between the USSR and the Western powers had begun to widen and the dynamic of the Cold War was already beginning to shape the character of the post-war settlement. The Western powers vigorously pursued a policy of preventing the USSR's gaining a foothold in Libya. When the USSR proposed a collective trusteeship of two states, of which one would be held by the Allied Powers and the other by Italy, the three Western powers made it clear that, at all costs, the USSR had to be kept out of the Mediterranean.[9] The British Foreign Secretary declared that under no circumstances would sole Russian trusteeship of Italian colonies be acceptable. In order to close the door in the face of the USSR, Bevin proposed that 'all Libya including Tripolitania and Cyrenaica should be given immediate independence.'[10] This proposal proved, however, to be no more than a negotiating position from which Britain would move in compromise because, when the USSR supported the Italian claim to sole trusteeship over Tripolitania, Britain showed willingness to agree.[11] Britain was thinking in terms of world politics and was not so much concerned about honouring her promises to Idris.

Nevertheless, after three years of haggling, no single proposal had gained the necessary unanimous approval of the Big Four's Foreign Ministers and clearly there was an impasse. Therefore, the Big Four agreed to refer the matter to the General Assembly of the United Nations if they could not reach a solution within a year.[12] They also agreed that a commission of inquiry should be sent to Libya to ascertain the views of the local population and to obtain further information on the basis of which to make a definite decision as to the final resolution of the Libyan question.

*2.3 The Four-Power Commission of Investigation*

In accordance with the Peace Treaty, the Four Powers decided to dispatch a Commission of Investigation, composed of a representative of each of them, to supply the Deputies with necessary data and to ascertain the wishes of the Libyan inhabitants before the final decision on their future was taken. The Commission arrived in Libya on the 6th March 1948 and left on the 20th May, having spent forty days in Tripolitania, ten days in Fazzan, and twenty-five days in Barqa.[13] In Tripolitania the Commission found a widespread fear of and opposition to Italy's return to Libya. Despite rivalries among themselves, the Tripolitanian leaders unanimously agreed on national unity, independence, and membership of the Arab League.[14] They were even able to unite under the leadership of al-Sa'dawi, the head of the Libyan Liberation Committee, after his return from exile, and to present to the Commission on the 3rd May 1948 a memorandum asserting their support for 'independence, unity, and membership of the Arab League.'[15] In Barqa, where all political parties had been dissolved by Idris in favour of his National Congress, the Commission found a unanimous desire for the immediate independence of Barqa and a constitutional government under Idris's leadership.[16] In Fazzan they again found a desire for unity and independence.[17]

The British administrators in Tripolitania and Barqa, and their French counterpart in Fazzan, did everything they could to make the findings serve their own interests. In

Tripolitania, for instance, the leader of the Free National Bloc, 'Ali al-Faqih Hasan, was arrested by the British Military Administrator in order, as was stated by a British official, 'to ensure the free expression of opinion.'[18] In Fazzan as well, the French arrested 'Abd al-Rahman al-Barquli and imprisoned him until February 1950.

The findings of the Commission, particularly its reference to Tripolitania as 'insufficiently developed economically' and 'not ready politically or culturally for self government,' were a surprise to many Libyan people, especially since Tripolitania was the most developed province of the country. The members of the Commission seemed to have allowed themselves to be influenced by their preconceived ideas and, more likely, by instructions from their respective governments. As a result, the Commission's report was split along national lines; while the USA and Britain were generally in agreement on the wording of the report, the USSR and France usually insisted on adding or clarifying passages in one way or another.[19] The general conclusion, however, was that the inhabitants opposed the return of Italian sovereignty, and wanted freedom and independence.

Having received the report of the Commission of Investigation and listened to the views of other interested governments, the Deputies started work on the drafting of their recommendations to the C.F.M. on the 9th August 1948. Even at this stage, however, there were serious disagreements between the USSR and the Western powers on the one hand and among the Western powers themselves on the other. As a result of their disagreement, the Big Four admitted their failure and addressed a letter to the Secretary-General of the United Nations on the 15th September 1948, signalling their decision to refer the question of the Italian colonies to the General Assembly of the United Nations in accordance with the applicable provisions of the Peace Treaty with Italy.[20]

*2.4 The Libyan question before the United Nations, September 1948*

The referral of the question of the Italian colonies to the General Assembly of the United Nations seemed to improve the chances of reaching a solution on the future of Libya. The General Assembly provided a multi-state forum in which voting was on the basis of equality and in which no member had the so-called 'right of veto'. Moreover, unlike the Big-Four Conferences, in which no decision could be taken without unanimity, in the large U.N. forum any decision needed only a two-thirds majority, which was not so difficult to obtain since the forum provided opportunities for compromising, lobbying, and manoeuvring.

However, when the Libyan question was opened for discussion on the 6th April 1949 at Lake Success (Long Island, New York), the USA proposed the participation of Italy in the debate but without the right to vote. At the same time, Pakistan proposed the hearing of the representation from Libya.[21] Representatives of some political parties were given hearings by Committee 1 (Political and Security) and submitted written statements. They agreed on independence and unity, but their statements varied somewhat as to the appropriate form of unity.

In the general debate, when the members of the First Committee presented their respective governments' views on the Libyan question, there was an evident fundamental disagreement: Britain, the USA, and the Latin American states were in favour of trusteeship held by a single power over each province, or part thereof, with Italy to be one of the trustee powers, whereas the USSR, the Arab states, India, and Pakistan proposed independence or, as the only alternative, direct United Nations trusteeship. By the end of April 1949, it became clear that, although none of these groups could command the necessary two-thirds majority, each of them could prevent any solution from being adopted.[22] Thus it appeared that the General Assembly in its turn appeared to be moving towards a deadlock.

*2.5 The Bevin-Sforza Plan*

From January 1949, the British government seemed to have become convinced that Italian trusteeship or postponement were the 'only practicable alternatives' for resolution of the Libyan question.[23] Concerned for her interests in Barqa, Britain tended to seek any arrangement that would satisfy Italy in order to gain the support of the Latin American bloc, which formed the largest grouping in the General Assembly. Therefore, Britain tried to make a deal with Italy outside the United Nations. The British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, arranged with his Italian counterpart, Carlo Sforza, a package deal placing Barqa, Tripolitania, and Fazzan under the trusteeship of Britain, Italy, and France respectively for a period of ten years, after which Libya would become independent.[24]

This desperate attempt by the British government to settle the question behind the back of the United Nations revealed the anxiety of Britain to consolidate her position in the Mediterranean and to prevent the USSR from securing a foothold in the region. Britain's anxiety had been increased both by the Egyptian government's demand for the withdrawal of British troops from the Canal Zone and by the deterioration of the situation in Palestine. As a result of these events, Britain became more determined than ever to gain, by hook or by crook, full strategic facilities in Barqa for not less than twenty-five years.[25]

The Bevin-Sforza Plan was a blatant infringement of the terms of the Peace Treaty, which both Britain and Italy had signed. The Plan was repudiated by the Soviet bloc and by the Arab and Asian states. The Pakistani Foreign Minister attacked the agreement on the ground that it divided Libya into three parts with three administrations using three different languages.[26] The Polish representative described it as 'a stab in the

back of the United Nations'[27] and 'bartering under the table.'[28] Even so, the Plan was supported by the USA, France, and the Latin American states. The US delegate to the First Committee expressed his sympathy with and support for the agreement. At that time the Americans appear to have been on markedly close terms with the British. Since the early 1950s, Britain had realized the decline in her status as a 'world power' and had become convinced of her need of the USA's military as well as political support.[29] Even earlier, in 1947, Britain entered into what were called the 'Pentagon Talks' with the USA, in which the British were explicitly reassured by the Americans that the latter did not intend to replace them in existing spheres of influence such as Iraq, and that in Libya in particular the State Department would support them.[30] The Talks even laid the basis for the resuscitation of the US Wheelus airfield.[31] Thus, the Libyan question proved to be one of the few cases in the region in which the British and Americans could work hand-in-glove.

In Libya, the Bevin-Sforza Plan provoked heated protests. In Tripolitania, it was regarded as a betrayal of the country's national aspirations. A violent demonstration broke out and a state of emergency was declared. Also, the political leaders initiated a policy of non-co-operation and a general strike closed most stores. Protesters in Tripolitania even threatened that they would offer armed resistance against any attempt to implement the agreement.[32] The anger and frustration of the Arabs in Tripolitania were summed up in the written petition presented by the Free National Bloc to the B.M.A. on the 12th May. It included the following words:

> ...The agreement concluded between Mr. Bevin and Sforza to put Tripolitania under an Italian trusteeship with effect from 1951 has caused discontent and anger among the population. The Arab people consider such agreement as explicit encroachment against their national desires which are unanimously supported and an open challenge to their hopes. This attitude is considered unfriendly on the part of Britain towards the Arabs, whose friendship is proclaimed by Britain. The Kutla [Bloc] has to remind you that the people will not accept a return of Italy or anybody else and are determined to defend their independence and the unity of their country...[33]

When the Plan was submitted for voting to the General Assembly, it was decisively defeated. As a result, the hostile demonstrations in Tripoli and other main cities were replaced by demonstrations of joy. The violent public reaction to the Plan appeared to have generated wide sympathy and support for the Libyan case both in and outside the United Nations. It also had the effect of giving very considerable stimulus to the movement for Libyan unity, as several Tripolitanian political groups merged to form the Tripolitanian National Congress Party under the leadership of Bashir al-Sa'dawi. Paradoxically then, the defeat of the Plan produced victory for the ideals of Libyan unity and Arab nationalism.

*2.6 The Second Sanusi Emirate*

With the collapse of the Bevin-Sforza Plan, it became clear that the early granting of Libyan independence had become inevitable. Anticipating this, ten weeks before the resolution for Libyan independence went through the General Assembly, Britain granted a limited self-government to Barqa under Idris's leadership, disregarding whatever the United Nations might decide for Libya as a whole. Under this arrangement, Britain was to retain control over defence, foreign affairs, as well as legal and financial matters, while Idris was given some responsibility for internal affairs.[34] Britain's delegate informed the United Nations that his government

> could not continue to refuse the people of Cyrenaica its indisputable right to the greatest possible measure of self-government consistent with the International delegations of the United Kingdom Government... The Government has therefore given the Emir of Cyrenaica absolute powers in the internal affairs of that territory... Faced with a demand from representatives of the people of Cyrenaica for independence... the Government... had decided... it could do not less than grant Cyrenaica that full measure of self-government...[35]

Britain's aim in making this speedy move was to protect her own interests by exploiting the existing political structure before it could be quickly altered. Britain became particularly concerned about Idris's position as 'her man' in Barqa, since he began to come

under pressure as the Bevin-Sforza Plan increased sympathy among the people of Barqa for Tripolitania. Idris was even criticized by the nationalistic younger generation for his being a British puppet.[36] In fact, since the Lake Success Conference, Idris's position had come to be no longer tenable. From the early 1940s he had promised his people that, in return for their alliance with Britain, they would be free by the end of the War, but instead their destiny had become a matter of international bargaining. As a result, the people became frustrated and angry with Idris, Britain, and other Western powers. Even Idris himself felt that he had been misled by the British. In one of his routine meetings with De Candole, he made an angry outburst in which he said,

> ...I shall be accused of breaking my word after all these years and betraying my people after advising them to be patient for so long. I was assured that if the United Nations could not agree on the future of Libya, Britain would consider the grant of Cyrenaican independence and the negotiation of a treaty of co-operation and defence. The Cyrenaican respect of the British is weakening and the criticism of the British and of myself as a British tool is becoming widespread. The freedom for which we fought so long is in jeopardy.[37]

Idris was aware that if he wanted to change the situation, he had to make some statement to his people as early as possible. He asked for a British agreement in forming a national government in Barqa and the signing of a treaty of co-operation and defence. If Britain delayed any further, he threatened to resign and go back to Egypt.[38] The British, of course, did not want to lose him at this important time. De Candole, the British Chief Administrator, telegraphed the Foreign Office about Idris's position, saying that if Idris could not announce something at the meeting of his National Congress, he would be in a very difficult position.[39] The response of the British government was positive and De Candole was authorized to make a prepared statement announcing the granting of limited self-government to Barqa. When the National Congress of Barqa held its meeting on the 1st June, De Candole made the following statement in reply to Idris's opening speech in which he had asked the British government to recognize Barqa's new status:

> The British government recognise the Amir, the freely chosen leader of his people, as the head of the Cyrenaican Government. They formally recognise the desire of the Cyrenaicans for self-government and will take all steps compatible with their international obligations to promote it. They agree to the formation of a Cyrenaican Government with responsibility over internal affairs... Finally, in taking these steps, they wish to emphasise that nothing will be done to prejudice the eventual future of Libya as a whole.[40]

This announcement was sharply criticized as a device to divide the country into three political entities.[41] In Barqa, an angry crowd interrupted the British Chief Administrator while he was addressing the National Congress, chanting, "*Libya wahidah* (united Libya)!"[42] The doors to the hall were closed and De Candole had to abandon the microphone and deliver his message to the Congress members alone. As they were leaving the meeting, members of the Congress, De Candole, and Idris himself were insulted. A member of the 'Umar al-Mukhtar Club approached Idris and gesticulated in his face.[43] On the evening of that day, the Club called for a rowdy demonstration in favour of Libyan unity outside the Manar Palace and marched throughout the city of Benghazi chanting, 'Long live united Libya!'[44] In Tripolitania there were mass demonstrations against the British government's policy towards Libyan unity. Al-Sa'dawi, the leader of the Tripolitanian National Congress, addressed the demonstrators and declared, 'The Libyan people shall fight against the imperialists and their tools.'[45] These public demonstrations clearly evidenced the growing sense of nationalism, particularly among the younger generation, throughout the whole of Libya. They also indicated the decline of Idris's popularity as he came to be seen as a tool of the British. Indeed, with the passing of years, Idris's popularity in cities like Benghazi and Derna had declined to an all-time low, while in Tripoli he had enjoyed very little support from the beginning.

Despite all the criticism, Idris and the British nevertheless went ahead with their plan. On the 16th September 1949, De Candole issued the 'Transitional Power Proclamation', according to which Idris was empowered to enact a constitution, to define the powers to be exercised by the new government, and to specify those reserved to himself, who was

thereafter to be known as the British Resident.[46] A draft constitution, which had been prepared by a British Constitutional Committee in London, was promulgated by Idris as the constitution of Barqa on the 11th October 1949. The new government was granted powers over internal affairs, but on certain legal and financial matters the British authorities were entitled to exercise authority through their advisers. Britain was to retain control of foreign affairs, defence, and the disposition of Italian property. British advisers to the new government were to be approved by the British Resident and the constitution was not to be suspended or amended without his approval.[47] Furthermore, all airfields and military installations would continue to be occupied by British troops. Obviously, under these terms, the 'self-government' of Barqa was very limited indeed and was designed to sustain Britain's grip on the territory. The British aim was clearly to create a British-sponsored Emirate over which a practical British control would be maintained for an indefinite period by using the local political structures.

Within a year of the proclamation of self-government, there were three separate Cabinets. The first Prime Minister, Fathi al-Kikhya, resigned after five months on the ground that he did not have enough authority to act as Prime Minister in either name or practice.[48] The Foreign Office described al-Kikhya as a 'troublemaker' and a 'difficult and unsatisfactory person to deal with.'[49] In agreement with De Candole, who welcomed the resignation after having seen something of Fathi al-Kikhya in London, Idris invited al-Kikhya's father, 'Umar Mansur al-Kikhya, to take the place now vacated. The British viewed 'Umar as an 'unpopular but probably easier person to work with.'[50] In March 1950, however, Muhammad al-Saqizli took over from al-Kikhya. The latter two Prime Ministers were both close friends of Idris and on good terms with the British authorities.

Thus, with the connivance and blessing of Britain, individuals from traditionally strong tribes and wealthy families came to dominate Libyan politics for many years to come.

*2.7 Nominal independence and federation*

By the summer of 1949, with the defeat of the Bevin-Sforza Plan and the setting in of the Cold War, Britain and the USA came to the conclusion that their interests would be better served by an independent state rather than by one administered under the United Nations' trusteeship.[51] These two countries appeared to have realized two things: first, that a British trusteeship over Libya, whether in whole or in part, would be impossible unless it were linked with a promise of independence; and, second, that any trusteeship agreement, whether collectively for separate territories or for a single country, would make Libya useless for any defence arrangements since it would require the surrender of their bases.[52] The head of the State Department's Sub-Committee on the Future of the Italian Colonies and later the American Ambassador to Libya, Henry S. Villard, pointed out that

> as an independent entity Libya could freely enter into treaties or arrangements with the Western powers looking towards the defence of the Mediterranean and North Africa. This is exactly what the Soviet Union feared and what Libya did. The strategic sector of African sea coast which had proved so important in the mechanized war of the desert was coming into its own as a place of equal importance in the air age.[53]

Thus, in the view of Britain and the USA, a quasi-independent Libya, with Idris as King, would make Libya safer for their interests. They therefore began pushing for immediate independence for the whole of Libya. As a result, on the 21st November, the General Assembly overwhelmingly recommended that

> 1) Libya, comprising of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and the Fezzan, shall be constituted an independent and sovereign state; 2) This independence shall become effective as soon as possible and in any case not later than 1 January 1952; 3) A constitution for Libya, including the form of the government, shall be determined by representatives of the inhabitants of Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and the Fezzan, meeting and consulting together in a National Assembly.[54]

The U.N. General Assembly also appointed Adrian Pelt, Assistant Secretary-General of the United Nations, as the U.N. Commissioner in Libya.

Although the U.N. resolution granted Libya independence, it cannot be seen as a complete fulfilment of the Libyan people's demands. It did not take into account the people's desire to obtain immediate independence and to ensure Libyan unity. Furthermore, the resolution did not solve the problem of the British and French air bases and troops occupying Libya, as Sub-Committee 17 of the General Assembly had rejected a Soviet proposal for ending the foreign military administrations and liquidation of military air bases.

The role of Britain in creating the Libyan state did not stop at securing a nominal independence, but it went so far as to determine the form and structure of the future political system. Britain had made it clear that if there were to be an independent Libyan state, it would be federal under the Sanusi crown.[55] In other words, if there was no escape from connecting the future of Barqa with that of Tripolitania and Fazzan, Britain stipulated that the country would be a monarchy with a federal system of government and that Idris would be the head of state.

Britain's attempt to keep Libya divided was not new. It went back to the early forties when she had formed two different military administrations, each with its own system. In September 1946, the British government decided that Britain should treat Tripolitania and Barqa separately from each other 'on the assumption that separate solutions will be found for them.'[56] Then, in May 1949, Britain tried again through the Bevin-Sforza Plan. Later, in June 1949, Britain declared independence for Barqa, but when she failed to secure her interests in Barqa apart from the rest of Libya, she asked for independence for the whole of Libya, knowing in advance that the future state would be under British control.

The British, together with the Americans, were wary of the possibility of a unitary state which might be dominated by Tripolitania, where anti-Western sentiment was at its

most severe. The emphasis, therefore, was on a loose-knit federation. The British government's reason for federalizing a country of less than one million inhabitants seemed to be that if the federation collapsed, it would not be difficult to split the country up and retire to Barqa where her interests would be secure. In this case, it would be the Americans, not the British, who would encounter radical nationalism since they had put all their eggs into the Tripolitanian basket.[57]

The British used every means at their disposal to impose their plan of federation. First, they worked hard in the United Nations to obtain the appointment of members of the United Nations Advisory Council who would be acceptable to them and they apparently got what they wanted. With the exception of the Egyptian and Pakistani members, all other members were from Western countries. Even the Egyptian and Pakistani members were nominees of pro-British regimes, but they did not bend to British wishes and remained independent in their opinions. Then, the British tried to bring the Commissioner round. In the exploratory talks at the Foreign Office, Adrian Pelt, the UN Commissioner to Libya, was informed about the British policy in Barqa, which was based on recognizing Barqa's independence and signing a military treaty with Idris.[58] Pelt expressed the view that such a policy would be 'contrary to the spirit of the United Nations on Libya... since it would prejudice the possibility of a free decision by the Libyan people on the future form of the Libyan state.'[59] The British also tried to exploit the split between the traditional political leaders, who were in favour of a federal system, and the younger nationalists, who opposed any plan that would jeopardize Libyan unity. In this regard, Pelt indicated that the British authorities, particularly in Tripolitania, 'used indirect tactics, in an endeavour to promote controlled emancipation.'[60] Furthermore, in order to block any attempt on the Tripolitanians' part to impose their plan of a unitary state by virtue of their numerical superiority, Britain insisted that the three provinces should be equally represented in every political body. Thus, Fazzan with only five per cent of the population and Barqa with only twenty per cent were each given twenty seats

in the National Assembly, with the same number allotted to Tripolitania, where seventy-five per cent of the population lived.[61]

In addition, in order to direct the debates through delegates from Barqa and Fazzan, the British strongly supported the view that the National Assembly should not be elected but selected from those who were likely to back Britain's policies in Libya. It was generally known that selected members from Barqa were following instructions from Idris, who was in turn receiving them from the British Resident in Benghazi, and further that their counterparts from Fazzan were following instructions from the French Resident through Ahmad Saif al-Nasr. This clear violation of the spirit of the U.N. resolution led the U.N. Commissioner to express 'grave doubts' about whether the selection rather than the election of the National Assembly would have 'the necessary moral and political authority to elaborate a final and definitive constitution for Libya.'[62] Even under the selection measures, the British wanted to make sure that no anti-British person would get through. They held a veto on the selection of Tripolitanian and Barqan candidates for the preparatory Committee and the National Assembly who were not considered to be pro-British. The Foreign Office, for instance, rejected the nomination of 'Umar Shinnib from Barqa and 'Ali Rajab from Tripolitania, the latter of whom was described by the Acting Chief Administrator as a man of straw with little following and very anti-British.[63]

It was not long before the Commissioner came to realize that Britain had little interest in the U.N. resolution and was concerned less with Libyan unity than with securing her own sphere of interests.[64] Nevertheless, Pelt agreed to the British proposal that Libya should be a federal state, even though he knew that the proposal was neither popular nor suitable for a country like Libya with a small population, meagre resources, and little political experience. Pelt appeared to have realized that if his mission were to be a success, he would have to work closely, and even make concessions to the British. Thus, with the help of the U.N. Commissioner, Britain managed to defeat the aim of the

Libyan nationalists and the Arab League of creating a united state that might have been less receptive to the British influence.[65]

However, on the 25th November 1950, before embarking on its main task of drafting the constitution, the National Assembly decided that Libya was to be a democratic, federal, and sovereign state. The form of government was to be a constitutional monarchy and Idris was to be the King-designate of the United Kingdom of Libya. The federal principle was supported by the members from Barqa and Fazzan, with the encouragement of Britain and France. The Tripolitanians accepted it only reluctantly. The public reaction was anger and frustration. Violent protests broke out in Tripoli calling for the denunciation of the federal format. It was significant that British military police were used to break up the demonstrations. Over 800 people were arrested on one occasion.[66] The Tripoli newspaper, *Al-Mirsad*, hostile to federation, was also closed down by the British authorities.

Towards the end of the transition period, Britain, France, and the USA became more eager to achieve Libyan independence as soon as possible. In February 1951, Idris asked the administrating powers to transfer their authority to a Libyan provisional government. A month later, local provisional governments were created in Tripolitania and Fazzan on the same lines that already existed in Barqa. On the 29th March, a national provisional government, headed by Idris, was established to govern Libya until the constitution was completed and independence declared.

The independence of Libya was proclaimed on the 24th December 1951, one week before the U.N. deadline. A formal Declaration of Independence was made by the King-designate at a ceremony in the Manar Palace in Benghazi, in which he said,

> We joyfully proclaim to the noble people of Libya that... our beloved country has, with the help of God, attained independence... We formally

> proclaim that Libya has, from today, become an independent sovereign state... We take to ourselves the title of King of the United Kingdom of Libya... We welcome also the coming into force at this moment of the constitution of the country... It is our wish, as you will know, that the life of the country should conform to constitutional principles, and we intend henceforth to exercise our power in accordance with the provisions of this constitution... it is our duty one and all to preserve what we have gained at so dear a price, and to hand it down carefully and faithfully to posterity.[67]

*2.8 Conclusion*

The new Libyan state was, by and large, a creature of the West and of Britain in particular. Although the Libyan people welcomed independence, many of them, especially the nationalistic younger generation, were disappointed and disillusioned, and had reservations about the imposition of federation and Idris's leadership by Britain and other Western powers.

Britain had indeed nurtured the outcome in co-operation with Idris. Concerned for her strategic interests as a consequence of the intensifying Cold War in the post-war era, Britain's policy towards Libya was based on securing her interests in Barqa and preventing the USSR from gaining a foothold in Tripolitania. When Britain failed to achieve these goals inside the United Nations, she tried to side-step the international forum by devising the Bevin-Sforza Plan. However, the overwhelming opposition to the Plan by the Libyan people seemed to convince Britain to reconsider her policy towards Libya. Britain feared for her interests not only in Barqa but throughout the Arab world. Therefore, she changed tactics and started, along with other Western powers, to push for the immediate independence of Libya, not for the sake of Libyan independence itself but rather in order to protect her own regional interests. Anticipating the U.N. resolution in favour of Libyan independence, Britain took considerable care in shaping the outcome. She granted to Barqa a limited autonomy and stipulated that if there was to be an independent Libyan state, it would be federal under the Sanusi crown. Britain feared that a unitary state could be dominated by the more sophisticated Tripolitanians, whose loyalty

Britain could not rely on. On the other hand, federation would make it easier for Britain to split up the country in case of any encounter with the more politically-conscious Tripolitanians. In this policy Britain relied on the goodwill of Idris, who did not see Britain's interests as inconsistent with his own. In the end, Britain got what she wanted: a semi-independent state relying heavily on the West and Britain in particular for its survival. Given these conditions, it was likely that the foreign policy of the Libyan monarchy would be one of subordination to Britain and the West in general.

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# CHAPTER THREE

# FRIENDSHIP AND ALLIANCE WITH BRITAIN

## *3.1 Introduction*

As the preceding chapter has demonstrated, Britain shaped the new Libyan state in a form that would serve her own interests in the region. As a result, from the time of its creation, the Libyan state was forced to rely heavily on Britain for assistance, which gave the latter opportunity to sustain her grip on the country's domestic and foreign policy. This grip was formalized in 1953 by the signing of the so-called Treaty of Friendship and Alliance.

The importance of the Treaty springs from the fact that it became the basis for Libya's foreign policy towards Britain and the other nations of the world for many succeeding years. It also became the principal factor working to undermine the authority of the monarchical regime as the presence of the foreign bases became the focus of public demonstrations.

The Treaty reflected the stance of the ruling elite and Idris's personal pro-British inclinations, but it did not conform at all closely to the nationalist sentiment of many ordinary Libyans. Despite this strong current of popular feeling, the Treaty was approved by the Libyan Parliament and ratified by the King on the same day, 7th December 1953.

The present chapter will examine the monarchy's alliance with Britain, as manifested in the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, and the impact of that Treaty on

Libya's foreign policy. Before proceeding to this examination, however, a brief look at the Libyan constitution and the power it gave to the King appears important since the domestic constitutional and political structure provides a framework for foreign policy.

*3.2 The Constitution and the King's power*

The process of reaching agreement in framing the constitution had been a difficult matter as the representatives of the three provinces struggled to balance their divergent opinions. Even when the complete constitutional draft was presented to the National Assembly for discussion and approval, it emerged that there were still several points of disagreement, namely the process of succession to the throne, the distribution of customs and revenue, and the naming of the capital.

The constitution stated that 'Libya is a state having a hereditary monarchy, its form is federal and its system of government is representative.'[1] The constitution invested the King with broad powers, stating that the sovereignty of the new Kingdom, constitutionally vested in God, was entrusted to the Sanusi dynasty of Idris.[2] It further stipulated that 'executive power shall be exercised by the King within the limits of this constitution,' and that legislative power was to be exercised by the King in conjunction with Parliament.[3] The King was also given authority to appoint the Prime Minister and could reject the appointment of any member in the Council of Ministers. He could, in turn, remove the Prime Minister from office and/or accept his resignation; he exercised the same power regarding all other ministers.[4] He sanctioned and promulgated the laws, and 'if, when Parliament is not in session, exceptional circumstances arise which necessitate urgent measures, the King may issue decrees in respect thereof which shall have the force of law provided that they are not contrary to the provisions of this constitution.'[5] The King also had the power to dissolve the House of Representatives and to convene a joint meeting of the two chambers to discuss important questions.[6] He could proclaim a state of emergency and martial law, and had the power to declare war,

conclude peace, and enter into treaties.[7] Moreover, he could name diplomatic representatives and senior officials, and could remove them from office.[8] The constitution also extended the King's influence over Parliament, granting him the right to appoint members of the Senate. The original constitution granted him the appointment of over one half of the Senators and, following the amendments of 1963, the King appointed all twenty-four Senators.[9]

Thus, for all the apparent sophistication of the constitution, the Libyan political system was dominated by the King and his close aides. Despite his disinclination for the day-to-day governmental affairs, Idris reigned as an absolute monarch who ultimately exercised right of approval over every important decision. The King derived his power from the claim to religious legitimacy, on which all the Arab monarchies were founded, and from the traditional structure of tribal society. To undergird his rule, Idris seemed deliberately to encourage tribalism and regionalism from the very beginning. In choosing the Cabinet members, the King would often take into account traditional and provincial considerations. Recruitment of Prime Ministers, Ministers, and other senior officials was based on candidates' connections with the Palace regardless of their education or ability to govern. As a result, Cabinets were usually composed of persons accounted loyal who were selected from among wealthy townsmen, tribal leaders, and prominent and influential families. Idris's attempts to keep a regional balance in the government were apparent in the appointment of the Prime Minister and the Head of the *Diwan*, the Royal Household, so that whenever the former was from Tripolitania, the latter was from Barqa and vice versa (see Table 1).

**Table 1**
**The Regional Provenance of the Premier and the Head of the Royal *Diwan***

| Year | Premier | Region | Head of Diwan | Region |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| July 1962 | 'Uthman al-Sa'id | Fazzan | 'Ali al-Sahli | Barqa |
| May 1963 | Fkeni | Tripolitania | 'Ali al-Sahli | Barqa |
| September 1964 | Al-Muntasir | Tripolitania | 'Ali al-Sahli | Barqa |
| August 1965 | Husayn Maziq | Barqa | Al-Muntasir | Tripolitania |
| August 1967 | Al-Badri | Barqa | Al-Muntasir | Tripolitania |
| August 1968 | Al-Bakkush | Tripolitania* | Al-Muntasir | Tripolitania |
| August 1969 | Wanis al-Qathafi | Barqa | Al-Muntasir | Tripolitania |

Source: 'Ali Shembish
*Dr. Shembish indicated that Al-Bakkush was a Barqawi while, in fact, he is a Tripolitanian.

Thus, despite what was stated in the constitution, the monarchical political system was in reality a palace-system of power. The King, through his *Diwan*, exercised legislative, executive, and judicial powers that exceeded those actually granted to him in the constitution. He was a traditional monarch in modern constitutional dress.[10] In the absence of established political parties, which he had dissolved in 1952, in conducting the country's affairs, the King had to rely upon the traditional leading figures who were personally loyal to him and his family. This excessive power enabled Idris to direct Libyan foreign policy in whatever direction he wished.

Indeed, despite statements and announcements by Libyan officials that Libya would pursue a policy of co-operation with African and Asian countries and would strengthen relations with Arab states, Idris, in fact, relied exclusively on Britain and the USA. Since his early contacts with the British, Idris had firmly hitched his own fortunes to those of Britain and the West in general. The British seemed to have succeeded in convincing Idris that Libya's independence and his own personal position were in danger from neighbouring Arab countries, especially Egypt, and from nationalist leaders in

Tripolitania. He was therefore eager to conclude a military and financial agreement with Britain and the USA even before independence.

*3.3 The Treaty of Friendship and Alliance*

The idea of concluding a treaty of alliance with Britain can be traced back to the time when Libya was under the British Military Administration, or indeed even earlier. It came about as a result of the mutual understanding between Britain and Idris that while, on the one hand, Libya, or at least Barqa, was in need of British military and financial support, Britain, on the other hand, needed the strategic location of Libya. De Candole observed that

> the prime need he [Idris] saw at the start was for a powerful and trustworthy ally to protect Libya's new-won statehood. In his lifetime he had seen weak nations overrun by more powerful ones while the world stood idly by... The second need was for financial help to enable Libya to build up a stable economy... For both these needs he turned first to the British... he had consistently wished for a treaty with Britain ever since 1940 when he had staked everything on her final victory which he had never doubted.[11]

Britain, in turn, facing the eventual withdrawal of her forces from Egypt and Palestine, found Barqa an ideal alternative. As early as autumn 1946, a Cabinet Defence Committee paper made it clear that 'the proposed withdrawal of our forces from Egypt increases the importance of Cyrenaica.'[12]

The broad outline of the treaty was discussed by Idris and the British behind the back of the United Nations. On the 24th May 1949, after the General Assembly had postponed the discussion of the Libyan issue, the Under-Secretary of State, William Strang, visited Barqa and engaged in talks with Idris on the future of the country. Idris expressed before Strang his great disappointment on the failure of the Lake Success Conference to reach a decision on the future of Libya and revealed his intention to announce the formation of a national government and to conclude a treaty of defence with

Britain.[13] His desire to sign a treaty with Britain was well received by Strang since the British government itself was most anxious to have such a treaty, but Britain knew that the signing of a treaty with Idris before settlement of the Libyan question would involve the issue of the territory's international status.[14]

During his visit to Britain on the 15th July 1949, Idris once again raised the matter of concluding a treaty between Britain and Barqa. The British government welcomed Idris's desire and took advantage of the situation by putting Idris under strong moral obligation to contract such a treaty with Britain and to bind himself to the terms of it. The Foreign Office proposed that, before Idris left London, there should be a draft exchange of letters between the British Prime Minister and Idris, in which the former should take note of the Amir's wish for a treaty with Britain and should draw up the outlines of such a treaty, which could be concluded as soon as the question of Barqa was settled.[15]

From the British point of view, the advantage of concluding a bilateral agreement with Barqa while the United Nations were considering the Libyan question was that it might form a useful precedent for negotiations after independence. The Foreign Office hoped that 'it might make it easier for us to secure facilities then [after independence], by merely extending the existing treaty.'[16] On the other hand, it was perceived that the disadvantages of concluding a treaty would be many. A treaty with Idris before independence would be contrary to the spirit of the U.N. resolution and would be sure to provoke hostile criticism in the General Assembly.[17] It would also lead to the non-co-operation of the U.N. Commissioner in helping Britain to conclude a long-term agreement with Libya after the announcement of independence. Roger Allen of the Foreign Office pointed out,

> We have Mr. Pelt's assurance of his assistance over this if we do not make his position with the United Nations impossible now by contravening the

> spirit of the United Nations resolutions. If we now act contrary to Mr. Pelt's advice, we should not be able to reckon on his co-operation either in 1952 or in the meantime.[18]

On balance, the British government chose to follow the U.N. Commissioner's advice to delay the signing of the treaty until a provisional Libyan government had been constituted. Idris, for his part, also seemed to follow Pelt's advice to adjust his plan to fit in with the United Nations resolution for Libyan independence. Thus, the three parties—Britain, Idris, and Pelt—agreed that immediately after independence, a treaty of alliance with Britain would be signed by the new Libyan government to legalize the presence of foreign troops on Libyan soil. They also agreed that the treaty with Britain might serve as a model for similar agreements between Libya and other interested foreign powers. Britain, France, and the USA agreed among themselves that 'each should negotiate a long-term agreement or treaty by which Libya would extend the facilities required.'[19]

On the 23rd December 1951, just one day before the declaration of Libya's independence, Alec Kirkbride arrived in Benghazi to present his letters of credential as Britain's first Ambassador to Libya.[20] Shortly after his arrival, he resumed the negotiations with the newly-created independent state of Libya which had been postponed as a result of the talks with the U.N. Commissioner. At the head of the Libyan side in the negotiations was the Prime Minister, Mahmud al-Muntasir, known to be a friend of the British and, before them, of the Italians.[21]

The Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between Britain and Libya was signed in Benghazi on the 29th July 1953 and was approved by Parliament and ratified in December of the same year by the King, who closely guided the whole proceedings, especially those relating to Barqa. The Treaty embodied in words what was in fact the existing situation. British troops had been present on Libyan soil a long time before the signing of the Treaty and British advisers were in full charge of most of the Libyan affairs. It even failed to

provide that such troops would evacuate Libyan territory after the termination of the agreed period or in the event of the Treaty's non-renewal. In short, it was a treaty between the occupied and the occupier, creating an unequal alliance between unequal parties. Political, economic, and military superiority had enabled Britain to impose her will on Libya and to exploit the situation in her own favour.

As the clauses of the Treaty made plain, its alleged main goal was the establishment of peace, friendship, and close alliance between Libya and Britain. Article 1 provided that 'there shall be peace and friendship and close alliance between the High Contracting Parties in consecration of their cordial understanding and their good relations.'[22] According to the second Article, the other aim of the Treaty was collective defence. It claimed that each party, whether in war or armed conflict, will come to the aid of the other as a measure of collective defence. The Article stated that 'in the event of an imminent menace of hostilities involving either of the High Contracting Parties they will immediately concert together the necessary measures of defence.' To ensure mutual defence measures, Article 3 provided that each party 'will furnish to the other all the facilities and assistances in his power on terms to be agreed upon.' Further, in return for facilities provided by Libya for British forces on conditions to be agreed upon, the Article stated that Britain would 'provide financial assistance to His Majesty, the King of Libya, on terms to be agreed upon as aforesaid.'

It is clear from the clauses of Articles 2 and 3 cited above that the Treaty was primarily designed to serve the political interests of Britain. The need for a collective defence agreement with a power like Britain seemed out of place since the possibility of Libyan engagement in war was remote. Libya had been fortunate to emerge as an independent state with no real dispute with any other country; to the contrary, she was surrounded by friendly Arab states who had provided her with all kinds of help during the lean years. There was no evidence to support the view that Egypt was a threat to

Libya, either before or after the discovery of oil. The ties between the two countries had always been strong and had grown even stronger during the Italian invasion when Egypt had been for many Libyans a place of refuge where a number of them, including Idris, had found shelter from Italian concentration camps. Moreover, until the British had closed the border, Egypt had provided Libya with arms and food, and many Egyptians had fought side-by-side with their Libyan brothers. When the Big Powers had begun to discuss the final disposition of the Italian colonies, Egypt had made it clear that Libyan independence should be respected and that Libya could join the Arab League as an equal member alongside the other Arab states. If then Libya were to be placed under sole trusteeship, and only in this case, Egypt felt that she herself or the Arab League collectively should be the trustee.[23]

The other foreign threat which was used as an excuse for the signing of the Treaty was that of the possible return of the Italians. Idris seemed to have been convinced that Italy could do it again and that no one could prevent her but Britain. While Idris may well have been right to fear the return of the Italians, particularly in view of their large community still present in Tripolitania, he was nevertheless unwise in choosing the Treaty as the only way to prevent them.

In short, the possibility of Libyan engagement in another war was indeed remote. On the contrary, it was Britain that was more likely to enter into war since she was a member of many military organizations which considered any attack on one of their members as an attack on the others. In other words, Britain was obliged to come to the assistance of any one of these member countries, from Norway to New Zealand, and Libya, according to the Treaty, was supposed to provide Britain with all the facilities and assistance she might require, although Libyan armed forces were not obliged to serve outside Libya. This simply meant that Libya could become a target for any retaliation

against Britain so that, indirectly, Libya could be dragged into a war it had nothing to do with.

*3.3.1 The Military Agreement*

As was stated in its preamble, the military agreement came about to give effect to Article 3 of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. The military facilities to be provided by Libya were claimed to be a contribution to the maintenance of international peace and security, in accordance with the provisions and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Military Treaty was in fact a flagrant infringement of Libyan sovereignty since, according to the Treaty, the Libyan armed forces would be completely dominated by Britain in terms of training, maintenance, and leadership. In its first Article, the Agreement stated that Britain and Libya agreed to take appropriate steps to ensure that 'their armed forces attain the necessary efficiency in co-operation with each other and that uniformity of training methods and equipment of their armed forces is established and maintained as far as possible.'[24] Consequently, Britain monopolized the training of the Libyan armed forces since, in order to maintain uniformity of training, the Libyan government would be compelled to use only British personnel and to obtain permission from Britain if it wanted to use personnel of other nationalities. Moreover, it would be compelled to send its trainees to Britain or a location where the British military training system prevailed, and to use the British military training system in Libyan military academies.[25] Britain also monopolized the armament of the Libyan armed forces since it was only British-made arms, ammunition, and equipment that the Libyan army was allowed to use. The first Article of the Agreement stated that 'the United Kingdom government will use their good offices to facilitate the supply from the United Kingdom of arms, ammunitions and equipment for the Libyan armed forces in a manner consonant with the national continuous development of these forces.' This meant that Britain had

not only secured a good potential market for her military industry for years to come, but had also made the Libyan armed forces a client of her own armed forces. Even the command of the Libyan armed forces during wartime was likely to be in British hands since the Libyan officers would have had no previous experience in such things.

Moreover, in accordance with the clauses of the Agreement, Britain was granted an exclusive and uninterrupted use for military purposes of certain lands and buildings, the most significant of which were the air base of al-Adam near Tobruq, the base near Tripoli Civil Airport, and the one near Benina. Britain was to vacate some lands and buildings that she had occupied during the Second World War, but if Britain needed further tracts of land for training and exercise, the Libyan government, in accordance with the Agreement, was obliged to make these available.[26] In order to make the British military presence effective, the Agreement gave Britain the right to lay pipes, construct drainage and irrigation channels and railways, and to lay cables and wires on or over or below the surface of any land or water for military purposes.[27] Britain was also granted the right to construct and maintain any necessary roads and bridges, and to improve and deepen harbours, channels, and anchorages. She was, in addition, permitted to use telecommunication systems and to construct and use service-broadcasting stations within the agreed areas.[28] The Agreement stated, moreover, that Britain could search for and use water and indigenous building and construction materials such as stone, sand, and gravel. Any discovery of archaeological remains or mineral resources, including oil, would remain the property of Libya.[29] Britain was, in fact, granted liberty to misuse the land and abuse the environment if she wished to do so and to exploit the resources of the country without paying adequate compensation. In accordance with the Treaty, when Britain vacated any area, she was not obliged to leave it in the condition in which it had existed prior to its being used and no compensation for any decrease in the value of the land was provided for.

The Agreement also gave Britain a free hand to conduct any survey of any kind in any part of Libya, including the carrying out of aerial photography. As a mere formality, Britain had to inform the Libyan government about any survey carried out outside the agreed lands and the latter, according to the Agreement, had no right to refuse to the former permission to do so. A representative of the Libyan government could be present during the conducting of the survey and the results could be shown to him by the British authorities.[30]

Having agreed to provide Britain with the state land she needed, the Libyan government, in accordance with the Agreement, left Britain free to purchase or rent from the private sector. Bearing in mind the desperate economic condition of the Libyan people, the Libyan government, in fact, left its people with no choice but to sell their lands in return for income. In addition, the Libyan government had conceded that in the case of any refusal by any private owner, it would take the necessary steps to compel the owner to sell his or her land.[31] Such necessary steps were likely to comprise anything from bribes to jail sentences.

In accordance with the third Article of the Military Agreement, Libya granted Britain military bases, which would naturally be occupied by British forces. Article 22 clearly stated that the government of Libya permitted Britain to bring into Libya members of the British armed forces and to remove any such members from Libya. Thus, Britain was granted the full right to send to Libya, whenever she wanted, the number of troops she considered necessary and she could also reduce the number of troops according to her own wish without consultation with the Libyan authorities. All that Britain was obliged to do was to keep the Libyan government informed of the number of British troops present in Libya. Although Article 22 stated that the number of British troops in Libya should not exceed the quota agreed between the two governments, it was unlikely that the Libyan government would refuse any number decided by Britain, simply because such

refusal could be interpreted as contravening the clauses of the Agreement. In any case, it would be impractical for the two parties to restrict themselves to a fixed number given the changeable international politics of the post-war period.[32]

Members of the British armed forces were granted many exemptions under the terms of the Treaty. They were, for example, exempted from all passport and visa requirements, from all toll charges for their entry to or departure from Libya, and from any laws providing for the registration and control of foreigners.[33] Furthermore, members of the British armed forces were allowed to possess and carry arms as required in the performance of official duties, and the Libyan authorities had no right to arrest or inspect any member of them.[34]

*3.3.2 The Financial Agreement*

When Libya gained her independence, she was one of the poorest countries in the world. The United Nations Commission to assess the condition of Libya's economy in 1951 confirmed that Libya had an annual *per capita* income of $35. The Commission also observed that the country had a large balance-of-payments deficit and that exports did not cover half the cost of imports.[35] The British Military Administration, and the Italian government before it, had tried to cover the heavy budgetary deficit by foreign aid, which made Libya almost totally dependent on help from foreign countries. In its resolution on Libyan independence, the General Assembly of the United Nations acknowledged the economic problems but without making any definite recommendations.

In this desperate economic situation, Britain wanted to take advantage of Libya's difficult economic condition in order to keep the country within her sphere of influence. The British government expressed its readiness to provide the main support for the Libyan budget and to take care of the country's balance-of-payments deficit if it was allowed to take control of the Libyan economy.[36] But the UN Commissioner was aware of the

threat by a single state, *viz* Britain. He reasoned that, given Libya's geographical and political situation, an exclusively British subvention, with its concomitant budgetary control, would mean virtual control of the state.[37] He hoped that Libya would receive financial support from a number of countries, particularly from the USA. Pelt even suggested that any country which wanted to cover Libya's budget deficit should deposit its contribution in a special account under the name of the Libyan government and, at the same time, a United Nations official should be appointed to advise the Libyan government on how to use these funds.[38] Yet Britain vigorously opposed the proposal, believing that subsidy and control of expenditure went together. As Pelt put it, the British maxim was, 'He who pays the piper calls the tune.'[39]

To complete her financial domination of Libya, Britain was determined to include the former in the sterling area. When persuasion was not enough, she threatened to cut off financial assistance unless the Libyan provisional government promised to comply.[40] Although British and American policies regarding Libya seemed to have worked in concert, the issue of Libya's entrance to the sterling area raised some tension between the two countries, though not at high levels. When, during his visit to Libya in 1951, Roger Allan, the head of the African Department of the Foreign Office, heard an American official speaking of the 'dead hand of the sterling area,'[41] he replied by denouncing the speaker as an 'imperialist' of a well-known American type who wished to take over the British Empire by economic means.[42]

Ultimately, the British, as the occupying military authority, put the screws on the Libyan government, forcing it to allow Libya to enter the sterling area and to accept one-hundred-per-cent cover in sterling for its currency.[43] The decision was conditional, ill timed, and had little support among the Libyan people. It was taken without the co-operation of, or even consultation with, the U.N. Commissioner, whose duty it was to provide guidance and help in political and economic matters to the provisional Libyan

government.[44] The Libyan government did not even wait until the conclusion of the reports of the U.N. experts had been released before making its decision, with the result that Libya had not secured a special status for her foreign exchange earnings in US dollars, which would have been possible. Moreover, the political implications of the decision affected Libya's commercial and financial relations, particularly with her neighbours.[45]

On the 13th December 1951, Britain and the provisional Libyan government concluded a temporary agreement for financial assistance to Libya. The temporary agreement on financial assistance and, before it, the talks between Idris and the British on military facilities set the ground for the Treaty of Alliance and Friendship, which was signed on the 29th July 1953. Like the Military Agreement, the purpose of the Financial Agreement was to give effect to Article 3 of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance. Its general purpose was almost identical to that of the temporary agreement. The first Article provided that the aim of the Agreement was to 'assist Libya to enjoy conditions of financial stability and orderly economic development.'[46] In accordance with the Agreement, Britain was obliged to give financial assistance annually to the government of Libya for the duration of the Agreement. For the first five years, Britain was to pay £1,000,000 a year to the Libyan development organizations and £2,750,000 to the Libyan treasury. The sums that had already been paid by Britain under interim arrangements prior to the entry into force of the Agreement were to be regarded as payments on account for those years.

According to the second Article, before the end of each succeeding period of five years during the currency of the Agreement, Britain would undertake to give such assistance annually during any subsequent five-year period of agreement that might be concluded between the two governments. In return, Libya was to provide the British authorities with copies of the annual consolidated estimates as approved by the Libyan

Parliament and with copies of the annual reports of the Libyan auditors as adopted by the appropriate legislatures.[47]

In effect, therefore, Britain's position of dominance was enhanced by her control over financial assistance. It was Britain, not the Libyan government, that would distribute the funds. Instead of transferring the total amount of money to the Libyan government to be used freely as the economic conditions of the country required, Britain insisted on dividing the funds between the Libyan development organizations and the Libyan treasury.[48] Furthermore, Britain took advantage of the Financial Treaty to interfere in Libyan domestic affairs. When the Libyan government wanted to establish a Central Bank, for example, Britain appealed to the fourth Article of the Treaty in order to block Libya's initiative, arguing that the Article stipulated the continuance of existing Libyan currency arrangements and that the establishment of a Central Bank would in fact change them and would therefore be inconsistent with the Treaty.[49]

However, the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance between Libya and Britain, which was based on military and financial arrangements, was sent to the Libyan Parliament for approval and was brought before the Defence and Foreign Relations Committee of the House of Representatives for examination. In its report, submitted on the 13th August 1953, the Committee commented that

> the treaty fortifies Libya's independence... and maintains it against external aggression and guarantees for it a state of economic stability through which it can carry out many projects for increasing its production and raising the standard of living of its people, without any interference in its financial, economic, and political affairs.[50]

Such a view was expected from a Committee largely dominated by the older generation, who were, like Idris, obsessed with the idea of a foreign threat. At the same time, the Committee did notice, in its report, that there were certain ambiguities in the Treaty and

a consequent possibility of its being interpreted in more than one way. Despite that, the Committee recommended the approval of the Treaty by Parliament. This approval was formally granted on the 7th December 1953 and was followed by the King's ratification and the enforcement of the Treaty on the same day.

*3.4 The Wheelus Base Agreement*

If the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with Britain was the first pillar of Libya's foreign policy, the American-Libyan agreement was the second. Although Libyan-American relations are beyond the scope of the present study, it will be helpful to shed some light on the American military presence in Libya and its implications for Libyan foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular.

The American use of the Wheelus Airfield near Tripoli went back to 1944. By the late 1940s, the interests of Britain and USA had drawn very close. In this climate, in the 'Pentagon talks' of late 1947, the two countries agreed on the resuscitation of the American base at Wheelus field in order to counter the so-called communist threat.[51] Thus, Tripolitania became one of the best overseas stations for Britain and the USA. Wheelus field had the potential to become an American military base in Libya comparable to the British base in Suez. The potential facilities might include seven additional airfields, a US Navy communications facility, supply and service centres, 500 square miles of training ground, and bombing rights in the desert.[52]

Nevertheless, it was not until 1954, when Ben Halim assumed office as Prime Minister, that the negotiations were finally completed and the USA was granted the use of Wheelus Airfield for a period of twenty years. The pro-Western Libyan government of the time seemed to have recognized that a treaty with the USA would give it a bargaining chip *vis-à-vis* Britain. The Libyan Prime Minister felt that his predecessor had played the game of foreign policy with only one card and that he could play the other card

by signing the treaty with the USA.[53] The agreement was not signed until September 1954, following a visit made to Washington by Prime Minister Ben Halim. It was passed by Parliament, ratified by the King, and put into force on the same day, the 30th October 1954.

The broad purpose of the agreement was not dissimilar from that of the Libyan-British Treaty. The preamble stated that the agreement aimed to strengthen the friendship between the two countries, to confirm their determination to co-operate and support each other in the international field, and to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security.[54] Under the Treaty, Libya granted permission to the USA to 'occupy and use for military purposes' certain specific areas agreed upon for the duration of the agreement.[55] The USA was to exercise full control over aircraft, ships, and vehicles entering and leaving the agreed areas, and to construct and maintain communications outside those areas.[56] The USA was also granted the right to bring into Libya members of her forces, who would not be prevented by the Libyan laws from admission into or departure from Libya.[57]

The Wheelus Base provided the USA and her allies with an important military air-transport-service staging-post while, in conjunction with al-Watiyah bombing range in western Tripolitania, it served as a fine-to-good-weather training centre for air personnel in the Mediterranean area. The base also acted as a link in the chain of US bases built up round the Sino-Soviet bloc in the early years of the Cold War. After Morocco had achieved independence and the security of foreign bases had become uncertain, the headquarters of the US Seventeenth Air Force was transferred from Morocco to Libya. In return for facilities obtained in Libya, the USA pledged to give during the first year $7,000,000 in development assistance and to deliver $3,000,000 worth of grain for immediate drought relief. During the subsequent six years, the USA was to provide Libya

with $4,000,000 annually.[58] The USA was also to help Libya in the agricultural, educational, and health fields.

This agreement was another indication of Libya's foreign policy orientation towards the West. It placed an additional restriction on Libya's freedom of action in international affairs and was a clear violation of Libya's sovereignty.

Meanwhile, Britain was not content with her political, economic, and military domination in both Barqa and Tripolitania which had been granted under the Libyan-British Treaty and the agreement with the Americans. She now tried to impose a further measure of domination, this time to be exercised by France, on the Libyan government. On the eve of independence, two temporary agreements were signed between Libya and France by virtue of which France was to retain her troops in Fazzan for six months, subject to renewal for a further six months pending the signing of a treaty of alliance which would replace the temporary agreement. In return, Libya was to receive financial assistance equal to the amount of the deficit in the Fazzan budget.[59]

France would have liked nothing better than an agreement similar to those already concluded with Britain and the USA, but the Libyan government was wary of the French intentions in Fazzan. In addition to awareness of the French atrocities in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, Libyan historical memory of the French went back to the beginning of the century, when French troops had attacked the Sanusis in southern Libya. In 1902, French columns had moved from their bases in southern Algeria and Niger to capture the Sanusi headquarters in Kanem and to implement systematic destruction of the Sanusi Order in the immense Chadian territory and beyond.[60] It was only by British intervention that the French advance had been halted some two hundred miles south of al-Kufra. That incident had become inscribed in the memory of King Idris, who had then been a child, and, as a result, Libya's relations with both countries after independence were drawn in

accordance with Idris's preconceptions.[61] When France proposed a base-leasing agreement like those with Britain and the USA, Libya was willing to negotiate only on the basis of total evacuation. However, Britain sought to pressurize the Libyan government. When Ben Halim stopped in London, on his way to France for direct negotiations with his French counterpart, he met Lord Reading, the British Secretary of State to the Foreign Office, who sought to impress on him the fact that France was an important ally of Britain and that Libya should therefore conclude with France an agreement similar to the Libyan-British Treaty, since the former depended on the latter to defend southern Libya.[62] Ben Halim later claimed to have informed the British Secretary of State that 'the Anglo-Libyan Treaty did not refer to a third party' and that he had asked him if the British had entered into a subcontract with France to defend the south of Libya without any regard being paid to the latter's wishes.[63] A week later, in Paris, the British Ambassador tried to put more pressure on the Libyans' side in the negotiations to compel them to comply with the French demands.[64] Later, in 1955, when the two parties agreed on the principle of evacuation, Britain, once again, tried to intervene in favour of France; the British Embassy in Libya presented a memorandum stating that, in accordance with the Anglo-French agreement to defend the so-called free world, the defence of southern Libya was in the French sphere of influence.[65]

Ultimately, Britain had her way as, in August 1955, a Treaty of Friendship and Neighbourliness was signed. Although it provided for a gradual withdrawal of French garrisons, the Treaty granted France certain air and surface transit rights, as well as frontier rectifications in favour of French colonies in Africa. In return, $1,000,000 of development aid were promised.[66] The agreement was ratified by the Libyan Parliament in April 1956 and by the French National Assembly in the following November. Thus, Britain secured the presence of one of her allies in southern Libya, though not on the same scale as the Americans or herself. It was, however, seen to be enough to deter any possible Soviet expansion in the region.

*3.5 Conclusion*

The Treaty of Friendship and Alliance explicitly bound Libya's foreign policy to that of Britain and the Western camp in general. Under the Treaty Libya was obliged to follow Britain's guidance in conducting her foreign policy. The first Article clearly stated that each country should not adopt a stance toward other states which might be inconsistent with the alliance or might create difficulties for the other party. Consequently, Libya's foreign policy was limited to those actions and reactions which were favourable to or consistent with Britain's interests. Since Britain was the more powerful nation, it was Libya who had to modify her foreign policy to render it consistent with that of Britain. In other words, Libya had to carefully consider Britain's interests before she could take any action. If she failed to do so, Britain could easily interpret the failure as difficulties created by Libya. Even a stance of non-alignment could be seen as hostile since non-alignment was viewed as a distancing from Britain and the West in general. Consequently, Libya could not enter into any kind of treaty of alliance with other countries, such as the revolutionary Arab states or the Eastern bloc states. Therefore, the Treaty not only defined Libya's relationship with Britain but also with the rest of the world. When Libya established diplomatic relations with the USSR, for example, the British Ambassador to Libya, in a secret letter to the Foreign Office, referred to Article 1 of the Treaty as a basis for complaint. He stated that in the light of the explicit Russian intentions to work for complete evacuation of all foreign troops from Libya, any Libyan-Russian convergence could be regarded as a violation of the spirit of the Treaty.

In addition to having bound Libya's foreign policy to her own interests, Britain also secured the strategic position of Libya in international politics. Libya was an ideal alternative for British bases to sites in Egypt and Palestine, which had to be evacuated in the near future. Britain's new bases at Idris Airport near Tripoli and al-Adam near Tobruq provided not only Britain but the whole Western alliance with strategic air corridors to East Africa, the Indian Ocean, and the Far East.

Although the Treaty stated that the two countries would respect each other's sovereignty, many clauses in it cannot be seen in any other way than as legitimating clear violations of Libyan sovereignty. In accordance with the Treaty, Britain was granted the use of lands and buildings as well as all other technical facilities needed for the effective use of such lands and buildings. Britain was also granted the right to supervise and control aircraft, vessels, vehicles, and all other means of transport and communication. Furthermore, British personnel in the land and air forces were granted the right of entry into, passage through, and movement within Libya, as well as the use of civil airports. In return for all these military facilities, Libya would receive limited financial assistance from Britain in accordance with the financial agreement, which was another way of keeping Libya's foreign policy subordinate to that of Britain and the Western states.

Although it could be argued that the Treaty secured British support for Libya's independence against any foreign encroachment, all the evidence indicated that the foreign threat was remote and even if there was a threat, it was no justification for binding the country to foreign powers. In short, the political disadvantages and limitations placed on Libya by the Treaty exceeded the economic and defensive benefits, and had far-reaching negative effects.

# NOTES

1. *Constitution of the United Kingdom of Libya*, Art. 2.

2. *Constitution of Libya*, modified by law 1 of 1963, Art. 44.

3. *Ibid.*, Art. 41.

4. *Ibid.*, Art. 72.

5. *Ibid.*, Art. 26-64.

6. *Ibid.*, Art. 65.

7. *Ibid.*, Art. 65-69.

8. *Ibid.*, Art. 71-74.

9. *Ibid.*, Art. 94; original Art. 95, later replaced.

10. Hurewitz, *Middle East politics*, 235.

11. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 120.

12. F.O. 371.J4589/1008/66, British strategic requirements in the Middle-East.

13. F.O. 371.J4779.24.5.1949.

14. *Ibid.*

15. F.O. 371.J6437/1511/122G, 25.7.1949.

16. F.O. 371.JT1515/139, Notes on Cyrenaica, 2.4.1950.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. F.O. 371.JT1011/1, no. 30, 'Confidential' Tripoli report, 3.3.1952.

20. Kirkbride was no stranger to Libyan affairs as he had served as Britain's Ambassador to Jordan and had been one of the pioneers of British colonial rule in the Middle East. He spoke fluent Arabic and was an expert in tribal customs and bedouin accents.

21. Al-Muntasir had been born in 1903 into a family from Musrata and had been educated at the University of Rome. Neither he nor his family had been involved in the popular resistance to the Italian occupation. On the contrary, the Muntasir family had collaborated with the Italians and had facilitated their occupation of Libya. Mahmud al-Muntasir had himself concentrated on business affairs and on maintaining strong ties with the Italian community. When the Italians left, he established friendly relations with the British. He became involved in politics and, in 1950, the British appointed him as the Vice-President of the Tripolitanian Administration Council. In 1951, he served as a member of the

National Assembly and then was chosen by the British to head the provincial government. Shortly after that, he was selected by Idris to form the provisional government. After independence, he became the first Prime Minister, with the additional portfolio for Foreign Affairs. He resigned in February 1954 to become Libyan Ambassador to Britain (1954-7) and later to Italy (1958-62). He accepted the premiership for a second time in 1964, only to resign again in March 1965 to be appointed the Head of the Royal *Diwan.*

22. *Treaty of Friendship and Alliance*, Art. 1.

23. For more details on Egypt's stand regarding the Libyan question, see Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 117 f; Bianco, *Gadafi*, intro., p. 3 f.

24. *Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the United Kingdom of Libya regarding military facilities*, Art. 1.

25. Mikha'il, *Al-'Alaqat al-Ingiliziyah al-Libiyah*, 261.

26. *Agreement*, Art. 3.

27. *Ibid.*, Art. 5.

28. *Ibid.*, Art. 7.

29. *Ibid.*, Art. 8.

30. *Ibid.*, Art. 13.

31. *Ibid.*, Art. 18.

32. Mikha'il, *Al-'Alaqat al-Ingiliziyah al-Libiyah*, 271.

33. *Agreement*, Art. 22, 23.

34. *Ibid.*, Art. 25.

35. For more details on the UN Commission's findings, see Lindberg, *General economic appraisal*, 32 f.

36. Pelt, *Libyan independence*, 702 f.

37. *Ibid.*, 703.

38. *Ibid.*, 707.

39. *Ibid.*, 705.

40. *Ibid.*, 709.

41. Louis, "American anti-colonialism", 408.

42. *Ibid.*, 36.

43. Pelt, *Libyan independence*, 711 f.

44. *Ibid.*, 712.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Financial agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Government of the United Kingdom of Libya*, Art. 1.

47. *Ibid.*, Art. 3.

48. Pelt, *Libyan independence*, 701-724.

49. *Ibid.*, 706.

50. Quoted in Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 230.

51. Louis, "American anti-colonialism", 405.

52. *Ibid.*, 407.

53. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 253.

54. *Agreement between the Government of the US and the Government of Libya*, cited in Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, Appendix V, 383.

55. Art. I.

56. Art. II.

57. Art. XVI.

58. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 255.

59. *Ibid.*, 258.

60. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 16.

61. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 217.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*, 218.

65. *Ibid.*

66. For more details on the Franco-Libyan agreement, see Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 258 f.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# FROM SUEZ TO THE FALL OF THE MONARCHY: THE SUEZ CRISIS AND THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE MONARCHY

## *4.1 Introduction*

Following the Second World War, the countries of the Middle East experienced a conflict between a growing tide of Arab nationalism and Western imperialism. Western powers, led by the USA, viewed the region as a vulnerable, rich, and strategically important area lying close to the USSR. Concerned for their own interests, the USA and Britain wanted the Arab countries to enter into a pact which would prevent what these Western powers perceived as Soviet expansion. The Arab nationalists, on the other hand, led by President Nasser, viewed the Arab world as a single nation having common interests and security priorities that were distinct from those of the West. For Nasser the main threat came from Israel, not from the USSR, which had never had any quarrel with the Arabs and which lay thousands of miles away. Nasser believed the defence of the Arab countries had to be made from within the region and not from pacts concluded externally and aimed at the encirclement of the USSR. Therefore, he strongly attacked the Baghdad Pact and worked for its collapse. His opposition was considered by Britain and the USA as a danger to their friends in the region and, from that time, they worked to humiliate Nasser and to plot his downfall. When Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, Britain and France felt that they had been presented with an opportunity for achieving their aim.

The Suez Crisis of 1956, which involved Egypt on one side and Britain, France, and Israel on the other, highlighted the dilemma that faced the monarchical regime in

Libya from its beginning to its end. Having been cultivated and brought to office by Britain, King Idris accommodated himself to and co-operated with Britain and the USA, though he did not join the Baghdad Pact. His talk of Libyan-Arab brotherhood and solidarity seldom went beyond lip service to this cause unless he came under great pressure. By contrast, the majority of the Libyan people tended in their aspirations to identify with the ideal of Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism, especially after the emergence of Nasser as the champion of Arab nationalism. Through the spread of education and urbanization, and the development of new channels of communication, the Libyan people became more aware of foreign relations and, consequently, more divergent in their outlook from their government's foreign commitments. This dissidence between the aspirations of significant sections of the populace and the orientation of the regime placed the monarchy in a dilemma. It had to manage its close alliance with the West and its obligation as an Arab state, its relationship with its citizens, with the Arab world in general, and with Egypt, its strong neighbour, in particular.

The Suez crisis provides a good case study of the contradictory interplay of domestic opposition, Arab nationalism, and Libya's pro-British foreign policy. This chapter will examine Libyan foreign policy towards Britain in the light of these contradictory elements and stress how they continued to be the main source of challenges to the monarchical regime until its eventual downfall on the 1st September 1969.

*4.2 Egyptian-Libyan relations prior to the Suez crisis*

As has been mentioned earlier, Libya's ties to Egypt had always been very strong, regardless of changes in governments' attitudes toward each other from time to time. Apart from common ethnic, religious, and linguistic bonds, the peoples of the two countries were drawn closer together when the Italians invaded Libya, as Egypt became for many Libyans a place of refuge from Italian atrocities. One of these refugees was Idris, who spent almost thirty years in Egypt before the liberation of Libya. After

independence, Egypt immediately recognized the Sanusi monarchy but tried to dissuade it against signing a treaty with Britain. Egypt considered such a treaty to be a threat to her own national security and offered to supply Libya with financial support, but Idris had already come to agreement with the British on his first visit to London. When the Libyan Prime Minister signed the Anglo-Libyan Treaty, he was castigated by the Egyptian press as 'a tool in the hands of imperialism.'[1]

When Ben Halim came to power in 1954, he tried to promote friendly relations with Egypt. Ben Halim correctly realized that if he did not try to cultivate friendly relations with the Arab world, his government would lose its popularity and run the risk of collapsing.[2] At that time the Arab people throughout the Arab world had begun looking to President Nasser as their leader. Nasser's prestige and his influence over the Libyan people were such that in 1955 the Libyan government dared not join the Baghdad Pact. In addition to the legend of Nasser and her position at the heart of the Arab nation, Egypt was also the place where Ben Halim had grown up. It was therefore natural that the first Arab country with which Ben Halim tried to establish friendly relations should be Egypt.[3] Returning from a visit to Turkey in June 1954, Ben Halim stopped off in Cairo, where he met President Nasser. The satisfaction felt in the meeting encouraged Ben Halim to pay another visit to Egypt in late October 1954.[4] The main object of the visit this time was not direct Egypto-Libyan relations; rather, Nasser wanted to inquire of Ben Halim whether the Libyan government was prepared to permit the passage of arms across Libya on their way to support the popular resistance in Algeria. Ben Halim, of course, had to consult the King, who reluctantly gave his permission to the secret passage of arms on condition that no war materials were stored in Libya.[5]

Such incidents proved that relations on the official and personal levels were good, and they continued to improve. When King Idris agreed to take another wife to ensure the Sanusi succession, he went to Egypt and married an Egyptian woman of Libyan

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parents. Nasser himself acted as one of the two marriage witnesses, a gesture intended to advertise the mutual goodwill between the two countries. Most important, however, was Libya's refusal to join the Baghdad Pact. Libya saw no advantage in joining the Pact and felt that it would antagonize her strong close neighbour, Egypt.

The Libyan-Egyptian friendly relations did not, however, appeal to many major powers, particularly Britain, who viewed them as submissiveness to Nasser's anti-British policies. Although in his letter to the Foreign Office the British Ambassador to Libya, Alec Kirkbride, pointed out that the Libyan Prime Minister had assured him that 'he would oppose any attempt by the Egyptian government to dominate Libya or to use that country for Egyptian ends,' the Ambassador warned that, in his personal view, Ben Halim 'may well have a sentimental leaning towards Egypt due to the background of his boyhood.'[6]

*4.3 Nationalization of the Suez Canal and the Libyan government's position*

The story of Suez is very much the story of the ideological and armed confrontation between Arab-nationalist revolutionary and European colonialist powers, particularly Britain. Soon after the revolution in Egypt, Nasser became the symbol of Arab nationalism and the anti-colonial movement in the Arab world. The British and French turned implacably against President Nasser and began to consider his policies of attacking the Baghdad Pact and supporting the Algerian revolution as a threat to their interests in the region. As a result, signs of crisis in the Middle East became imminent as early as 1956.

The spark that ignited the conflict was the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company by the Egyptian government. The Canal was of vital importance to Britain. It ran for 130 miles between Port Said in the north and Suez in the south, connecting the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, a connection which enabled Britain to ship soldiers and

goods to her colonies in the East. To secure this link, Britain had bought control of the Suez Canal Company from the Khedive of Egypt in 1875, with the result that Britain tended to look upon the Canal as her own fiefdom, even when it was opened to ships of all nations.

Aiming at humiliating Nasser, the Western powers could not find a more appropriate chance than his need of money to build the Aswan High Dam. The Americans and British agreed at first to offer a part of the amount Egypt needed but later announced the withdrawal of their offer. John Foster Dulles, the American Foreign Secretary, was reported to have said that the USA had decided to withdraw her offer because Egypt's economy could not sustain such a project and that anybody who built the High Dam would earn the hatred of the Egyptian people, a pleasure that he would leave to the USSR.[7] The real reason for the withdrawal, however, seemed to be the Americans' anger at Egypt's arms deals with the Eastern bloc. Facing threats from Israel and the Baghdad Pact, Nasser had felt compelled to obtain arms from anywhere. He had tried to get the British to release the eighty Centurion tanks which had been bought before the revolution, but the British had sent only sixteen and said they would deliver the remainder only if Egypt would cease from propaganda against the Baghdad Pact. The British had even put pressure on the Americans not to sell arms to Egypt. When Nasser had asked Dulles why Eisenhower had delayed sending Egypt the arms she needed, the Foreign Secretary had said that 'Winston Churchill had telephoned the newly elected President and urged him not to sell arms to the Egyptians and so start his Presidency by providing weapons which might be used to kill British tommies who had served under Eisenhower during the war.'[8] To counterbalance the flow of arms to Israel from the Western powers, especially France, Nasser had to look elsewhere to equip his army. But the USA and Britain were neither prepared to sell arms to him nor to let him obtain them from somewhere else.

Although the Egyptian government's decision to nationalize the Suez Canal Company was the spark which ignited a barrel of gunpowder, the underlying causes of the crisis appear to have been broader and deeper and to have involved, on the one side, struggles by the colonial powers to retain their domination and, on the other side, the liberation movement in the Arab world, led by Nasser. Nasser's anti-colonialist and nationalist policies were seen by Britain, France, and Israel as a threat to their interests in the region.[9] Consequently, their aim was to punish Nasser and, with him, the whole liberation movement in the Arab world by humiliating him and bringing him down.

With these factors in play in the background, in a historic speech in Alexandria, Nasser announced the take-over of the Suez Canal Company by Egypt in order to 'restore part of the glories of the past and to safeguard our national dignity and pride.'[10] Ben Halim was listening to Nasser's speech on the radio, as indeed many Libyans were doing. He described his feeling at the moment of the announcement as a 'mixture of fear and sympathy with Egypt, and admiration and pride at the boldness of the decision.'[11] He immediately issued a statement in support of Egypt's right to protect her national rights, which contained the following words:

> The decision taken by President Jamal 'Abd al-Nasser to nationalize the Suez Canal Company is a wise and courageous step which we [all] hope will be carried out successfully. This decision has been taken to protect Egypt's [national] interests, and it falls within the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign independent state. So I do not understand the reason for the objection raised against Egypt by some of the Western powers, since the decision was dictated by [Egypt's] national interests. However, President Nasser, who appreciates the significance of the Suez Canal as an International maritime passage, declared his country's readiness to respect [the principle of] the free navigation of the Canal. This should be regarded as a sufficient guarantee for world public opinion. The negative attitude of the Western Powers [towards the nationalization of the Canal] raises doubts as to their [good] intentions in giving free economic aid to small Powers.[12]

Ben Halim's statement seems to have sprung from the delicate position that his government was in, for he seems to have been aware that anything less than a sympathetic

stance towards Egypt could easily have led to a popular explosion which the Libyan government would have been quite unable to control. From the beginning of the Suez crisis, the popularity of Nasser in Libya and the rest of the Arab world had risen to a peak. He seemed to embody the foremost foe of both imperialism and Zionism, and the saviour of the Arab nation. Given this climate of opinion, the Libyan government deemed it necessary to assure Egypt and the Libyan people that Libya would not permit any foreign power to launch an attack on Egypt from her territory. The Libyan acting Foreign Minister, 'Ali al-Sahli, even summoned the British Ambassador and advised him against the use of the British bases in Libya, urging him to make that clear to his government.[13] On a visit to Turkey, Ben Halim also tried his best to dissuade the Turkish government against taking any hostile stand towards Egypt in the Users of the Canal Conference which was to be held in London in August.[14] Furthermore, in a press conference, Ben Halim reiterated that the nationalization of the Canal was an Egyptian domestic affair and that the Libyan people could not be anything but sympathetic toward their brothers in Egypt.[15] On his way back from Turkey, Ben Halim met Nasser and repeated Libya's assurance that Egypt would not be attacked from Libya. He assured Nasser 'that if Britain commits any foolishness and tried to use its bases in Libya to attack Egypt, it will be confronted by the Libyan army and the popular resistance before it can attack Egypt.'[16]

Although Ben Halim tried to satisfy Egypt and to calm the internal situation, he was nevertheless determined not to antagonize the British government. After all, Libya was bound by the clauses of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance not to pursue any foreign policy that could be interpreted as hostile to the British interests and so he tried to placate both Egypt and Britain. But this was no easy task. As a result of his attempts to appear sympathetic towards Egypt, Britain saw him as leaning towards his neighbour.[17] Ben Halim, however, did not think that his efforts contained any hostility towards Britain and he made them on this basis only. In other words, his main concern was to calm the internal situation and to survive the crisis rather than prevent Egypt from

being attacked. Otherwise, his acting Foreign Minister could not have indicated to the British Ambassador that 'if Britain attacked Egypt from bases outside Libya, it would be a much lesser evil. Libyan public opinion would resent it, but the Government would be able to control any demonstrations.'[18] The British Ambassador's report reveals that the Libyan government's verbal support for the nationalization of the Suez Canal was not based on ideological considerations, but rather on a pragmatic policy aimed at defusing the strong anti-Western and Pan-Arabist feelings on the domestic front, and at satisfying Egypt without antagonizing Britain.[19]

King Idris, however, seemed as always to be ambivalent in his position and did not like his Prime Minister's way of conducting policy during the crisis. He severely criticized Ben Halim for his 'over-hasty' statement of support for Nasser, although it had been in line with similar statements made by heads of other Arab governments. The lack of understanding between King Idris and Ben Halim on how to deal with the crisis led to the latter's tendering his resignation, only however to have it rejected. In his memoirs, Ben Halim observed that the understanding with the King on how to deal with the Suez crisis was neither deep nor comprehensive.[20]

Although Ben Halim did not expect Britain to resort to force, he assured the King that if the crisis developed into armed conflict, Libya would stick to the spirit and letter of the Anglo-Libyan Treaty of Alliance.[21] This legal stand did not carry any hostility towards Britain and would prevent Libya's being accused of granting permission to foreign forces to attack Egypt. But the King was suspicious that Britain would use her forces against Libya if the former needed to deploy her troops in Libya and the latter tried to stop her from doing so. He therefore advised his Prime Minister to exercise caution and display courtesy in dealing with the British. Ben Halim, however, did not take the King's remarks seriously and was convinced that Britain had no intention of attacking Egypt, at least not from her bases in Libya. In this he proved to be wrong and to have miscalculated

the situation, for the British Embassy's correspondence with the Foreign Office on the Suez crisis, which has been released recently, reveals that Britain was indeed considering the use of her bases in Libya to attack Egypt and that she did not give serious attention to the Anglo-Libyan Treaty.

*4.4 Britain and the use of her bases in Libya*

Even though under the Anglo-Libyan Treaty Britain was debarred from using bases in Libya to attack an Arab country, during the Suez crisis the British government seems to have seriously contemplated the option of launching a land attack on Egypt using its 10th Armoured Division based in Libya.[22] In the event, this option was not adopted, but for tactical reasons rather than for any consideration of the Treaty or of Libyan sovereignty. The correspondence between the British military and civilian officials reveals that there were contrary attitudes held by the Foreign Office and the British Embassy in Libya on the one side and by the Defence Ministry and the Chief of General Staff on the other side as to the possible use of British bases in Libya. While the British Ambassador, W.G.C. Graham, with some support from the Foreign Office and Selwyn Lloyd in particular, strongly opposed the use of British bases in Libya in the offensive against Egypt, the Chief of General Staff together with the so-called 'Egypt Committee'[23] and the high ranks in the British armed forces were seriously contemplating what they called a 'limited use' of those bases. The Public Record Office documents reveal that Britain had also thought of reoccupying Libya by military force and re-establishing a military government in the case of rejection by the Libyans of permission to use bases in Libya.[24] But the British diplomats were wary of violent reaction from the Libyan people. In a letter to his Foreign Minister, the British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, questioned whether anything should be done to reassure Libya, thinking that some message might be sent to the King or to the Prime Minister. In its comment on this suggestion, the Foreign Office recommended informing the Libyan government that its British counterpart had no confidence in President Nasser and that he would be punished for his hostile policies

towards Britain. The Director of the African Department in the Foreign Office, J.H. Watson, suggested that a draft message be sent to the Libyan Prime Minister, making patent Britain's intention to invade Egypt via Libya. He wrote,

> As regards timing, the best moment for sending such a message would seem to be just before we start making the necessary military dispositions. A decision about timing of deployment of our troops in Libya is now with the chiefs of staff. When the deployment is to begin (it is not likely to be long delayed) the message should be sent.[25]

In his summary presented to a top secret meeting, Watson concluded that although the Anglo-Libyan Treaty of Alliance did not permit Britain to use her bases in Libya to attack Egypt, he estimated that it would be quite easy to override the Libyan government by force and to use al-'Adam base irrespective of the Libyan government's wishes. He noted that British troops could deal effectively with any attacks by Libyan forces, but he warned that in such a case Britain had to take into consideration the possibility of such widespread public action in Tripoli and Benghazi that it could lead to a total breakdown of relations with Libya.[26] The British Embassy in Tripoli warned of the far-reaching consequences of possible use of the British bases in Libya to attack Egypt. In a letter to the Foreign Office, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Tripoli warned that 'Arab blood is thicker than British subsidies' and advised his government against forcing the Libyan government to permit the use of the British bases in Libya.[27] However, he expected that if troops from Libya were to be shipped out of the country to Cyprus or Malta for eventual use against Egypt, there would be a good deal less likelihood of hostile reaction in Libya.[28] The British Ambassador in Libya, for his part, also warned his government that unless Libyan permission could be obtained, the use of British bases in Libya would be a clear violation of both the letter and spirit of the Anglo-Libyan Treaty and would be unanimously condemned by Libyans and much of world opinion.[29] Moreover, in a letter to Watson, Graham pointed out that any use of Libyan territory as a base or staging-point for men or supplies was absolutely ruled out by the terms of the Anglo-Libyan Treaty

with its reference to Libya's obligations as a member of the Arab League. He expressed his firm conviction that Libya must be regarded as 'non-existent for military purposes.'[30] Although he thought that the Ambassador was perhaps going too far in respecting the Anglo-Libyan Treaty, Watson was convinced that the British must be very careful and not allow themselves to think of Libya as an area which they could use just as they liked.[31]

Despite all these warnings, the British military planners had never entirely abandoned the idea of making use of Libya in the event of hostilities against Egypt.[32] Britain's plans for use of her bases in Libya were summarized in a letter signed by Watson on the 10th August 1956 in which he stated that, as a result of the decision by the so-called 'Egypt Committee', the air trooping programme to Libya had been halted for twenty-four hours at least. The latter programme was based on the original Chiefs of Staff's plan which provided for the gradual movement of the Tenth Armoured Division into eastern Barqa and its replacement by two battalions from the Third Infantry Brigade. It also provided for thirty-five flights to Benina Airport spread over eight days with a maximum of eight aircraft on each day.[33] In a reply to Watson's letter, the Secretary of the Chiefs-of-Staff Committee, D.J.P. Lee, indicated that the Chiefs of Staff had studied the British Ambassador's view that 'absolutely no use can be made of Libyan territory for attack on Egypt' and that 'Libya must be regarded as utterly out of bounds for military purposes,' but the Committee had a different plan. Lee wrote that 'neither the Chiefs of Staff nor General Keightly [the Commander of the Suez campaign] are thinking in terms of avoiding the use of Libyan facilities in so complete a manner considered necessary by the Ambassador.' He added,

> Broadly speaking we propose to go on using Libya during Musketeer [the code name of the Suez campaign] to the extent to which it is being used now and although, for example, the airfields will not be used for offensive sorties against Egypt, they may be used for aircraft operating in support of Musketeer and by so doing help to relieve congestion on airfields closer to the scene of operations particularly in Cyprus.[34]

This contradiction between the British civilian and military authorities on the use of the bases in Libya should not be understood to suggest that the British Embassy in Tripoli and the Foreign Office were actually very much concerned about Libyan sovereignty and the clauses of the Anglo-Libyan Treaty. On the contrary, it merely reflected divergent points of view between the military planners and the politicians and diplomats on how to serve the British national interests more effectively and at minimum cost. Much evidence suggests that the rejection by the Foreign Office and the British Embassy in Libya of the idea of using the British bases in Libya was not motivated by any great conviction of the need to respect Libyan sovereignty and to honour the Anglo-Libyan Treaty, but rather by the British decision-makers' not wishing to jeopardize their interest in Libya and in the region in general. In his letter to the Foreign Office, the British Ambassador in Tripoli warned that the idea of using their bases in Libya would 'destroy for ever the good Anglo-Libyan relations on which the long-term success of the agreement depends, and which we have been trying so hard to maintain.'[35] He added,

> ...unless it is absolutely essential to the success of the operation, I respectfully suggest that on political grounds we should not permit it. It would be unfortunate if, while improving our position in the [Suez] Canal we rocked our present very good position here [in Libya], which, though by comparison secondary, is also very important both for itself and for its effect on the rest of the Arab world.[36]

It is clear that if the use of the British bases in Libya were essential to the success of the Suez operation, Ambassador Graham would not mind, but when he realized that the disadvantages were greater than the advantages, he advised his government not to use them. Thus, although there was a consensus among the British authorities that the Anglo-Libyan Treaty did not permit Britain to use her bases in Libya to attack an Arab country, they were clearly willing to violate the Treaty if the use of the bases was essential to the success of the Suez operation.

*4.5 The tripartite aggression and the Libyan government's delicate position*

Most of the world's governments thought that Nasser would keep the Canal open, but the recently appointed British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, laboured under the fixation that Nasser was a dictator comparable to Adolf Hitler. In a highly emotional broadcast to the British people, Eden said that the pattern was familiar to the British and they knew that was how Fascist governments behaved.[37] Harold Macmillan, for his part, recorded in his *Diaries* that if Nasser 'gets away with it,' Britain would be done for and 'it may well be the end of British strength and influence for ever. So, in the last resort, we must use force and defy opinion, here and overseas.' After a consultation with Winston Churchill, Macmillan presented the Egypt Committee with a detailed minute arguing the need to 'destroy Nasser's armies and overthrow his government.'[38] Nasser, of course, was neither Hitler nor Mussolini, but the British decision-makers were inclined to use such propaganda against anyone who refused to do exactly what they wanted him to do. The comparison of the Arab hero Nasser with Hitler or Mussolini could have been scarcely less calculated to impress the Libyan people with the enduring military presence in their country.

Britain was not the only one who saw Nasser as a threat to her dominance in the region; the French also wanted to be rid of Nasser because of his assistance to Algeria, where France wanted to stifle the spirit of resistance. Therefore, the British, French, and Israelis secretly agreed that Israel would first invade Egypt; then Britain and France would issue an ultimatum to Israel and Egypt calling upon them to withdraw from the area around the Suez Canal, before sending an Anglo-French military force that would occupy the Canal zone on the pretext that it was keeping the route open for international shipping and acting as a buffer between the combatants.[39]

On the 29th October, Israel invaded Egypt. The next day the Anglo-French ultimatum was issued, and Britain and France went ahead with their invasion. The

aggression was condemned in the United Nations and publicly rebuked by the US government. The American Secretary of State, J.F. Dulles, spoke of his contempt for Eden, remarking to one Arab statesman that Eden 'does not know what he is doing. He is obsessed by Nasser.'[40] That is not to suggest that the Americans' long-term aims were any different from those of Britain. On the contrary, they also wanted to be rid of Nasser, but they believed that this could be done discretely, not by an attack from outside but by a coup from within, which would provoke neither the Arabs nor the Russians.

With the Israeli involvement in the conspiracy, the Libyan government's position became more delicate. Ben Halim had to take into consideration three major elements: (1) the overwhelming public support for Egypt and the great influence Nasser had on the Libyan people; (2) the ambivalent attitude of the King; and (3) the Anglo-Libyan Treaty and its obligation on Libya. Ben Halim heard of the Israeli invasion when he landed at Tripoli Airport coming from Tobruq, where he had been discussing the crisis with the King. In the absence of the British Ambassador, Ben Halim summoned the Oriental Secretary and expressed to him his deep concern over the Anglo-French ultimatum and asked for a written assurance from the British government confirming that the British bases in Libya would not be used against Egypt.[41] That was because he had become suspicious of Britain's intentions, whether or not she really would abide by her commitments and respect the spirit of the Treaty. He feared that the British forces would march into Egypt without Libya's consent and put the Libyan government in a position where it could do nothing. As a preventive measure and to satisfy the Libyan public, Ben Halim instructed the Libyan Chief of Staff to send the three Libyan brigades and deploy them across the border with Egypt in order to intercept any British force trying to attack Egypt. The Libyan brigades, of course, had no chance of stopping the British forces from crossing the border, but it was a symbolic gesture by Ben Halim to prove that he had done all that he could. In his memoirs, Ben Halim also claimed that he had decided to organize cells for popular resistance to prevent the British bases from being used against Egypt.[42]

In this tense internal situation, Ben Halim badly needed an assurance from the British government in order that he might maintain law and order. He intended to issue a public proclamation about the situation, but unless he could quote from an official British assurance he would hardly be able to control the public anger and resentment. Despite the Ambassador's assurance that his talks in London had been constructive and that he was convinced that there had been no change of heart in London, Ben Halim insisted on a written assurance from the British government. In a telegram to the Foreign Office, the British Ambassador earnestly advised his government to issue the requested assurance in categorical terms and to do so as soon as possible. The wording of the Ambassador's telegram reveals that he was fully aware of the strong anti-British feelings that had been aroused in Libya and the unenviable position the Libyan monarchy was in. He wrote to the Foreign Office that nothing less than the issuing of the requested assurance could have any effect in ameliorating the situation.[43]

The position of the Libyan government and the monarchical regime as a whole became even more delicate later, on the 31st October, when Britain and France began their aerial bombardment of Egyptian cities. Ben Halim was furious at what he described as the 'folly and injustice' of the British action. In addition to the embarrassing position that the British attack had put the regime in, Ben Halim was fearful that Libyan territory could become the battle-field for a war with which Libya had nothing to do. Immediately he heard the news of the joint attack, Ben Halim instructed his Foreign Minister to address a memorandum of protest and condemnation to the British Embassy in Tripoli. The memorandum read,

> The Libyan government finds itself, facing these dangerous developments, compelled to strongly protest against these acts of aggression against Egypt and regards them as a crude violation of the U.N. Charter which has been regarded as the basis of the Anglo-Libyan Treaty of Alliance and Friendship, a clear infringement of the principles of the U.N., and a danger threatening the peace and security of the world.[44]

At last, on the 1st November, the British Ambassador, Mr. Graham, presented a written assurance to the Libyan Prime Minister stating that as implementation to Articles 2 and 4 of the Anglo-Libyan Treaty the British troops in Libya would not be used in any military operation against an Arab country.[45] This was not, however, sufficient to enable Ben Halim to maintain order. Demonstrations in Tripoli and Benghazi in support of Nasser were organized from the beginning of the crisis. When Israel openly entered into the conspiracy and invaded Sinai, the momentum of the demonstrations increased, for no sooner had the Anglo-French attack begun than nationalist elements became active and demanded the breaking off of diplomatic relations with Britain in retaliation for her aggression. Some demonstrations developed into disturbances and attacks on several British and American installations.

This inflammable situation stirred the Libyan government to request further assurances from the British government. Ben Halim laid four demands before Graham, *viz*: (1) that British troops in Libya should be confined to their bases and should not leave them during the period of military operations; (2) that there should be no loading or unloading of military supplies from British ships; (3) that no visits should be made to Libyan ports by British ships; and (4) that permission should be granted to station Libyan observers at al-'Adam and the R.A.F. sections of Tripoli Airport.[46] Ben Halim told the Ambassador that he did not doubt that the British government would honour its assurance, but he asked for these additional measures only to 'cool his mind.'[47] Graham strongly recommended to his government that it should concur in all the Libyan government's requests for a short period of time at least. On the 1st November he wrote to the Foreign Office saying that the measures proposed by the Libyan Prime Minister would greatly ease the task of the Libyan authorities in controlling the situation.[48] The next day Ben Halim was more than happy to declare to the Libyan people that the British troops stationed in Libya would be completely frozen and would not be used directly or indirectly against Egypt. To impress his audience, he added that Libyan observers would be stationed at al-

'Adam Airbase and Tripoli Airport to monitor any suspicious movement inside the British bases.[49]

The hostile nature of the nationalist opposition to the British interests in Libya put the Libyan government in a difficult position since, in return for Britain's assurances not to use her bases, the Libyan government had promised to protect the British and their interests in Libya. It declared a state of emergency and restricted the movement of the people, but despite these measures of internal security, the nationalists' activities did not stop. The British Embassy blamed the Egyptian Military Attaché for having distributed arms to some active nationalists and sent notes of protest to the Libyan government demanding the recall of the Attaché.[50] The Libyan government did just that in November 1956.[51]

However, even after the British government had officially assured Libya that the British bases would not be used against Egypt, the British military planners did not stop trying to persuade the Foreign Office to agree to reinforce their forces in Libya.[52] They suggested that three infantry brigades and three artillery battalions should be sent to Libya to maintain order and enable the Tenth Armoured Division to participate in the attack on Egypt. But the politicians and diplomats in the Foreign Office appeared to disagree with the plan. In response to the military strategists' plan, the acting assistant of the Foreign Office insisted that before reaching a decision they must know how much dislocation would be caused to the Musketeer plan by the postponement of the arrival of the Tenth Armoured Division and the extent of operational commitment in Libya if they proceeded with the plan.[53] Ambassador Graham, in his turn, also warned against the military planners' proposal, remarking in a telegram sent to the Foreign Office that the proposed moves would greatly increase tension and might cause the Libyan authorities to become hostile toward the British. He made it clear that from a long-term point of view, military action of that kind would mean the end of Britain's position in Libya.[54]

*4.6 The expulsion of the British Oriental Secretary*

The British were exasperated by the Egyptian influence in Libya and what seemed to them the Libyan government's failure to do something about it.[55] They therefore decided to approach the King himself. Since Britain had been behind the creation of the Libyan state and, more importantly, behind the appointment of Idris as head of it, they seemed to believe that the doors of the Palace would be open to them at any time. Therefore, Ambassador Graham, thinking that Idris was either incompletely informed about the conduct of his government or that some of its actions had not been accurately reported to him, decided to send Cecil Greatorix to see the King. Greatorix had been in Libya since the war and had known the King previously in Egypt. After Libya's independence, he had become the Oriental Secretary and the head of the intelligence services in the British Embassy in Tripoli.

Greatorix's conversation with the King on the 1st November was reported to Ben Halim by al-Busiri al-Shalhi, the Head of the *Diwan*, who had stepped into his father's position after the latter's assassination in 1954.[56] He informed Ben Halim that Greatorix had met with the King and had told him that 'the prime minister had sold the country to the Egyptians, and we [the British] are advising you to hurry up to Tripoli to save the country from Ben Halim's conspiracy with the Egyptians.'[57] Complying with Greatorix's advice, the King decided to go to Tripoli via Musrata where he was accompanied by Ben Halim, who realized that the King, contrary to his usual nature, was nervous and tense. From the information given to the King by Greatorix, Ben Halim later wrote that the former was expecting to see demonstrations and protests, but he found nothing to support Greatorix's claims.[58] Ben Halim claimed to have been furious at Greatorix's interference in Libya's internal affairs and decided to expel him. Idris, for his part, approved his Prime Minister's decision and a formal note was sent to the British Embassy demanding the recall of Greatorix as soon as possible.

The British government was angered by this decision, regarding it as a hostile action, and threatened to reconsider its policy towards Libya. In a letter to the British Embassy, the Foreign Office asked the Ambassador to make it clear to the Libyan government that the expulsion of Greatorix was seen by the British government as 'quite unjustified and manifestly taken in response to Egyptian pressure as a result of the Libyan government's decision to expel their military attaché.'[59] The Ambassador was also asked to warn Ben Halim that, in response to the Libyan government's action, he should not expect Britain to be as co-operative to the expansion of the Libyan armed forces as it would otherwise have been.[60] Thus, Libya found herself in a position between the hammer and the anvil, on the one side Britain accusing the Libyan government of surrendering to the Egyptian influence by expelling Greatorix and, on the other, Egypt and the nationalist groups in Libya accusing the government of being no more than a client to the British by its decision to expel the Egyptian Military Attaché. In an attempt to defend the government position, Ben Halim denied that either the expulsion of Greatorix or the Egyptian Attaché had been caused by pressure from anybody and insisted that the two cases had been treated separately and each on its merits.[61] In commenting on the decision to expel Greatorix, he stated that he had asked the British government to recall him solely because he had gone without his knowledge to complain to the King against his government and had presented to the King a very gloomy picture of the situation. Ben Halim seemed to have been particularly annoyed by Greatorix's remark that he 'was looking after Egyptian, not Libyan, interests.'[62]

Eventually, however, the British Ambassador reluctantly accepted the Libyan government's decision and asked his government for a replacement as soon as possible.[63] This reluctance on the part of the British government to accept the decision suggests that Greatorix was an important figure in the Embassy, a possibility the likelihood of which is supported by secret reports and correspondence between the Foreign Office and the

British Embassy in Libya. In a letter to the Foreign Office, the British Ambassador in Libya wrote,

> another reason [for Ben Halim's decision] may be to reduce our contacts. Greatorix knows everybody in Libya. He does not often see the King, but twice this year he has gone on missions to the King which no one else could possibly have undertaken. His day-to-day contacts with other Libyans, official and private, are invaluable to me and perfectly proper in themselves, but may be annoying to a Prime Minister who has something to hide.[64]

*4.7 The aftermath of the Suez crisis*

The Suez crisis had put the Libyan-British alliance and friendship to a real test. It proved that that alliance was fragile, nominal, and unequal. During the vital days of the crisis, the Libyan government, and Ben Halim in particular, realized that Britain could easily have overridden the Libyan authorities and used her bases in Libya to attack Egypt since Libya could do nothing to stop her either militarily or legally. Therefore, the Libyan government wanted to revise the Treaty in order to add certain restrictions on the movements of the British forces. The Libyan government seemed to have learnt from the Suez crisis, when its position had been not only embarrassed but also threatened, the lesson of the inherent danger in the Treaty as it stood. Consequently, it aimed to make sure that Britain would not use her forces in Libya against an Arab country under any circumstances. The Libyan government also decided to build up its Army and asked Britain to help it in doing so.

It should be noted that the Libyan government had no intention of abrogating or weakening the Anglo-Libyan Treaty. In fact, Ben Halim later admitted, 'The abrogation of the Treaty was an honour I could not claim and an aim I did not strive for.'[65] On the contrary, he thought that any attempt to denounce the Treaty would be foolish and suicidal. His purpose therefore was merely to achieve a revision of the Treaty to bring it up-to-date with the new conditions. Ben Halim pointed out that the Anglo-Libyan

Treaty, as it had been written in 1953, had created an unequal alliance and, unless it was exploited to develop and strengthen the weaker part, it would have no meaning or justification.[66]

As it had done with the Libyan government, the Suez crisis led the British government to reconsider its position. Since the events had proved that it would be politically adventurous for Britain to use her troops stationed in Libya against Egypt, the British authorities began to contemplate reducing the number of troops there. In a report, the General Director of the African and Middle East Department in the Foreign Office suggested that the British ground troops could be very substantially reduced since their value as reinforcements for the Baghdad Pact had been exaggerated and their use against Arab nationalist governments was difficult.[67] However, Britain's desire to reduce her ground forces in Libya did not mean that she wanted to completely end her military presence in Libya. On the contrary, the Foreign Office documents reveal that the British authorities continued to regard the need to maintain their landing rights and staging facilities in Libya as very important. Watson commented, 'They enable us to reach East Africa in two hops as opposed to three via West Africa.'[68] Indeed, Britain's requirements in Libya were linked to her interests in an area far wider than the Middle East.

In addition to the above-mentioned reasons, financial considerations also seemed to play their part. In 1956, for instance, Britain paid subsidies to the Libyan government amounting to £4,000,000 and, in the following year, she was to pay £4,500,000 plus some expenditure on the expansion of the Libyan Army and the creation of a nucleus of a Navy. It appeared that Britain hoped to catch two birds with one stone: to reduce her financial burden to the minimum and, at the same time, to keep British and Western interests in Libya secure. To do so, all the influential figures in the Foreign Office seemed to have agreed that a small force should remain in Barqa to protect King Idris and to deter any Egyptian invasion (and perceived expansion of Russian influence).[69]

Britain was determined to keep the USSR away from the region and to counter Arab nationalist influence, but her resources appeared no longer sufficient to the task. For this purpose she then had to rely on her ally, the USA, who also had interests in Libya and had built an enormous base at Wheelus Field. P. Dean, from the Foreign Office, warned that it would be dangerous to withdraw from Libya any R.A.F. landing and staging rights until Britain had had a thorough discussion with the USA. He contemplated that if Britain could reach some understanding with the Americans about the future of the Baghdad Pact and the means to promote stability in the Middle East, it would be possible also to reach some arrangement with them about Libya and the facilities required there.[70] Watson, for his part, suggested that Britain should negotiate with the USA on the size and disposition of her nuclear deterrent. He wrote,

> We [the British] must show that we have a contribution to make. Since the Americans already possess a nuclear base at Wheelus Field near Tripoli, we might perhaps economise on the proposed base at Al-'Adem, which would offer much the same facilities.[71]

Thus, a reduction of the British military presence in Libya appeared to be to the benefit of both countries, although viewed from different perspectives. In the speech from the throne, delivered by the Prime Minister after consultation with the King, Ben Halim declared that his government would enter into immediate negotiations with Britain to renew the Anglo-Libyan Treaty in the light of the new development in the Middle East.[72] The King, again, was ambivalent about the revision of the Treaty; he first gave his approval and then changed his mind and asked for the section relating to the reviewing of the Treaty to be omitted from the speech. Ben Halim later revealed that the cause of the King's vacillation was the former Libyan Prime Minister, Mahmud al-Muntasir, who visited Idris and advised him not to agree to the idea of reviewing the Treaty.[73] Al-Muntasir's opposition to reviewing the Treaty was confirmed by the comment of the British Foreign Secretary, Selwyn Lloyd, who revealed that al-Muntasir had told him that he thought it very important for the Treaty to be maintained as it was.[74]

Al-Muntasir was not alone in opposing any substantial change to the Treaty. The leading officials in Barqa, Husayn Mazeq in particular, were in favour of keeping the existing arrangement. In a secret report on his visit to Benghazi, made to the Foreign Secretary, the British Ambassador commented that Mazeq, the Provincial Governor, was clearly of the opinion that there was no need for British troops to be less in evidence in the towns, even in uniform, than they were at that time. He wrote, '...relations between the troops and the townsmen (except in Derna) are excellent, and as far as Cyrenaica is concerned there seems no desire for any alteration in the existing arrangements.'[75]

The King himself appeared to have been influenced by his aides to stand behind the rejection of the Treaty's review despite his earlier ambivalent stance. He summoned the British Ambassador to Tobruq and expressed to him his desire to postpone the negotiations on reviewing the Treaty for an indefinite period. He further asked the Ambassador to request his government not to evacuate its troops from Barqa in general and from Tobruq in particular.[76] His justification for his change of mind was that he had received a petition signed by hundreds of inhabitants of Tobruq begging him to rescue them from the financial disaster that would ensue as a result of the British evacuation from Tobruq. What in fact happened was that some of the King's entourage, who had been renting their flats to the British soldiers, feared that any review of the Treaty could lead to the evacuation of the British troops from Tobruq. Therefore, they, with some other beneficiaries from the British presence, met with the King and persuaded him that a British evacuation would have a deleterious impact on the country's economy. Thus, once again, the corrupt entourage and self-interested leading figures managed to inveigle the King into making a decision of seemingly limited benefit to Libya's longer-term interests as a regional actor.

This rejection by al-Muntasir, Mazeq, and Idris himself of the idea of even reviewing the Treaty clearly demonstrates what kind of people Libya had been led by.

Their personal interests and fear for their personal safety led them to sacrifice the national interests of the whole country and to allow themselves to be used by the British and Americans regardless of the widespread public support which the Suez Crisis had brought into the open for the evacuation of the foreign bases.

*4.8 The fall of the monarchy*

The sudden end of the Suez crisis did not mean the end of the regime's crisis. The regime's dilemma continued to be the same: a huge gap between the evident aspirations of growing numbers of Libyan people and the orientation of the regime, which meant that it had to compromise between its heavy dependence on the West and its obligation towards its own people, many of whom had cause to identify themselves with Arab nationalist and anti-imperialist ideas. This, however, proved too great a gap for the regime to span from the standpoint of practical politics. Reflecting on the public belief in the King's dependence on Britain, Ivor Lucas, the former British diplomat, recalled that when Idris was seen being driven round the streets of Tripoli in his Rolls-Royce, it was commonly said, even when Lucas was serving in Libya in the early 1960s that King Idris had in fact died some time previously but that the devious British, anxious to perpetuate their 'special relationship', had made a wax effigy which was put on show in order to deceive the populace.[77]

It can be noted here that public opinion in Libya has never been as effectively aggregated and articulated as would be typical in the case of Western countries. In this context, I understand public opinion as referring to the general public attitudes towards a particular issue, institution, or leader. However, since public opinion polling has never developed in Libya, the only way to assess the Libyan public opinion is to observe such visible manifestations as mass demonstrations and overt expression of public dissatisfaction—types of behaviour in fact which had become common features of Libyan public life by the end of the 1950s. Before this stage, the public played a very small role in Libyan

political life, especially in the field of foreign policy. That could be attributed essentially to the low rate of literacy and the lack of other means of mass communications. On the other hand, in Libya, as in other Arab countries, the urban coffee shops had long been the place for circulating political and other news; indeed, it is well known that at times of crisis and public unrest, the coffee shops became the place for visits by secret police agents seeking to gauge public opinion. In the Libyan case, on the other hand, through the spread of education, urbanization, and the development of new channels for communicating information under the impact of 'oil prosperity' in the 1960s, the public was undoubtedly becoming much more aware and interested in the domestic and foreign policies of their country, especially at times of international or regional tension.[78]

The pro-Western foreign policy of the monarchical regime acted as a catalyst to stimulate the people to demonstrate their frustration and anger. From its outset, the monarchical regime had been confronted by violent demonstrations and protests as a reaction to its strong ties with the West and its limited involvement in Arab issues. In 1953, there had been widespread demonstrations in many Libyan cities against al-Muntasir's decision to allow the British and American military personnel to continue occupying their bases in Barqa and Tripolitania. In 1956, students had taken to the streets in many centres in violent demonstrations protesting against Libya's acquiescence in the tripartite invasion of Egypt. In these violent demonstrations British and American military installations, as well as a number of civilian targets such as British banks and insurance companies, had been attacked, which had led British families to begin to leave the country.[79] Demonstrations had become furious when rumours circulated that Egypt had been attacked by British planes which had taken off from their bases in Libya. During the Suez crisis, the Libyan government had hoped to satisfy the two belligerent parties and to contain domestic opposition. In dealing with these contradictions, it had managed to satisfy neither Britain, Egypt, nor the increasingly politically aware segments

of the Libyan populace, who had tended to listen to President Nasser rather than to their own leaders.

The same dilemma faced the regime in 1958 when, once again, public anger was evident over reports that the government had allowed the British to use their Libyan bases in an attempt to thwart the Iraqi coup.[80] These accusations may have had no basis in fact, but what enabled them to gain ground was the Libyan government's refusal to recognize the new regime in Baghdad and the grievance shown by Idris over the assassination of the young King Faisal of Iraq.[81]

The period between 1957 and 1964 witnessed the widespread expression of public resentment at the Libyan government's stand on foreign policy issues. After the Suez crisis, no Arab leader could be Britain's friend and Nasser's enemy. Although the Egyptian military may have been defeated, Nasser emerged as a hero in Arab eyes, the one Arab leader who had been prepared to defend his people against Zionism and imperialism. To demonstrate their dissatisfaction with the government's policies, many Libyans, as we have seen, were prepared to take to the streets to protest against Western imperialism, to demand the withdrawal of the British and American bases, to support independence for Algeria, and to oppose armament deals with Britain. In a number of these demonstrations, young Muammar al-Qathafi and some of his friends took part with secondary school students in Sabha.[82]

By the sixties, demonstrations started to become more overtly political and disruptive. In January 1964, there was a wave of demonstrations that were provoked mainly by the government's failure to adopt a more pro-Arab stance in foreign policy. In Benghazi on the 14th January, several hundred students boycotted classes and went on strike in a show of solidarity with the Arab States' Conference in Cairo, which had been called by Nasser to plan concerted action against Israel's diversion of the River Jordan.

This demonstration was also seen by the students as a chance to express their fury at their government's insistence on the continuing presence of the foreign military bases and its ambivalent stand on Arab issues, especially the Palestinian question. Ivor Lucas, the British diplomat who served at the British Embassy in Tripoli from 1962 to 1966, has observed that 'for the first time demonstrations and disturbances raised slogans against the King himself.'[83] The government's response this time was outrageous: the police were called out to clear the Benghazi streets, as a result of which three students were killed and many others injured. These deaths stirred up sympathetic demonstrations in Tripoli, Zawia, and other major cities, and as many as eleven dead were later reported.[84] Once again the scapegoat was the Prime Minister, Mohie al-Din Fkeni. He demanded of the King the dismissal and punishment of the Cyrenaica Defence Force (CYDEF) Commander, Mahmud Buquweytin, who had been technically responsible for the police action in Benghazi although he had been out of the city at the time. Idris not only refused Fkeni's demands but sacked him on the spot. Buquweytin was brother-in-law to Abd al-Aziz al-Shalhi and Commander of the powerful CYDEF. The King was unable to sack him either because of his own connection to the Shalhi family or because of his importance as Commander of the powerful CYDEF or both. Moreover, the King appears to have been under pressure from the Sanusi hierarchy and other conservative sheikhs who were angry with the young Prime Minister. Indeed, Fkeni could be considered to have been a modernizer, responsive to pressures for social change, and more sympathetic toward Pan-Arabism than other political leaders. Ivor Lucas has pointed out that Fkeni 'was known to be more nationalistic than the previous incumbent,' and his choice was a surprise for many Libyans because of his radical reputation.'[85] His dismissal proved to be unpopular among the younger generation and brought in its wake further protests on the 24th and 25th January.

After Fkeni, Idris recalled his old friend, Mahmud al-Muntasir for a second term of office as Prime Minister. Al-Muntasir, who also took responsibility for internal

security, used a combination of rewards and punishments to re-establish domestic calm. He used coercive measures against the demonstrators and, at the same time, promised to start negotiations with the British and Americans on the treaties governing their bases. Relative calm was restored for a month or so, but demonstrations recommenced when President Nasser called for the ending of British and American base rights in Libya. In a public speech on the 22nd February 1964, Nasser stressed fear of the foreign military bases and demanded assurances from the Libyan government that these bases would not be used against Egypt or any other Arab state in the wake of the military action against Israel. The immediate response in Libya was a public demonstration in support of Nasser's demands.

During 1965, the issue of Libya's relations with West Germany sparked more waves of public demonstrations. When, during an Arab states' summit, a resolution was passed calling for a break of diplomatic relations with West Germany, which was planning to recognize Israel, Libya refused to follow suit. As a result, Libyan students, both inside and outside Libya, protested against their government's stand.

The presence of foreign bases had always been a contentious issue provoking strong opposition to the monarchical regime. As had happened in 1964, opposition over the bases reached a critical peak again in 1967 during the Arab-Israeli war. The outbreak of the war in June of that year stirred powerful nationalist feeling in Libya. Led by the student movements and trade unions, demonstrators took to the streets condemning the Anglo-American air support for Israeli forces that was being alleged. Offices of the US and British Embassies were wrecked, the US Information Library in Benghazi was sacked, and demands for the removal of bases were renewed. Furthermore, the trade union movement decided to disrupt the oil industry and, on the 7th June, the oil workers and port workers struck and refused to load tankers with oil.[86] The next day, two Libyan army divisions crossed the border into Egypt, defying their own commanders, and

convinced that they were going to be part of an Arab army fighting against Israel and the USA. They did not return home until after the Revolution. In addition, in October, two Libyan airmen flew a Libyan military plane to Egypt, hoping to join in the battle.

The extent of public unrest clearly indicated that the regime faced a serious and entrenched opposition. In his last four years in power, Idris appointed four more prime ministers, but their task proved impossible. They tried to placate both the Libyan people and the revolutionary Arab states on the one side, and King Idris and his Western allies on the other. Politically aware Libyans, especially students, workers, and intellectuals, were committed to Pan-Arabism and were unsympathetic toward Libya's pro-Western policies. Thus, the inevitable result of Libya's failure to adopt an ideology compatible with the people's aspirations and to follow a foreign policy embodying these aspirations was growing public resentment and consequent tendencies towards government instability. During the eighteen years of the monarchical regime, there were eleven governments in all and over two hundred ministers. These consecutive governments were unable or unwilling to make any attempt to come to terms with the emerging politicized opposition. Power remained in the hands of Idris and his close associates, who, in 1969, were essentially the same as those in 1951, all aging and out of touch with the new trends that had taken hold in society. In short, Libyan foreign policy was largely directed by Idris's own values and beliefs, which, by 1969, were too conservative, if not reactionary, and out of date. Through the 1950s and 1960s, the Libyan government continued to be oblivious to the significance of the emerging popular discontent and resumed old practices of placating popular unrest by injecting more liquidity into the economy, as if money would cure all diseases.[87]

The other factor that contributed to the monarchy's eventual downfall was corruption. Although Idris himself was a modest and ascetic man, and simple in his manner of life, his entourage and some of his relatives were profoundly corrupt. Because

of his increasing senility and weakness of character, Idris failed to curb their abuse of power and authority in order to satisfy their greed. A full analysis of corruption during the monarchical period is not the primary concern of the present study, but it will be illustrative to single out one or two examples. The clearest example of persons using their influence to enrich themselves was the Minister for Palace Affairs, 'Umar al-Shalhi who, in a very short time, managed to accumulate a private fortune estimated at over $25,000,000. His wedding was reported to have cost £L2,000,000 at a time when other Libyans were living in shanty towns. Armand Hammer, the owner of Occidental Oil Company, later admitted securing his concession by paying an extra three cents per barrel into al-Shalhi's bank account in Geneva.[88] Another example of the corruption that was rife among the ruling clique was the scandal over the building of the Fazzan Road, the central figure in which was 'Abd Allal 'Abid, a close relative of Idris whose construction company managed to exhaust all the money provided for the whole project when only a third of the work had actually been completed.

The widespread nature of corruption and exploitation led the King to take the unprecedented step of issuing a letter, dated the 13th July 1960, to government heads drawing their attention to the effects of widespread corruption upon Libyan opinion. It read,

> ...Matters have come to a climax as have deafening reports of the misconduct of responsible state personnel in taking bribes—in secret and in public—and in practising nepotism—the two [evils] which will destroy the very existence of the state and its good reputation both at home and abroad, as well as the squandering of the [country's] wealth in secret and public.[89]

In this letter the King quoted the Qur'an and the Hadith (the Prophet's tradition) on the evil of taking bribes and practising nepotism. He further promised to correct evil and that in doing so he would not be deterred from carrying out God's command to re-establish the good reputation of the country.[90] However, even this intervention by the King was

too little and too late to curb the rampant corruption and exploitation. Furthermore, it should not be forgotten that the King himself used patronage to benefit the tribes of Barqa. In fact, the King's bias toward the eastern part of Libya made the government unable to choose a single capital for the country. Until 1969, Libya was distinguished by having two capital cities: Benghazi and Tripoli. The cost of moving the government and the diplomatic corps from one city to the other was extremely wasteful in a country where there was still widespread poverty. Although the bulk of the population lived in the western part of Libya, much of the country's wealth was diverted to the east of the country. A number of new cities were planned in Barqa and work was started on a third capital, at the city of al-Baida.[91] This policy of appeasement of vested traditional or commercial interests continued even after the flow of oil money. Policy planning and financial allocation were not based on analysis of the needs of the country but on the appeasement of the strong tribal leaders and wealthy families in Benghazi, al-Baida, and to some extent Tripoli, which led to the growth of these three cities at the expense of the rest of the country.[92] As will be discussed in detail in Chapter Seven, these kinds of social ills such as corruption, favouritism, intrigue, and graft can be attributed to the advent of oil, which has created rapid social changes and set the bases for a politcal one.

In short, the monarchical regime was unable to respond effectively to the rapid political and socio-economic changes that occurred in Libya after independence. The combination of a young nationalist generation, a turbulent regional environment, and widespread corruption and exploitation made it difficult for the monarchy to survive for long. By 1969, the monarchy was on the verge of collapse.

With the banning of all kinds of organized opposition, including political parties, the only organization in a position to bring about any change was the Army. It had discipline, the advantages of education and training (particularly for the officer corps), and, of most practical importance, weapons. It had, however, been perceived as a possible

political threat and was kept dispersed, short of sufficient offensive weaponry, and undermanned on account of the regime's distrust. The regime tried in fact to keep the Army under control by placing its command in the hands of loyal Sanusi veterans. But the danger, as we shall see, was to come from the young officers, who represented a different generation and had a different outlook. They were frustrated and angered by their government's stand on domestic and foreign issues, especially the continuing presence of the foreign bases in Libya. Although the frustration and anger of the younger army officers were no secret, the real extent of their threat seemed to have been underestimated until the military seizure of power on the 1st September 1969.

*4.9 Conclusion*

Libya's foreign policy during the Suez crisis was a good illustration of the dilemma that the monarchical regime was facing: a huge gap between the regime's orientation and the aspirations of the people. Whereas the majority of the Libyan people tended to identify with Arab nationalism and anti-imperialism, the monarchical regime chose to continue with its pro-Western policies. On account of this contradiction, the outbreak of the Suez crisis put the Libyan government in a delicate position.

During the Suez crisis, the Libyan government tried to satisfy the two belligerent parties and to contain domestic opposition, but the effort of combining the two aims proved to be too much for the government to achieve. Despite Ben Halim's support for the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company and his condemnation of the tripartite aggression against Egypt, sympathy alone was not enough to satisfy either Nasser or the Libyan people, especially when Israel invaded Sinai. Demonstrations developed into disturbances and demands for the evacuation of the British bases, and even demands for the breaking off of diplomatic relations with Britain. This potentially inflammable situation was anticipated by the Libyan government, which asked at the beginning of the crisis for a written assurance from Britain that Libyan territory would not be used in any

attack on Egypt. Although Britain ultimately issued such an assurance, the British government appears nevertheless to have seriously contemplated the option of attacking Egypt from Libya, using her Tenth Armoured Division there, but for tactical reasons this option was not adopted.

Moreover, the Suez crisis was a real test of the Libyan-British alliance. It proved that the alliance was fragile, nominal, and without public support. It also demonstrated that the Libyan government was an unequal partner with the British. Indeed, Britain could easily have overridden the Libyan government and used her bases in Libya to attack Egypt since Libya could have done nothing to prevent her. Libya, in fact, was relying on those same forces for her own defence. British government documents reveal that Britain did not give much consideration to the clauses of the Libyan-British Treaty or to Libyan sovereignty. Her main concern was how best the British interests could be served.

The sudden end of the Suez crisis, however, was not paralleled by any end to the Libyan government's own domestic crisis. The government continued to be oblivious to the emerging popular discontent. And thus, by 1969, all the conditions for change were present: a monarchical regime on the verge of collapse and young army officers with both the capability and the ideas to bring about change and reconstruction. In short, the monarchy ultimately fell victim to its own inability to answer the political, economic, and social demands of the emerging generation that was now ready to make its impact on the Libyan scene.

# NOTES

1. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 229.

2. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 379-456.

3. For details on Ben Halim's childhood in Egypt, see Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 17-29.

4. *Ibid.*, 170 f.

5. For more details, see *ibid.*, 350-6.

6. F.O. 371, Letter no. 1034/35/54, 17th July 1954.

7. Haykal (Heikal), *Nasser*, 72 f.

8. *Ibid.*, 50.

9. For more details on the confrontation between Nasser and Britain and other foreign countries, see Haykal, *Nasser*, 77-118.

10. Stephens, *Nasser: a political biography*, 197.

11. *Safahat*, 179. Although it contains his personal account of the events during the Suez Crisis, when he himself was Prime Minister of Libya, Ben Halim's book is still the only Libyan source of primary documentation on the country's policies during that period. Ben Halim's account contributes to the present study some counterbalance of viewpoint in that the primary sources are records in the British Public Record Office. However, the book should be read with caution and attention to the common human tendency to present oneself in one's memoirs in the best possible light.

12. Quoted in Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 269 f. For the original Arabic text, see *Tarablus al-Gharb*, Tripoli, 29th July 1956.

13. F.O. 371.JT1053/93, Telegram no. 252, 9th August 1956; *Al-Ahram* newspaper, no. 25457, 16.8.1956.

14. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 406.

15. *Ibid.*, 761. See also *Al-Ahram* newspaper, 16.8.1956.

16. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 411.

17. F.O. 371, letter no. 1034/35/54, 17th July 1954.

18. F.O. 371.JT1053/93, Telegram no. 252, 9th August 1956.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 180.

21. *Ibid.*, 420 f.

22. F.O. 371.JT1053/99, 10th August 1956.

23. The Egypt Committee was the ministerial committee which was formed by the British government to plan and follow up the attack on Egypt.

24. F.O. 371.JT1053/91, 28th July 1956.

25. F.O. 371.JT1053/89, 29th July 1956.

26. F.O. 371.JT 1053/91, 28th July 1956. See also Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 423.

27. F.O. 371.JT1053/87, 3rd August 1956.

28. F.O. 371.JT1053/87, 3rd August 1956. See also Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 424.

29. F.O. 371.JT1053/93, 9th August 1956.

30. F.O. 371.JT1053/05, 25th September 1956.

31. F.O. 371.JT1053/105, 29th September 1956.

32. F.O. 371.JT1053/105, 25th September 1956.

33. F.O. 371.JT1053/99, 10th August 1956.

34. F.O. 371.JT1053/105, 5th October 1956.

35. F.O. 371.JT1053/93, 9th August 1956.

36. *Ibid.*

37. "The Suez Crisis", BBC 1, 22nd October 1996.

38. Quoted in Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 145.

39. This conspiracy by the three states was confirmed in a recent British television programme marking the 40th anniversary of the Suez Crisis ("The Suez Crisis", BBC 1, 22nd October 1996).

40. Haykal (Heikal), *Nasser*, 88.

41. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 435 f.

42. *Ibid.*, 432.

43. F.O. 371.JT1053, Telegram no. 389, 31st October 1956.

44. For the full text, see Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 790 f.

45. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 436.

46. *Ibid.*, 437.

47. *Ibid.*, 436 f.

48. F.O. 371.JT1053/111, 1st November 1956. See also Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 439 f.

49. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 438.

50. *Ibid.*, 438 f.

51. For more details on the expulsion of the Egyptian Military Attaché, see *Ibid.*, 452-7.

52. *Ibid.*, 440.

53. F.O. 371.JT1053, Telegram no. 477, 2nd November 1956.

54. F.O. 371.JT1053/113, 3rd November 1956.

55. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 449.

56. For more details on the assassination of Ibrahim al-Shalhi and the struggle for power betwen the al-Shalhi and al-Sharif families, see Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 111-122.

57. *Ibid.*, 448.

58. For more details, see *ibid.*, 448 f.

59. F.O. 371.JT1053, Telegram no. 541, 10th November 1956.

60. *Ibid.*

61. F.O. 371.JT1890/10, Telegram no. 451, 10th November 1956. See also JT1890/10A, Telegram no. 458, 11th November 1956.

62. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 274; Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 448.

63. F.O. 371.JT1890/10A, Telegram no. 488, 11th November 1956.

64. F.O. 371.JT1892/11, 5th November 1956.

65. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 491 f.

66. *Ibid.*

67. F.O. 371/119729.JT1053/136, 7th, 8th, 9th December 1956.

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*

72. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 486.

73. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 487.

74. F.O. 371/119729.JT1053/128G, no. 160 Top Secret, 18th December 1956.

75. F.O. 371/119729.JT1053, Telegram no. 90410/56, 17th December 1956.

76. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 499.

77. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

78. For more details on public opinion in Libya from 1962 to 1973, see Shembesh, "The analysis of Libya's foreign policy", 98-138.

79. Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 145.

80. Wright, *Libya: a modern history*, 88.

81. *Ibid*. See also Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 147.

82. For example, al-Qathafi led a demonstration in Sabha on the 5th October 1961 denouncing the break-up of the union between Egypt and Syria.

83. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

84. The demonstration of the 14th January is annually celebrated in the Libyan schools, universities, and other educational institutions; one secondary school in Benghazi was subsequently renamed after the martyrs of the 14th January.

85. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

86. For more details on the students' attitude during this era, see Shembesh (who was a university student during the mid sixties and witnessed these developments), "The analysis of Libya's foreign policy", 115-121.

87. See El-Kikhia, *Political process*, 162.

88. Tremlet, *Gadaffi: the desert mystic*, 96.

89. For the full text of his letter, see *Tarablus al-Gharb*, Tripoli, 26th July 1966; or Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 299 f.

90. *Ibid*., 300.

91. El-Kikhia, *Political process*, 154-7.

92. For more details on the late years of the monarchical regime, see *The Economist*, 6 Sept. 1969, 12 f., 55 f.

# PART TWO

# THE FOREIGN POLICY OF THE REVOLUTION

# CHAPTER FIVE

# THE REVOLUTION:

# ITS NATURE AND UNIQUE POLITICAL STRUCTURE

*5.1 Introduction*

A study of any country's foreign policy would be incomplete without an examination of the internal environment in which that policy is formulated. Foreign policy, especially in Third World countries, is domestic policy pursued by other means, or, in other words, domestic policy carried beyond the boundaries of the state. That is to say, in developing countries foreign policy is always affected not only by the external environment but also by internal factors, which may range from public opinion to conflict over the leadership and the political system. Therefore, an understanding of the foreign policy of the Libyan Revolution requires an understanding of the internal political process.

Libya became a unitary state governed by a unique political system of People's Congresses and People's Committees, and led by a remarkable leader who wanted to change the present state of the world. This innovative system is without precedent and is based primarily on the ideology of the leader of the Revolution. Its impact has not been limited to internal affairs but has crossed boundaries to shape Libya's representative bodies around the world and to determine her political behaviour towards other countries. It is therefore essential for any analyst of Libyan foreign policy to appreciate the new political structure of direct democracy in order to understand the formulation and execution of the country's foreign policy process.

The present chapter is intended to provide some background for the examination of Libya's foreign policy after the Revolution. The main concern will be with the impact of the unprecedented institutional changes caused by the Revolution on the country's foreign policy. It will examine the internal environment of the Revolution's foreign policy, starting by shedding some light on the origin and nature of the Revolution and the British reaction to the fall of the monarchical regime. This will be followed by a brief discussion of the issue of consolidating and legitimating the Revolution and its leadership, and this in turn will pave the way for the subsequent examination of the evolution of the political system of People's Congresses and their implication for Libyan foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular.

*5.2 The origins and nature of the Revolution*

The origins of the Libyan Revolution can be traced back to 1959 when al-Qathafi emerged as a political activist among students in the secondary school in Sabha. Since that early time he started feeding his interest in political affairs by reading. Though only a teenager, al-Qathafi was a diligent reader on a wide range of issues, especially Arab politics and world revolution. One of the most important documents read by him was Nasser's *Falsafat al-Thawrah* (The Philosophy of the Revolution), in which he described how he had prepared for the Revolution in 1952. From that early time, al-Qathafi and his friends became politically conscious and, consequently, active, which led to their expulsion from Fazzan. Later, al-Qathafi added another habit to reading: listening to radio and the *Sawt al-'Arab* (Voice of the Arabs) station in particular.[1]

Like Nasser a decade earlier, al-Qathafi had realized that change by means other than military action was impossible. Therefore, he and some of his associates decided to enter the Royal Libyan Military Academy in Benghazi in 1963. Frustrated with the monarchical regime, their aim was not to launch a coup to change the government but to start a revolution that could bring about fundamental change in all aspects of the Libyan

people's lives. They began by forming a nucleus of what became known as the Free Unionist Officers. Having entered the Academy in 1963, most of the group, including al-Qathafi, graduated in 1965. They obtained junior positions in the Army and many of them received advanced training in Britain and the USA. In 1966, al-Qathafi was sent to Britain for a short training course at Beaconsfield.

Two events appear to have stimulated the Free Unionist Officers into action to precipitate the Revolution: the Arab defeat in the 1967 War and the arson committed in August 1969 at al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. The bitter defeat suffered by the Arab nation in 1967 was a great shock to al-Qathafi and his companions, but instead of demoralizing them it reinforced their determination to restore Arab honour. The Aqsa Mosque fire was another particular shock for al-Qathafi and his associates since for all Arabs, and indeed for all of the Muslim world, al-Aqsa Mosque is the third holiest place after the Ka'aba and the Prophet's Mosque in al-Hijaz.

By August 1969, just before several Free Unionist Officers were scheduled to depart for Britain for further training, all was ready for action. On the 1st September, a small group of junior officers seized control of the key government installations in Tripoli and Benghazi, including radio stations, airports, and police stations. This was accomplished within a few hours and was quickly followed by the arrest of the Crown Prince, members of the Royal *Diwan*, Cabinet ministers, senior army and police officers, and Members of Parliament. On the whole, it was a remarkably bloodless operation.[2] As Donald Maitland has pointed out, the take-over 'had been well planned and brilliantly executed.'[3]

At 6.30 a.m., al-Qathafi went on the air to deliver Communiqué Number One from Benghazi radio station. He announced that the Revolution had come about in response to the Libyan people's will and 'incessant demands for change and regeneration.' He went

on to announce that Libya was to be a self-governing republic and promised that freedom, unity, equality, and social justice would be guaranteed.[4]

Although revolutions had swept through much of the Arab world during the 1950s and 1960s, it was not evident that Libya would follow suit in the very near future. The Libyan Army was still in the process of creation and was closely watched by the British and American intelligence agents and advisers who existed on the fringe of the military establishments. Even those who predicted change expected that it would come from senior officers and in particular from 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Shalhi, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army. Nobody seems to have been aware of the real intention of the Free Unionist Officers. Denis Healey, a senior cabinet minister in the former Labour government, noted with hindsight that, just before the Revolution took place, 'it was obvious that the monarchy was likely to fall at any moment to an army coup,' but he was wrong when he tried to guess who would be the instigator. Along with other senior officials in Washington and Moscow, he thought it would probably be Colonel al-Shalhi.[5] Even President Nasser, who was accused by many of being the mastermind behind the Revolution, did not expect change to come from junior officers.[6] When his envoy, Muhammad Haykal, arrived at Benghazi Airport on the 2nd September, his first question was, 'Where is 'Abd al-'Aziz?' The Americans also were just as much in the dark as was everybody else. David D. Newsom, the American Ambassador in Libya until shortly before the Revolution, said that he first heard about al-Qathafi after the take-over through the British.[7]

Contrary to all expectations and speculations, the Libyan Revolution was exclusively planned and executed by a group of approximately seventy junior army officers calling themselves the Free Unionist Officers. They were led by a central committee of twelve who designated themselves the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), with al-Qathafi as their head (see Table 2).[8]

**Table 2**
**Members of the Revolutionary Command Council**

Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qathafi
Major 'Abd al-Salam Jallud
Major Bashir Saghir Hawwadi
Captain Khweildi al-Hamidi
Captain 'Ali Awad Hamza
Captain 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Huni
Captain Abu Bakr Yunis Jabir
Captain Mustafa Kharubi
Captain 'Umar 'Abd Allah al-Mahishi
Captain Muhammad Najm
Captain Mukhtar 'Abd Allah al-Qirwi
Lieutenant Muhammad Abu Bakr al-Meqaryaf

The principal concern of al-Qathafi and his colleagues was British or American intervention against the Revolution.[9] To obviate this possibility, on the night of the operation, al-Qathafi tried to neutralize Britain by assuring the British acting Ambassador, Peter Wakefield, that the change was not directed against any state or international agreement in law, but was a purely internal affair.[10] He said that 'it was time for rearrangements of things inside Libya and that his committee, which had taken power, would honour all international obligations.'[11] Further precautions to prevent any counter-action by the British or Americans, or both, were also taken. For example, on the night of the Revolution, battalions of artillery led by Free Unionist Officers surrounded the foreign bases in an attempt to prevent their occupants' taking any hostile action. Later, in a speech marking the second anniversary of the expulsion of the American base, al-Qathafi said that the Free Unionist Officers were determined to destroy the base if it tried to intervene.[12]

The fear of intervention, especially by Britain seemed to have some justification and was not an exaggeration. Britain indeed had a contingency plan for invading Libya in just such circumstances as the Revolution had created. A secret protocol was attached to the 1953 Anglo-Libyan Treaty providing for immediate British military intervention to protect King Idris and the royal family against internal troubles and external dangers.

The plan, code-named 'Radford', was dated the 27th July 1964 and was said to carry the signatures of Earl Mountbatten and other senior officers. Under the Radford plan, British troops in Libya would be reinforced by land, sea, and air to deter any possible Egyptian invasion or any internal threat to the Libyan monarchy. The British plan was to be carried out, in collaboration with American troops at Wheelus base, by British troops to be airlifted from Britain, West Germany, Malta, and Cyprus after a four-day alert period.[13]

The lightning success of the Revolution and the overwhelming public support from the first day seemed to have deterred the British and Americans from even considering to intervene to save their client kingdom. The Free Officers had moved too quickly and successfully, thereby allowing the British and Americans no pretext for intervening if they wanted to. The British also seemed to have neither enough time to actuate any alert nor enough troops inside Libya to stem the revolutionary tide. Peter Tripp, the British Ambassador to Libya from 1970 to 1974, has pointed out that the Revolution had taken them by surprise and that in practical terms they found themselves faced with a *fait accompli*.[14] Good luck and coincidence also played their part. From the 19th August to the 11th September, there was a major Soviet fleet exercise along the Mediterranean sea lanes between Libya and both Malta and Cyprus. This strategic position taken by the Soviet fleet gave the impression that the USSR was in fact protecting the Revolution.[15]

However, considering the situation from an Anglo-American point of view, it was in reality not worth fighting to keep a weak and unpopular King in power since British and American interests were not in jeopardy, or so it appeared since the initial signals of the new regime indicated that the British and American interests would be safe. The American Ambassador to Libya, Joseph Palmer, in his first dispatches on the Revolution, informed his government that the still-anonymous young men of the RCC had promised to protect all Western interests, including the pumping of oil.[16] The RCC members were anxious not to alarm foreign interests in Libya and so, many times during the first week

of the Revolution, members of the RCC visited the embassies of countries which had oil companies operating in Libya and reassured them that they would honour agreements to protect interests.[17] Moreover, a RCC statement broadcast over the radio made it clear that existing oil concession agreements would be honoured. It stated, 'The pumping of oil at Libyan ports will continue as usual. Work will continue according to the rules and regulations previously in force.'[18] Another reason for not intervening seemed to be that the Americans and British hoped that the new young leaders in Libya, with their strong conviction in Islam, would be useful in their campaign against communist penetration in the Middle East. The two American policy-makers—Deputy Assistant Secretary of State of African Affairs, David D. Newsom, and Ambassador to Libya, Joseph Palmer—had what they thought were sound reasons for believing that al-Qathafi and his colleagues would prove to be important assets in the struggle to keep Soviet influence and communism out of the region.[19] Their convictions on this point were based on the RCC's early anti-communist and pro-Islamic statements. In this regard the British appeared to take the Americans' line and hoped that the new regime would indeed act in the manner suggested.

Thus, after the new regime's recognition by Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Sudan, the British government also began to lean towards recognizing the regime of al-Qathafi and his associates. It was important for Britain to have good relations with the revolutionary regime for strategic and, more important, economic considerations. Libya had become the largest single supplier of crude oil to Britain at the time when the North Sea oil was as yet undiscovered. Three days after the Revolution, the British Ambassador, John Freeman, called on the American Ambassador to discuss the question of recognition. The two Ambassadors agreed that the new regime should be given a chance and recommended to their respective governments the recognition of the revolutionary regime.[20]

The overthrow of the monarchy proved to be popular with the Libyan people even before the RCC members revealed their identities. By 1969, change had become the demand of a substantial cross-section of Libyan society. Therefore, when the Revolution came about, it was met with spontaneous demonstrations of support throughout the country.[21] The support was generally for the change in the orientation of both domestic and foreign policy which had been indicated in the first communiqué. It was not necessarily for the leadership, because it took some thirteen days for the RCC to reveal their identities. The exceptions were a few merchant families who had benefited from collaboration with the monarchical regime, but even these did not at first oppose the change, but preferred to follow a policy of wait and see.

Although it was military in planning, organization, and execution, the change that took place on the 1st September 1969 cannot be seen as less than a popular revolution. The imposition of the change from above by military means should not lead one to view it as a classic coup engineered by and for the pleasure of senior army officers. The changes that were introduced were deep and affected almost every aspect of people's lives. The first British Ambassador to Libya after the Revolution, Sir Donald Maitland, has observed that

> what had happened on 1 September was a revolution, not a *coup d'état*. The new regime intended to raise the standard of the people of Libya, to establish the country's independent identity and to play the role in the Arab world to which the country's wealth and potential entitled it.[22]

In his first major speech to the public, on the 16th September, al-Qathafi tried to distinguish between the Revolution in Libya and other military coups in other countries. He said,

> What took place in Libya on the 1st September was something very different from a military coup; it was at once the logical consequence and

> the faithful reflection of the turning-point in history, which our people are attaining at the present time.[23]

In this speech, which laid down the broad lines of the Revolution's policy for years to come, al-Qathafi went so far as to hand over to the people the responsibility for running the country. He said,

> The Revolution does not claim that its leadership is the monopoly of the RCC or its ministers. Government must revert to the people just as sovereignty must, and the final decisions. I hand over to the people the responsibility of governing... [and] the responsibility for the philosophy of the Revolution. They must make it part of themselves, with its foundation and its objectives.[24]

Later, the RCC actually dissolved itself and declared the establishment of *al-Jamahiriya* (the state of the masses), anchored to the 'authority of the people'—that is, an arrangement in which direct democracy would be the foundation of the new political system. Now, after more than twenty-six years, the face of Libya has been completely changed by the Revolution. Since the 1st September 1969, in fact, almost everything has been made new: new constitution, new institutions, new political and economic system, and new social values and ideology. A different foreign policy, different alliances, different priorities, and different orientations and strategies have also been introduced.

### *5.3 Consolidation of the Revolution*

The most urgent goal confronting al-Qathafi and his colleagues was the consolidation and legitimation of the Revolution. In its wake, leading figures of the royal family, politicians, prominent officials, and high-ranking police and military officers were arrested, beginning the dismantling of the old regime. The revolutionary leaders then embarked on reducing the powers of the tribal and religious leaders who had prospered under the reign of King Idris. Tribes as political institutions were abolished and administrative boundaries were redrawn on non-tribal bases, paving the way for the

dismissal of all local officials, including governors, mayors, and deputy mayors, most of whom had been chosen from the tribal sheikhs or their relatives.[25] It should however be noted that al-Qathafi was not opposed to the tribe as a social institution. On the contrary, he himself maintained strong links with his own tribe and encouraged each individual member within the RCC to follow his example in this. Nevertheless, he certainly was opposed to tribal fanaticism since it weakens national loyalty and flourishes at its expense.[26]

Religious leaders presented a more formidable body of opposition, particularly the prestigious Sanusi Order and its followers in Barqa and Fazzan. Indeed, the abortive coup in 1970, headed by 'Abd Allah 'Abid al-Sanusi, a cousin of King Idris, together with a number of leading tribal figures of the old regime living in exile, was designed to mobilize the substantial fervour of the Sanusi movement that remained strong in some parts of Libya. In dealing with this group, al-Qathafi and the rest of the RCC moved quickly to establish their own religious credentials. In the revolutionary constitution they proclaimed that 'Islam is the official religion of the state and the Qur'an the ultimate source of legislation.'[27] Combining words with deeds, the revolutionary leaders were quick to abolish all non-Islamic practices: alcohol, which had been readily enough available under the monarchy, was now prohibited, strict Islamic punishments including amputations and stonings were put into practice, and the precedence of the Arabic alphabet over the Latin was reinstated. Moreover, many Muslim movements around the world were given aid, mosques and schools in Africa, Asia, and Europe were built, and preachers were sent out to many countries. The RCC's attempt to establish its religious credentials was facilitated by the fact that it was made up of people who had been pious Muslims since their early days in Sabha, Musrata, and later in the Military Academy.

With his own religious status established, al-Qathafi began to pull the rug from under the religious leaders' feet. He started by accusing them of being a class of priests

and emphasizing that in Islam there were no priests or clergy. Islam, he declared, was a religion based upon the direct communication of the individual with God, an emphasis which was in fact similar to what the Grand Sanusi had preached three generations before him. It was al-Qathafi's ambition to abolish what had become a class of priests and lead a return to the fundamental link between God and man.[28] Al-Qathafi's revivalist ideas and his interpretation of Islam led to increased opposition from the traditional religious leaders in Libya and from conservative Arab countries.

In a similar way, al-Qathafi rejected mediation between the Revolution and the people, which meant disbanding political parties and labour and student unions. Although these organizations had been the main opponent of the old regime and had proclaimed their support for the Revolution, al-Qathafi and his associates were suspicious of their activities. Al-Qathafi in particular had no faith in political parties and, since his early days, had ruled out the idea of working within a party framework.[29] Later, in his *Green Book*, al-Qathafi dismissed parties as non-democratic because they were composed of people who have common interests, a common outlook, or a common culture that is exclusive to others. The *Green Book* states that 'the party governs on behalf of the people, but the principle is no representation in lieu of the people... the party is only a part of the people, but the sovereignty of the people is indivisible.'[30] During the early years of the Revolution, former party members were given one month to drop their party affiliations and the slogan became, 'He who belongs to a party is a traitor.'

The other important factor which consolidated and legitimated the Revolution was the emergence of al-Qathafi as a charismatic leader. From the beginning, al-Qathafi appeared as a remarkable figure and, in a few years, became a symbol of national unity and pride. This quality of leadership was based on two things: personality and his record of revolutionary achievement. As one observer of Libyan politics noted, the remarkable record of achievement in particular 'can, in a country with a history of national

oppression, turn a leader into a popular hero.'[31] That is indeed exactly what happened in the case of al-Qathafi. The Revolution's remarkable achievements during the seventies created for him an image of forcefulness and success, and transformed him into a hero in the eyes of a large majority of the Libyan populace.

*5.4 Evolution of the political system*

On the eve of the Revolution, al-Qathafi and his associates realized that they lacked the political instrument on which they could rely. Apart from a short period during the monarchical regime, all opposition political organizations had been banned, but even if political parties *had* existed, it is doubtful that they would have been allowed to play any role. As has been mentioned earlier, the revolutionary leaders have always been suspicious of traditional political organizations and so they began the search for a new political system that could carry out the Revolution's aims. It proved to be no easy task.

The formal structure of the Libyan political system during the early period consisted of two bodies: the RCC and the Cabinet or Council of Ministers. In the early days, the RCC became the dominant power in the country, monopolizing both policy direction and legislative functions. That dominance was officially announced on the 11th December 1969, when the 1951 constitution was replaced by a constitutional proclamation which designated the RCC as the highest authority in Libya. Until 1977, the RCC functioned as the supreme authority and was assisted by a Council of Ministers, which carried out the RCC's policies and supervised the day-to-day administration of the government.

**Table 3**
**The Cabinet of the 8th September 1969**

| Name | Post |
|---|---|
| Dr. Mahmud Sulayman al-Maghribi | Prime Minister, Finance, Agriculture and Agriculture Reform |
| Mr. Salih al-Buyasir | Unity and Foreign Affairs |
| Major Adam Sa'id al-Hawwaz | Defence |
| Major Musa Ahmad | Interior |
| Mr. Anis Ahmad Shitaywi | Petroleum, Labour and Social Affairs |
| Mr. 'Ali 'Umaysh | Economy, Planning and Industry |
| Mr. Muhammad Shetwi* | Education and National Guidance |
| Mr. Muhammad al-Jadi | Justice |
| Dr. Muftah al-Usta 'Umar | Health, Public Works and Communications |

Source: Ansell & al-Arif, *Libyan Revolution*, 62.
*Mr. Shetwi resigned on the 23rd September 1969.

The first government was appointed a week after the Revolution. The RCC named a nine-man Cabinet under the premiership of Sulayman al-Maghribi, the erstwhile leader of the oil-workers' revolt in 1967 (see Table 3). The new Foreign Minister was Salih al-Buyasir, a journalist who had previously gone into exile in Egypt to avoid arrest for his outspoken criticism of the monarchical regime.[32] The only military presence in the Cabinet was that of the two sympathetic senior officers: Adam al-Hawwaz, the Defence Minister, and Musa Ahmad, the Interior Minister.

The Cabinet's formation shows that the RCC intended to govern indirectly through sympathetic civilian representatives who accepted the superior position of the RCC, but this solution theatened to create a situation of dual power in the country. It was not only that the RCC found it difficult to impose its will on the government; in addition some members of the Cabinet, with their popularity increasing daily at the expense of the still anonymous RCC members, became convinced that they could steal the Revolution from

its real leaders. The most direct threat came from the military members of the Cabinet, Musa Ahmad and Adam al-Hawwaz. On the 10th December 1969, less than four months after the Revolution had taken place, it was discovered that both men were engaged in a conspiracy to topple the RCC and establish in its place their own leadership. The motives behind the plot were never fully ascertained, but it seems that rivalry and personal clashes between these two men on the one side and some of the RCC members on the other were the principal reasons.

Following the abortive coup, the RCC decided to abandon the policy of working through intermediaries and acted swiftly to reinforce its own position. On the 11th December, the RCC issued a provisional constitutional proclamation, comprising a preamble followed by three separate parts. The preamble detailed the causes of the Revolution, the claims to legitimation of the regime, the nature of Arab nationalist philosophy, and also stressed the guiding principles of freedom, socialism, and unity. Part one defined the state, describing Libya as 'a free Arab democratic republic in which sovereignty rests with the people, who constitute part of the Arab nation and whose objective is overall Arab unity.'[33] It also reaffirmed the establishment of Islam as the state religion and Arabic as the official language.[34] Part two described the system of government, making it clear that the RCC was the highest authority. It held sovereign power, promulgated laws and decrees, decided in the name of the people the state's general policies, and took all precautions it might consider necessary for protecting the Revolution and the republican regime.[35] In addition, it appointed, and could dismiss, the President and members of the Council of Ministers, who were jointly and severally responsible to the RCC.[36] Finally, it was also the RCC which controlled the armed forces, ordered the provisions of the state's general budget, declared war, nominated diplomatic representatives abroad, and accepted the accreditation of the representatives of foreign powers.[37]

The first Cabinet reshuffle was made very soon after, on the 16th January, when the RCC appointed a new government after having received the resignation of Prime Minister al-Maghribi (see Table 4). The new Cabinet was expanded from nine to thirteen posts, with al-Qathafi as Prime Minister and Defence Minister. Eight months later, the composition of the Council of Ministers was changed once again. The formation of the Cabinets indicated the departure from the old regime's way of recruiting people for top positions, which had been largely based on tribalism and regionalism. At least during the period under study, the RCC was not in favour of keeping a balance between the different regions at the expense of national interests. Its main criteria for recruiting candidates for key positions, such as Cabinet membership, were primarily belief in the Revolution's principles of freedom, socialism, and unity; merit; and educational qualifications.

**Table 4**
**The Cabinet of the 16th January 1970**

| Name | Post |
|---|---|
| Colonel Mu'ammar al-Qathafi | Prime Minister and Defence, Chairman of the RCC and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces |
| Major 'Abd al-Salam Jallud | Deputy Prime Minister, Interior and Local Administration, RCC Member |
| Major Bashir Hawwadi | Education and National Guidance, RCC Member |
| Captain 'Umar al-Mahishi | Economy and Industry, RCC Member |
| Captain Muhammad al-Meqaryaf | Housing and Municipalities, RCC Member |
| Mr. Salih al-Buyasir | Unity and Foreign Affairs |
| Dr. 'Umar al-Hadi Ramadan | Communications and Public Works |
| Mr. Muhammad al-Jadi | Justice |
| Dr. Muftah al-Usta 'Umar | Health |
| Dr. Juma' Shariha | Agriculture |
| Mr. 'Izz al-Din al-Mabruk | Petroleum and Minerals |
| Mr. 'Abd al-'Ati al-'Ubaydi | Labour and Social Affairs |
| Mr. Muhammad Hilal Rabi | Treasury |

Source: Ansell & al-Arif, *Libyan Revolution*, 118.

*5.4.1 The Arab Socialist Union (ASU)*

Until 1971, the RCC had not developed any mechanism capable of bridging the gap between itself and the people. As Arab nationalists, al-Qathafi and his companions looked to the Nasserist experiment in Egypt as an example which they could follow. Therefore, on the 11th June 1971, al-Qathafi, as Chairman of the RCC, announced the formation of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) as a mass organization composed of the working forces of the Revolution, defined as farmers, workers, intellectuals, soldiers, and what were called 'non-exploitive' capitalists. It was not so much a party as an organization of mass mobilization, intended to provide a single vehicle for popular political participation and representation.

The RCC hoped that the ASU would fill the vacuum left by the abandonment of political parties and the discrediting of the tribal and religious leaders. With its stand for liberty, Islamic socialism, Arab unity, popular democracy, and anti-colonialism, the ASU embodied the core values of the RCC and a large majority of the Libyan people, although this does not deny the fact that it faced hostility from the traditional tribal and religious leaders.[38] The general public, however, were passive and apathetic. As a result, al-Qathafi became convinced that the ASU and the state apparatus required an urgent major transformation, which got under way on the 15th April 1973 when he launched the 'Popular Revolution', sometimes called the 'Cultural Revolution'.

*5.4.2 The Popular Revolution*

After the failure of the ASU to achieve the Revolution's goals and the escalation of tension between those who wanted to duplicate Egypt's political structure and those who did not, al-Qathafi started putting his own theory into practice. Although he did not completely denounce Nasserism, he wanted to create political and economic organizations which would help the Libyan Revolution avoid the kind of problems that many other revolutions had come up against. Al-Qathafi believed that the failure of revolutionary

leaders in the Arab world and other Third World countries (for instance, Nasser in Egypt, Sukarno in Indonesia, and Nkrumah in Ghana) had been caused by their regimes' weak organization, lack of revolutionary theory, and dependency on one charismatic leader. Once this leader disappeared, al-Qathafi argued, revolutionary practice came to an end and anti-revolutionary elements began to surface.

In a major speech in the city of Zuwara on the 15th April 1973, al-Qathafi announced that the previous three years had not been part of the true Libyan Revolution, but 'an introduction to the veritable revolution in which the masses take over power in order to govern themselves by themselves.'[39] He incited the population to take direct action against those elements in society which had become 'insulators' between the Revolution and the masses. In practice, he proposed a five-point programme, consisting of: (1) the suspension of all laws which hinder the development of the Revolution; (2) purging the country of the 'politically sick'; (3) arming the people; (4) an administrative revolution to destroy bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie; and (5) a cultural revolution to refute and destroy everything contrary to the Holy Qur'an.[40]

To achieve this programme, al-Qathafi called on the people to seize power through People's Committees, which were to be elected throughout Libya. Direct elections were normally held in large open spaces and voting was usually conducted by show of hands rather than by secret ballot. They were also largely restricted to organizations within geographic administrative districts, with the more general levels of representation being achieved by the election of representatives of zone committees to municipal and provincial committees. Each municipality had special occupational committees for teachers, lawyers, farmers, engineers, and other specialized groups. Once constituted, both the municipal and provincial popular committees became bodies independent from each other, and elected chairmen who in turn became mayor and governor respectively.

There was a complex web of ideological and tactical considerations behind the decision to establish the system of People's Committees.[41] Al-Qathafi and his close associates hoped that this experiment would put an end to people's passivity and lead to the destruction of the traditional socio-political power base and what was seen as the classical bureaucratic system. They also hoped that it would broaden the base of public participation and involvement, which, in turn, could develop the people's awareness of themselves as active citizens in the state-building process. The establishment of the People's Committees would also make the Libyan people responsible for their own affairs instead of relying on foreigners to do the hard work. Finally, it was hoped that the new system would provide Libyans with the opportunity to purge the bureaucracy of obstructive elements and to help the Revolution in its confrontation with the anti-regime factions.

The new system of decision-making was largely positive in terms of the objectives set up by the RCC. It redefined the RCC's control of the Revolution and provided it with a new group of young activists who, unlike the traditional leaders, were sympathetic to the Revolution and closer to the grievances and demands of the public. On the other hand, the radical change from traditional administrative mechanisms to populists ones produced some confusion and inevitable mistakes. Many members of the People's Committees proved to be opportunists seeking personal benefit, or to be more negligent and insensitive than the bureaucrats they were supposed to replace and control.[42] Furthermore, conflict over who would do what arose between the ASU and the People's Committees.

Yet, despite these shortcomings, the new system was an interesting experiment in popular self-government. For the first time in Libya's history, the populace was allowed to participate in the policy-making process. The system produced a relatively high level of public response and involvement in political life within the limits allowed by the RCC.

The ultimate result was an increase in the political involvement and experience of the Libyan people through active participation and the popular desire for democracy.

*5.4.3 Direct democracy*

The other major turning-point in the development of the Libyan political system came in 1975, when al-Qathafi's personal leadership over the RCC was firmly established with the elimination of the RCC members who were in disagreement with him. This purging enabled al-Qathafi to shape the country's domestic and foreign policy as he wished. Even so, Al-Qathafi remained dissatisfied with the progress of the Revolution, despite the general success of the People's Committees system, particularly in the area of political participation. There was, al-Qathafi claimed, too little direction and too much waste and confusion: the bureaucracy was extremely wasteful, the People's Committees were not making as much progress as expected, and the ASU had yet to effectively penetrate the masses.[43] All these shortcomings seem to have led al-Qathafi to conclude that the country was lacking an overall political framework that would integrate the revolutionary leadership, the bureaucracy, the ASU, and other unions into a cohesive and coherent political system in which the Libyan masses could participate. By 1975, al-Qathafi announced that these shortcomings required a total transformation of the Libyan political system into a system of direct popular democracy. But it seemed that not all the RCC members shared al-Qathafi's ideas, for there was no consensus among them on the next step for the development of Libya's political system.

The emergence of disputes among the RCC members may be attributed to the nature of the RCC itself. Although there was a certain degree of cohesion within the RCC, there was also divergence on the type of political system they should adopt and whether they should stay in power or return to their barracks.[44] The revolutionary leaders remained united against their common enemy manifested in the monarchical regime, but the bases of unity seemed to begin to disintegrate on the question of how to

run the country. For the first three or four years, the RCC adopted a collective leadership and worked as a collegial executive body with al-Qathafi as its leader, but this arrangement did not last for long. By 1975, the collective leadership broke down and intense policy conflicts came to the surface. These conflicts ultimately manifested themselves in a number of attempted coups, resignations, and defections. The most serious attempted coup was that led by 'Umar al-Mahishi, a RCC member and the Minister of Planning, who escaped to Tunisia when the plot was uncovered in August 1975.

By the end of 1975, the original twelve members of the RCC had lost over half their colleagues, but had perhaps become more cohesive. In addition to al-Mahishi's defection to Tunisia and from there to Egypt, Mukhtar al-Qarwi fled to the USA, al-Huni defected to Egypt, Hawwadi and Hamza were placed under house arrest, and Najm was relieved of his duties. The remaining five—al-Qathafi, Jallud, Yunis Jabir, al-Kharubi, and al-Hamidi—were still on the RCC in 1995, although unreliable sources have claimed the withdrawal of Jallud.

While proving abortive, the coup nevertheless served as an opportunity for the victorious to purge the armed forces and the state apparatus of dissent, which gave al-Qathafi the chance to reinforce his leadership of the RCC and of the country. This is not to suggest that he was not the dominant figure prior to al-Mahishi's attempted coup, but with the crushing of the pro-Mahishi faction, the leadership of al-Qathafi became permanent and dominant.[45]

Having consolidated his position to the maximum, al-Qathafi began grouping the disparate tenets of his ideology under the umbrella of what came to be called the Third Universal Theory. This ideology was tentatively outlined at the Conference of European and Arab Youth held in Tripoli in May 1973, but it was never fully elaborated until 1975.[46] In April 1975, al-Qathafi announced the transformation of the ASU into

People's Congresses, to provide 'the exciting democratic experiment of people's power.' A year later, the ASU reconstituted itself as the General People's Congress (GPC). This new move gave a broader meaning to the popular revolution; it was not enough that administratively the country was being run by the Popular Committees, because politically the decisions were still being made 'on behalf of the people'.

The Third Universal Theory was set out in its final shape in the *Green Book*. In part one of this document, which deals with the problem of democracy, al-Qathafi rejected both communism and capitalism as well as virtually all types of political system. He believed that there can be no genuine representation on behalf of the people and that Parliament, parties, factions, groups, tribes, sects, or segments of the populace cannot speak or act for the whole people. According to the *Green Book*, parliamentary democracy is a form of 'misrepresentation and all representation is fraud and a falsification of democracy.'[47] In al-Qathafi's view, the basic problem of society was the conflict between the instruments of government. As a solution to this problem, he suggested the establishment of popular democracy devoid of class, elites, political parties, and all other kinds of governmental instruments. He advocated a kind of democracy based on absolute popular power where the people are the true owners of powers, riches, and arms. The people would be not only the source of power, but also the instrument of governing themselves, without intermediaries, representation, or deputation.

Al-Qathafi suggested in the *Green Book* a horizontal reorganization of society in which authority flows upward from the sovereign people at the bottom to the General People's Congress at the top. Popular Committees and People's Congresses were to be formed at the local, regional, and national levels to ensure direct mass political participation at all levels and in all matters.

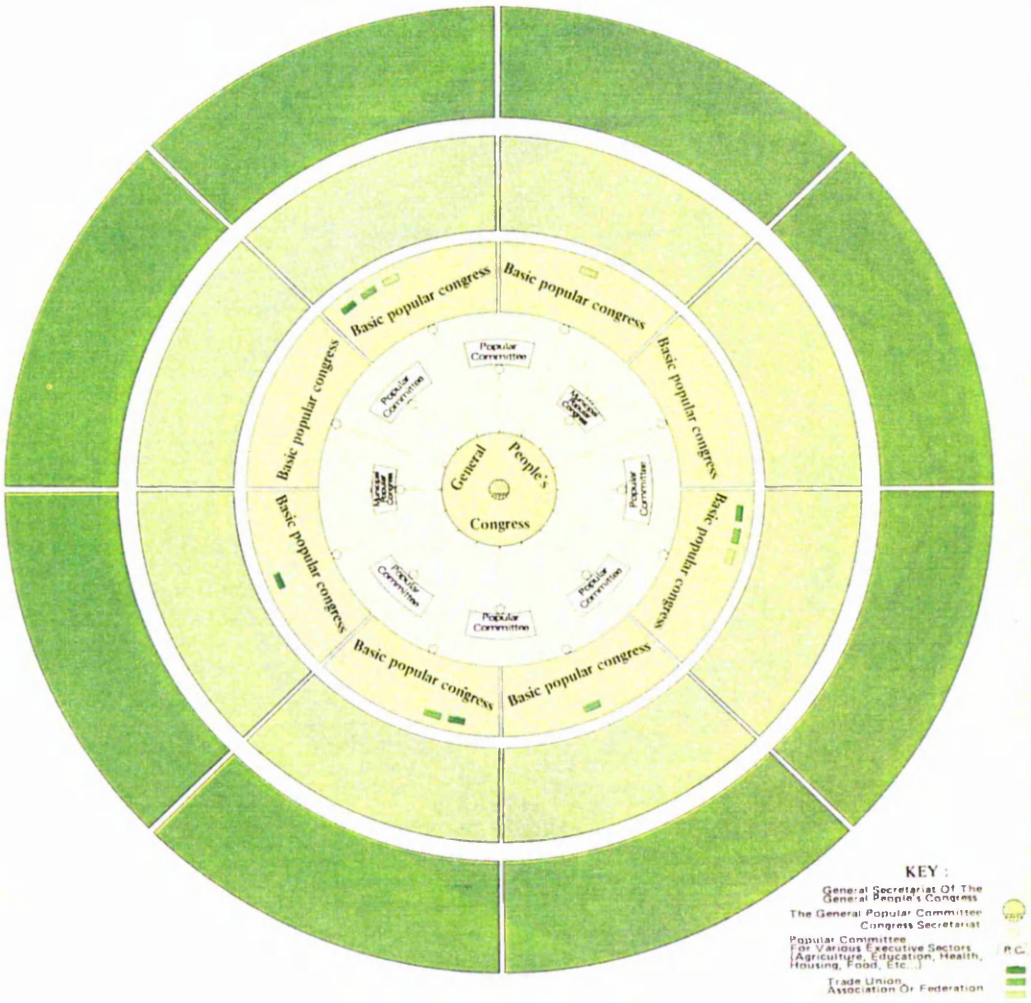
According to the *Green Book*, the people would be divided into Basic People's Congresses (BPCs) and each BPC would choose a secretariat, whose responsibility would be to make preparations for holding the BPC sessions and for its agenda. The BPCs would also choose Administrative Popular Committees to replace formal organs of the governmental management, so that all services in society would be run by Popular Committees which would be responsible to the BPCs. The latter would dictate the policies to be followed by the Popular Committees and supervise their execution. All issues debated by the BPCs would take their final shape in the General People's Congress (GPC), which would not be a congregation of members or individuals as was the case in parliaments; it was a general assembly of popular congresses, popular committees and unions, syndicates, and professional associations. Thus, in theory at least, BPCs became the bodies in which complete authority and power of decision-making resided (see Chart 1).[48]

*5.4.4 The establishment of people's authority*

In November 1976, al-Qathafi put forward a draft declaration on the establishment of the people's power. The draft called for the abolition of the RCC and the dismantling of the government, and suggested instead the immediate transfer of power to the GPC. On the 2nd March 1977, the GPC, meeting in Sabha, issued a *Declaration of the Authority of the People*, which was based on the principles contained in the first communiqué of the Revolution, the constitutional declaration of 1969, and the Zuwara speech in Zuwara city on the 15th April 1973.[49] It proclaimed that direct power of the people was the foundation of the political system in Libya and that all kinds of conventional institutions of government—authoritarian, familial, tribal, factional, class, parliamentary, partisan, or party coalition—would be ended. Libya's name became the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya and the Holy Qur'an was declared to be the code of society.[50]

**Chart 1**

**Organizational framework for popular authority**




Organizational framework for popular authority

Source: Taken from *Al jamahiriya*, prepared by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, Department of Moral Guidance, p. 51

Thus, in theory at least, direct popular democracy was to be the basis for the new political system and complete authority and power of decision-making were vested in the BPCs. Under the new system of *Jamahiriya*, the people were to be the active participants in the decision-making processes, which meant that each village, town, municipality, and city had its BPC.[51] Rather than being the bottom of the power structure, these BPCs were the power structure itself and no individual or group was capable of circumventing or overriding their resolutions and recommendations.

In general, the new system of direct democracy has proved relatively successful. It has provided the opportunity for the large majority of the Libyan people to participate in the process of nation-building. It has enabled them to become actively involved in local government and even at the national level. Indeed, for the first time in Libya's history, an ordinary citizen has not only been able to participate in discussion, but to put forward his or her recommendations and make decisions on all major issues, ranging from economics to nuclear energy development.[52]

Counterbalancing this relative success, however, the new experiment was not without a certain number of shortcomings. It was no easy task for the Libyan people to run their own affairs after long years of exclusion from any kind of political participation. Throughout their modern history, the Libyan people have been subjected, in one way or another, to rule from above: from the Turks to the Italians to the monarchy. As a result, they had grown suspicious of *any* kind of government and so were reluctant to become part of the decision-making process when, after 1969, they were granted this right. Consequently, the new system of direct democracy was affected by non-participation and abstention. This problem may also in part be attributed to illiteracy, inexperience, and sometimes the people's unfamiliarity with some subjects of discussion, such as defence, oil, and foreign policy.

The other challenge facing the Libyan experiment was the role of al-Qathafi and the RCC members. The question was raised about the position of al-Qathafi after the declaration of the 'people's authority', which placed, at least in theory, all authority, wealth, and weapons in the hands of the people.[53] Al-Qathafi answered the question whether he was still the President of Libya or not by saying that 'there are no representatives of the people, no imposters, and the people practice sovereignty totally and the power of the RCC has been terminated. But there are daily things which the RCC is able to do for the people.'[54] So the only justification for al-Qathafi's presence at the pinnacle of the Libyan state was the role he could play in the transitional period. He stated,

> The transformation from a condition of backwardness to one of civilisation, from what we are to what we should be, the transition from the Revolution to the state will certainly not be easy... The cost will be high [but] it is the law of life, it is the cost of the progress, the liberation and the emancipation we want to attain.[55]

Indeed, al-Qathafi sees himself as a unifying figure and interpreter of the general will, whose mission it is to guide the masses during the transition stage. Unsurprisingly, Libyan people found it difficult, when acting corporately, to execute particular functions that had been traditionally reserved to the head of the state. This made the guiding role of al-Qathafi and the RCC inevitable during the transition period, but how long it will take to complete this transition stage nobody can predict. In his speech on the twentieth anniversary of the Revolution, al-Qathafi claimed that the Revolution had just started and that the preceding twenty years had only been an introduction to it.

Following the declaration of the 'people's authority' and his resignation from all formal positions in the government, al-Qathafi recognized the need for revolutionary mobilization within the BPCs. He therefore called for the establishment of Revolutionary Committees to instigate the people to 'practise authority' and to counter behavioural problems such as absence from sessions and the tendency to pursue individual interests.

Although the term 'Revolutionary Committees' was not once mentioned in the *Green Book*, structurally they became parallel to the People's Congresses and Popular Committees. For every BPC and PC, a Revolutionary Committee was instituted. The general objectives of the Revolutionary Committees were outlined by al-Qathafi as: to orient the People's Committees; to incite People's Congresses to consolidate the people's authority; to encourage the people to exercise their authority; to exercise revolutionary supervision; and to protect the Revolution, defend it, and preach for it.[56]

It should be noted that the Revolutionary Committees are different from other, traditional revolutionary organizations, for while in other scenarios the revolutionary vanguard aimed at reaching power, the Revolutionary Committees movement in Libya is supposed to have nothing to do with governing. Al-Qathafi has made it clear that the Revolutionary Committees would not be a party of the vanguard, nor of any of the traditional institutions, but rather something similar to the 'nerve in the human body'. He has also given verbal assurances that the movement would not and should not constitute a class above the people. On the contrary, it should be a part of the people, an effective political movement among them to consolidate their authority. The Revolutionary Committees are an open movement for all the people who believe in the principles of the Revolution.[57] They are also supposed to be a temporary institution that will automatically disappear after the majority of the people become conscious of their role, but the possibility remains that this movement could easily begin to separate itself from the masses and become a power centre in itself.

*5.5 The new political system and Libyan foreign policy*

The implications of the new political system for Libya's foreign policy have been considerable. It has greatly affected the way in which foreign policy decisions are formulated and the bodies responsible for their implementation. In accordance with the system of direct democracy, the People's Congresses draw up the policies and the Popular

Committees, each according to its speciality, implement them. In the foreign policy arena, the General Popular Committee of the People's Bureau for Foreign Affairs is entrusted to implement resolutions and recommendations relating to foreign affairs after they have taken their final shape in the GPC. Although they have proved to be more difficult for the public to deal with than domestic matters, foreign policy issues have not been excluded from the agenda, and sometimes have even overshadowed domestic issues. So, for example, in 1980, a wide range of foreign policy issues was discussed including the United Nations Charter, US missile bases in southern Italy, events in Lebanon, Arab unity in the Maghrib, relations with African states, and the policies of the PLO.[58] In 1984, major decisions relating to foreign affairs were adopted, including resolutions to institute 'a total economic and political boycott' of the USA, to freeze relations with both Zaire and Liberia because of their resumption of relations with Israel, and to support the new Fath revolutionary movement (Abu Musa's anti-'Arafat faction). The agenda for the session held in February-March 1986 focused on Libya's economic situation and a government reshuffle, but also included a call for the Central Bank of Libya to seek the assistance of other central banks to end the US freeze on Libyan assets and the formation of suicide squads to strike at Libya's enemies.[59]

The new political system affected not only the political structure inside Libya but also outside the country. Since overseas embassies represented government bodies and the government had been abolished in Libya to be replaced by the system of People's Congresses and Popular Committees, these embassies had to be transformed to reflect the change inside the country. Therefore, in 1979, in a speech marking the tenth anniversary of the Revolution, al-Qathafi called for Libyan nationals abroad, the majority of whom were students, to take over the Libyan embassies and transform them into 'People's Bureaux'. In explanation, he stated that 'all the embassies continue to represent government bodies at a time when the government has disappeared in our country.'[60] With minor variations, the pattern of taking-over was remarkably constant and the

transformation went smoothly. In the countries where Libyan students were in large numbers, they chose five members among themselves to form a popular committee to take over the embassy and transform it into a People's Bureau. Anyone who was unhappy with the new arrangement was apparently free to leave, but this rarely happened; usually, existing embassy staff announced that they would stay on.

In Britain, just after al-Qathafi's call, the Libyan embassy was taken over and a People's Committee of five members was formed. This action was not welcomed by the British government. A spokesman for the Foreign Office announced that they were waiting to find out from Libya whether the students were accredited representatives. He said, 'Until we get something positive we are not recognising them as being their country's representatives here.'[61] Similar actions were organized at the Libyan embassies in Washington, Athens, Rome, and Malta, but only after May 1980 did the operation begin to accelerate. In non-Arab countries, such as Britain and Germany, the bureaux are called People's Bureaux, whereas in Arab countries they are called Brotherhood Bureaux.

In line with this unprecedented political system, the Libyan government claimed that it conducted the country's foreign policy on the basis that the permanent relations are best developed between peoples, not between governments. In a speech marking the 11th anniversary of the evacuation of the British bases in Libya, al-Qathafi said that 'the Libyan revolution was not seeking the friendship of governments, which "fell every day" but wanted the friendship of peoples.'[62] Earlier in 1980, on the arrival of the four Libyan diplomats deported from Washington, a spokesman in the Bureau for Foreign Affairs said that 'the wave of popular revolution will persist in crumbling the bases of traditional diplomacy which is a function of the capitalist society. Instead, a new edifice of popular action and international relations between the peoples will be erected...'[63]

*5.6 Conclusion*

There is little doubt that the Libyan Revolution is one of the most radical revolutions the world has seen in terms of its overturning the political, economic, and social structures of the old regime. As far as the decision-making process is concerned, the Revolution has been quick and successful in dismantling the existing political system and creating a new one. The new political system of direct popular democracy, which started with the launching of the popular revolution in 1973 and took its final shape with the declaration of the people's authority in 1977, was unprecedented in Libya and the whole world and has brought about a completely new social, economic, and political order. This drastic change has inevitably had huge implications for the country's foreign policy.

The change did not, however, take place until after the consolidation of the Revolution and the leadership of al-Qathafi. With the early nationalist achievements and populist reforms, the new revolutionary regime has created a generous fund of political capital, which has brought legitimacy and consolidation to the Revolution and its leaders. Indeed, with the evacuation of the British and American military bases, the expulsion of the Italian settlers, the nationalization of the oil companies, and many other achievements on all levels, al-Qathafi and his colleagues could rest on their laurels and govern Libya indefinitely in the traditional way. However, since the formation of the Free Unionist Officers movement back in 1959, the aim was not to launch a coup to change the government but to start a popular revolution that could change the socio-economic and political structure of Libya. Yet enthusiasm alone was not enough. It soon became clear that the new regime lacked the political organization capable of mobilizing the population to overcome all obstacles that a revolutionary transformation might encounter. At first, the new regime tried to duplicate Egypt's political structure by adopting the ASU, but al-Qathafi had his own ideas. As early as 1973, he launched what he called the popular revolution and urged the people everywhere to form their Popular Committees and to run the administration. Later, the need to give a broad meaning to the popular revolution

became clear. It was not enough for al-Qathafi that administratively the country was being run by Popular Committees, because politically decisions were still being made by the RCC. Therefore, al-Qathafi launched a new wave of political changes by declaring the establishment of People's Congresses in order to formulate policy from the grass-roots. Such policies were taken upward from below, at the level of Basic People's Congresses, to ever-higher levels until the highest national General People's Congress.

The impact of the new political system on Libya's foreign policy has been evident. Issues of foreign affairs were discussed in the BPCs, and decisions and recommendations were taken to the GPC. Furthermore, Libya's embassies around the world were transformed into People's Bureaux and run by People's Committees. The change was faced with some difficulties, among them the initial refusal by some countries, such as Britain, to accept the new arrangements.

However, despite all these changes which do indeed give the Libyan people a greater role in the decision-making process, al-Qathafi remains at the pinnacle of the Libyan political system as the principal decision-maker at all levels, especially in foreign affairs. This exceptional role was earned, on the one hand, by al-Qathafi's personal legitimacy as a charismatic leader and, on the other hand, by the early nationalist successes and populist reforms. It seems that while al-Qathafi did genuinely want the people to seize power and govern themselves through the system of People's Congresses, when the outcome departs from what he takes to be the general will of the people, he will intervene to set it right.

**NOTES**

1. In an interview with Donald Maitland, the former British Ambassador to Libya (Bath, 30th October 1996), Maitland claimed that al-Qathafi's view of the world had been conditioned to an important extent by *Sawt al-'Arab.*

2. For a full account of the Revolution, see *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, VIII (1976-8) 67-114; and 'Revolutionaries' memories', in *ibid.*, VI (1974-5) 47-106.

3. Donald Maitland, *Diverse times*, 160.

4. For the text of the first communiqué, see *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I (1969-70) 9 f.

5. Healey, *Time of my life*, 383.

6. 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Huni, a former RCC member who fled to Egypt and became one of al-Qathafi's opponents, made it clear that Nasser had no prior knowledge of the Revolution and that al-Qathafi was adamant not to let Egypt or any other state know (*Al-Wasat*, nos. 187-9 (Aug.-Oct. 1995).

7. Blundy & Lycett, *Qathafi*, 54 (Blundy and Lycett's account is to be received with caution as they appear to have relied too heavily on journalistic and CIA sources).

8. For more details on the take-over, see *The Economist*, 6 Sept. 1969, 12 f.

9. In an interview (in Bath, 30th October 1996) with Donald Maitland, the first British Ambassador to Libya after the Revolution, Maitland said that in a meeting following the formalities, it emerged that al-Qathafi and his colleagues had indeed expected the British to invade after their take-over. See also Maitland, *Diverse times*, 160.

10. Donald Maitland, *Diverse times*, 160.

11. Blundy & Lycett, *Qathafi*, 7.

12. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, III, 424.

13. *Al-Ahram*, 5th September 1969; *Times*, 6th September 1969.

14. Personal interview with Peter Tripp, Powys, 7th October 1996.

15. Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 8 f.

16. *Ibid.*, 13 f.

17. The new regime assured the USA, Britain, France, and the USSR in particular that it intended to respect all pacts and agreements, and would protect the lives and property of foreigners. *New York Times*, 3 Sept. 1969. See also Maitland, *Diverse Times*, 160.

18. Quoted in First, *Libya*, 115. See also *New York Times*, 5 Oct. 1969.

19. Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 13.

20. *Ibid.*, 15. See also *New York Times*, 7 Sept. 1969.

21. At the time of the outbreak of the Revolution in 1969, the present author was about eight years old and witnessed some of those spontaneous and sincere demonstrations of support.

22. Maitland, *Diverse Times*, 166.

23. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 21.

24. *Ibid.*, 22.

25. El-Fathaly & Palmer, *Political development*, 53.

26. Al-Qathafi, *Green Book*, 85.

27. Ansell & al-Arif, *Libyan Revolution*, 108.

28. The basis for this information and many others is the author's own knowledge of the development of the revolution during the seventies and the eighties, which is common knowledge among the attentive public.

29. Bianco, *Gadafi*, 29.

30. *Green Book*, 15.

31. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 283.

32. The late Salih al-Buyasir was one of the victims killed when the civilian Libyan airliner was downed by aggressive Israeli fighters on the 23rd February 1973. For more details on the newly appointed government, see *The Economist*, 13 Sept. 1969.

33. *Provisional constitutional proclamation*, in Ansell & al-Arif, *Libyan Revolution*, 108-113, Article I.

34. *Ibid.*, Article 2.

35. *Ibid.*, Article 18.

36. *Ibid.*, Article 19.

37. *Ibid.*, Articles 19, 23, 24, 26.

38. For more details on the ASU, see Alexander, "Libya", 215.

39. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 467-497.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Alexander, "Libya", 217.

42. Hinnebusch, "Charisma", 64.

43. El-Fathaly & Palmer, *Political development*, 135.

44. For more details, see the report of the interview with 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Huni, a former RCC member, in *al-Wasat*, nos. 187-9 (Aug.-Oct. 1995).

45. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 148.

46. For the full text of the speech, see *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 731-750.

47. *Green Book*, 9 f.

48. *Green Book*, 27.

49. For more details on the Zuwara speech, see this chapter, p.173.

50. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, VIII, 324 f. See also *The Guardian*, 3 Mar. 1977 and *New York Times*, 4 Mar. 1977.

51. For more details, see *Africa report* (July-Aug. 1977) 21-27.

52. See Alexander, "Libya", 218 f.

53. See *The Guardian*, 3 Mar. 1977.

54. Al-Fathaly & Palmer, *Political development*, 149.

55. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, VII, 140-154.

56. *Commentary on the Green Book*, no. 16, 1 f.

57. For more details, see *ibid.*

58. St. John, *Qaddafi's world design*, 132.

59. For more discussion of the issue, see Niblock, "People's power in action", *The Guardian*, 1 Sept. 1978.

60. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, XI, 43 f. See also *New York Times*, 3 Sept. 1979.

61. *Times Supplement*, 9th September 1979.

62. *The Arab World*, 1 April 1981, 10.

63. *Ibid.*, 14 May 1980, 8.

# CHAPTER SIX

# CONFLICTUAL RELATIONSHIPS

*6.1 Introduction*

The rise to power of al-Qathafi and his colleagues in 1969 marked a major turning-point in Libya's foreign policy. The Revolution of 1969 not only caused a change in Libya's internal policies, but likewise the country's foreign policy underwent a marked radical change. Previously, Libya had been little more than a satellite for Western interests, providing important military bases for the USA and Britain. As a consequence of the Revolution, Libya adopted an active policy of non-alignment with the big powers, both Eastern and Western, while simultaneously pursuing a policy of involvement in Third World and Pan-Arab affairs. Indeed, driven by their nationalistic convictions, the revolutionary leaders were determined, from the very beginning, to end the subordination of Libya's foreign policy to Western interests and to bring the country into active involvement in the affairs of the Arab world.

As far as Britain was concerned, post-revolutionary Libyan-British relations were to grow progressively more strained and antagonistic. In contrast to the state of affairs during the monarchical period, diplomatic relations between the two countries went from bad to worse until they reached a point of breakdown in April 1984. The two countries appeared to have too many diametrically opposed views on world questions in general and on Middle Eastern questions in particular. What Libya saw as justifiable and legitimate appeared to Britain as a blatant threat to her own national interests and *vice versa.* As a result, relations soon started to deteriorate. Nevertheless, despite the deterioration in

political relations between the two countries, Libya and Britain remained bound by a web of common economic interests that both were reluctant to forego. Britain and her Western allies relied, to a greater or lesser degree, on supplies of Libyan crude oil, while Libya desired European goods and technology.

This chapter will examine the deterioration in the relations between Libya and Britain from 1969 and until they reached the point of breakdown in April 1984. The focus will be on how that happened, leaving the analysis of the underlying causes of the breakdown to the following part in the study. The discussion will revolve around several issues which prevented the two countries from establishing friendly relations, such as the British military presence in Libya, the air defence system and tanks deal, the nationalization of the British Petroleum Company, Libya's support for liberation movements, neutralization of the Mediterranean Sea, and the campaign of liquidation against political opponents abroad.

*6.2 The evacuation of the British bases*

It would be no exaggeration to say that the presence of foreign military bases in Libya was one of the main issues that undermined the credibility of the monarchical regime and, consequently, precipitated the eruption of the Revolution. The highly visible fact of foreign bases on Libyan soil, combined with rumours of their participation in the tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956 and their complicity with Israeli aggression in 1967, acted as a catalyst to stimulate challenges to the monarchical regime, especially when the excuse of economic necessity became invalid after the flow of oil revenues had begun.

As soon as the Revolution took place, al-Qathafi and his colleagues directed their attention to the presence of foreign military bases in Libya. For them the existence of the foreign bases on Libyan soil was an anachronism; it entailed not only a diminution of Libyan citizens' freedom, but also created a bridge through which Libya, or any other

Arab country, could become subjected to a military subversion campaign.[1] Donald Maitland has pointed out that 'in the eyes of the new leadership, the presence of foreign bases on Libyan soil was incompatible with the new identity they sought.'[2] Therefore, a complete and immediate evacuation of the British and American bases became the new leaders' first priority.

From the very beginning, the RCC asked the USA and Britain to cease undertaking training flights from Libyan bases.[3] Also, RAF flights in and out of the Al-'Adam base were limited to one a day and the British were refused permission to replace the army units which had been training in Barqa at the time of the Revolution.[4] These measures were designed to assert Libyan sovereignty and were immediately complied with by the two Western authorities. As its position became politically consolidated, the RCC took a further step in the direction of total evacuation. On the 16th October 1969, al-Qathafi declared that evacuation was a fundamental condition for Libyan freedom and he boldly pledged that he would turn the country into a battlefield if the British and Americans refused to leave unconditionally.[5] Two weeks later, on the 29th October, the RCC made its formal approach to Britain, asking for the British military's withdrawal from Libya at the earliest date. The request to Britain was made in a note handed over by the Libyan Foreign Minister, Salih al-Buyasir, to the British Ambassador, Donald Maitland.[6] A Foreign Office spokesman described the note as important, and said that it was under study and that a reply would be sent in due course.[7] Conveying his government's reply to the Libyan note of 29th October, the British Ambassador met al-Qathafi on the 13th November and informed him that they were ready to evacuate their troops.[8] The Ambassador added, 'We are ready to continue training the Libyan armed forces and would wish to retain training facilities for our forces.'[9] This last remark was immediately rejected by al-Qathafi.

The language of the Libyan revolutionaries was decisive and completely different from that which Britain had been used to hearing from the monarchical regime. Prior to the Revolution, there had been many statements by consecutive Libyan governments declaring their intention to close the foreign military bases, but nothing had been done of any consequence.[10] In fact, the successive governments were only trying to defuse public resentment and to pay lip service to President Nasser's demands for the closure of the foreign bases. In an interview Ivor Lucas, a former diplomat at the British embassy in Tripoli, pointed out that the British ambassador's contacts with the Libyan authorities persuaded the former that al-Muntasir's statement of 1964, in which he had claimed that Libya did not intend to renew the British and American agreements when they expired, 'was only a political move designed to take the steam out of the propaganda of the opposition.'[11] This attitude completely changed when al-Qathafi came to power. Britain and the USA were then faced by a new leader who brooked no compromise. In his speech delivered in Tobruq not long after taking power, al-Qathafi had announced that it was impossible for the Revolution to play host any longer to British military bases and threatened that the Revolution would, if necessary, use force to dislodge them from Libyan soil. Addressing a rally in Tobruq, he told the crowds,

> We say now in full strength, and as a challenge, that colonial powers should fully understand that their further presence in Libya has become impossible... We reject half solutions or postponements of the evacuation... if peaceful methods fail to achieve complete evacuation, the entire nation will be mobilized... We shall either die defending our country as martyrs or achieve victory, and we equally appreciate both alternatives.[12]

At first the British government appeared reluctant to accept the Libyan demand for the evacuation of her troops.[13] When Ambassador Maitland reported back to his government that there was no possibility of retaining the British troops any longer, London, in the words of Maitland, 'was not at all happy with this advice and sent representatives from the Ministry of Defence and the Commander-in-Chief in Cyprus.'[14] In his memoirs, Maitland has pointed out that it was no surprise that his

assessment of the situation was unwelcome to the Ministry of Defence and the Commander of British Forces in the Far East since 'Al-Adem was one of the jewels in his crown.'[15]

The decisiveness of the Revolution left Britain with no alternative but to either withdraw and use the fact of having done so as a means of maintaining her interests or to use force to resist the evacuation. For many reasons, she chose the former option.[16] Michael Stewart, the British Foreign Secretary, admitted that a new basis for a friendly relationship between the two countries needed to be found. He commented, 'Our friendship with Libya has been of long standing. It is clear now that we have to think out a different basis for it than the one which existed from the 1953 treaty.'[17] Britain appeared to have no wish to try and retain her military presence by force. Her unpleasant experience over the Suez crisis seemed to have warned her against further colonial adventures that might entail considerable risks in relation to their likely gains.[18] Furthermore, Britain did not want to jeopardize her growing economic interests in Libya. With her North Sea oilfields still not developed, Britain was taking about 15 per cent of her total oil requirement (of 90 million tons) from Libya; in 1969, deliveries were expected to be nearly 14 million tons, worth some £40 million to £50 million.[19] Moreover, the British Petroleum Company (BP) had invested some £75 million in Libya and was operating the biggest oilfield in Africa at al-Sarir. In addition to her interests in Libya's huge and expanding oil output, Britain was engaged in extensive engineering and defence projects in Libya worth some £130 million to £150 million.[20]

Although Britain had less need of an air staging-post for the movement of troops to Middle East or African trouble spots than in the 1950s, the loss of the training grounds in Barqa was certainly damaging. In addition to her strategic location, Libya had provided Britain and the United States with a sizeable amount of land for military training. This extensive terrain was appreciated by Donald Maitland, who led the British delegation in the negotiations for the evacuation. He said, 'The great military advantage which we had

in Libya was the training facility. We had an RAF staging post at Al-'Adam and a small garrison company in Tobruq. But the main use that we made of this was that we were able to send infantry regiments out to do training in desert warfare.'[21] Two months after the Revolution, the *Guardian* newspaper commented that

> the Libyan training areas are valued, not because we may one day be fighting another desert war—that is unlikely—but because they provide a rare opportunity for armoured and artillery units to stretch their limbs after the long period of confinement in West Germany, where they get only a small annual ration of exercise on stringently restricted training grounds.[22]

Ivor Lucas also saw the main advantage of the British bases in Libya as their being 'very good training areas' and was able to observe that in order to bring troops in for desert training, 'it was very useful to have people on the ground.'[23] He added that the RAF airbase at Al-'Adam 'was a very big staging post in our way to the Far East.'[24] Lucas further pointed out that since Britain still had commitments in the Middle East, Cyprus, and Malta, which were unstable areas, it was useful to have a small force close at hand in case it was required.[25] Moreover, with her unique climate, Libya provided the RAF with a full 365 days of flying weather a year.[26]

The advantages of withdrawing British bases peacefully seemed to outweigh the disadvantages and so the British government responded to the Libyan demand for their evacuation with a call for talks, which commenced on the 8th December in Tripoli, just three months after the Revolution had taken place. The Libyan side to the talks was headed by Jalloud, while Ambassador Maitland headed the British side. Al-Qathafi opened the first session by putting forward the broad outlines of the Libyan position. He began by stating the fact that military occupation had always been a repugnant basis for relations among states and that co-operation, friendship, and treaties ccould not flourish under a threat of force.[27] He emphasized that the freedom of Libya would be flawed

as long as a single foreign soldier remained on her soil.[28] Then he came to the point and said,

> I would like to advise the negotiators not to waste time in discussing the issue from the legal side by referring to the text of the treaty, because the question to be discussed today is related to the existence of foreign forces occupying a part of Libya and is not a question of a treaty at all. And it is enough that the man who ratified it is now in exile, and the man who prepared it is now in detention, and the constitution which allowed them to do so is now in the rubbish bin.[29]

The process could not be called a negotiation in the normal sense of the term, since the meetings were rather intended to work out the details of the evacuation. Thus the talks began on the 8th December 1969 and lasted only two sessions; in the second of these the British Ambassador conceded the principle of withdrawal. He declared that because of the new circumstances in Libya, Britain shared Libya's desire to change the basis on which existing relations had rested and to find a new basis for relations reflecting the interests of each of the two countries. He assured his opposite numbers that the British delegation would spare no effort to make the talks successful.[30] On the 13th December, at the end of the second session, a joint communique was issued in Tripoli declaring that an agreement had been concluded between the British and Libyan governments for the evacuation of all British forces and equipment from Libya, to begin on the 14th December and to be completed by the 31st March 1970.[31] Commenting on the agreement, Major Jalloud said it was proof of Britain's goodwill, which would lead to 'beneficial and honourable' relations between the two countries.[32] The evacuation issue appears to have been viewed differently by each country. Whereas it was a question of sovereignty and true independence from the new revolutionary leaders' point of view, for Britain it was a question of damage limitation with the basic purpose of protecting her extensive economic interests and clearing the atmosphere for further talks on the whole future of the British-Libyan relations.

The last British troops left Tobruq on the 28th March, three days ahead of schedule. The Libyan flag was raised at the base and twenty-five years of British occupation were ended. This was a great triumph for the Revolution and for al-Qathafi personally as he became a hero in the eyes of the Libyan people.[33] The British Ambassador to Libya, Donald Maitland, has compared al-Qathafi's victory over the foreign bases in Libya with Nasser's victory over the tripartite aggression in 1956 during the Suez Crisis.[34] As he was able to observe, 'the British military evacuation, which was followed by the American evacuation of Wheelus airbase, were as important to al-Qathafi's position at home and in the Arab world as Nasser's victory at the time of Suez affairs.'[35] On the 31st March, in a speech marking the completion of the evacuation of British troops, Al-Qathafi said that the Libyan people had been fooled by the monarchical regime when they had been told that the presence of foreign bases was a matter of economic necessity. He declared that the insistence of the defunct regime on the continuation of foreign bases in Libya was not for the sake of solving the country's economic problems or to extricate Libya from a cycle of backwardness, but to protect the privileges of the ruling family and its entourage.[36] He added that the monarchical regime should be asked if Libya had managed to rid herself of poverty, backwardness, and misery under the presence of the foreign bases. Answering the question himself, he argued that Libya had not gained any benefit or made any improvement under the presence of the British and American bases. To the contrary, he argued, the country had become more backward, and had been shackled and prevented from expressing her will by the presence of the foreign bases.[37] He further accused the foreign bases of having been used in attacking Egypt in 1956 and 1967 and for having threatened, practically and morally, nationalist forces in the Arab nation as a whole.[38]

In his call for total evacuation, al-Qathafi did not distinguish between the British and American bases; all had to be expelled. On the 24th December, the day after the British announced their withdrawal, the Americans agreed to follow suit by the 30th June

1970.[39] On the 11th June, nineteen days before the deadline, the Americans completed their withdrawal.

The evacuation of the British and American bases was indeed a great achievement. In less than nine months after the Revolution, almost twenty years of foreign occupation of sovereign Libyan territory were over. Maitland has observed that 'in very few months after the Revolution, al-Qathafi and his friends had achieved a number of things. They got both foreign bases out. They had achieved victories in a way.'[40] As a result, Libya became free of any constraints or restrictions and was able to follow the foreign policy that al-Qathafi believed would best serve the interests of the Libyan people. The evacuation also gave the revolutionary leaders the confidence and courage to press on with the same momentum to deal with other issues in domestic and foreign affairs.

Britain's readiness to withdraw without creating complications appeared to have created a friendly atmosphere on which good relations between the two countries could subsequently be based. On the 11th January 1970, al-Qathafi declared that the willingness with which the British had agreed to evacuate their military bases in Libya had paved the way for stronger ties between the two countries. He said,

> Personally, I think these good intentions are there on Britain's side also because she agreed to evacuate her military bases without hesitation. This has paved the way for good relations. However, these relations will inevitably grow in accordance with the mutual understanding and respect which is shown by both sides.[41]

Indeed, al-Qathafi seemed to have been optimistic that the future of the Libyan-British relationship would be positive and constructive. In this regard he said,

> From our side there are no problems to hinder the development of relations between us. And we hope that Britain and the United States will

> deal with us as we would deal with them. Our intentions are good and we hope that they will be reciprocated.[42]

Unfortunately, good intentions alone proved not to be enough to create harmonious relations between the two countries. Contrary to al-Qathafi's wishes and expectations, relations between Tripoli and London did not improve.

*6.3 Diversification of arms supplies sources*

The next obstacle to good relations between Britain and Libya was the prolonged disagreement over arms supplies. Before its downfall, the monarchical regime had signed on the 28th April 1968 a contract for the supply of British Aircraft Corporation Rapier and Thunderbird anti-aircraft missiles together with the electronic systems for their control.[43] It had also signed a contract for the maintenance of the missiles and training of the Libyan forces in their use. The contract was reported to have been worth at least £135 million.[44] Britain was also to supply Libya with modern arms, including 70-ton Chieftain tanks, anti-aircraft guns, and artillery, under an agreement signed in Tripoli on the 21st April 1969 by the British Minister of Defence, John Morris, and his Libyan counterpart, Hamid al-'Ubaidi.[45]

The defence system deal was of dubious value and virtue since it could be of no use to Libya except in a Western-backed conflict with her neighbours.[46] Even in such a situation, the deal would not guarantee Libya's independence. *The Times* defence correspondent, Charles Douglas-Home, noted that despite the defence build-up, 'There is little Libya could do on her own to withstand an overall and concerted invasion by Egyptian forces if that is what the government in Cairo intended. Libya's best defence against that eventuality would be to keep on as friendly terms with as much of the Arab world as possible.'[47] *The Economist* also observed that 'the Thunderbird high-altitude missiles included in the BAC defence contract seem out of place in Libya, which is not very likely to be exposed to high-flying bombers.'[48] The air defence system deal

puzzled even Libyans who were in favour of the regime: 'if there is a threat,' they said, 'it does not come from up there but from down there' (meaning subversion from neighbouring Egypt).[49]

However, after the Revolution, Libya had different defence priorities from the former ones. Contrary to the monarchical regime, which had adopted the British and American point of view that any serious threat to Libya would come from Egypt, revolutionary Libya viewed Egypt and all Arab countries as her closest allies, and believed that hostility could only come from the colonial powers, and from Britain and the USA in particular.[50] Therefore, in the light of the new political and security considerations, the deal had lost its defensive value for Libya and was viewed by the revolutionary leaders as entirely suspicious and only designed to serve the interest of imperialism and its agents in the Libyan government.[51] Inevitably, the deal was cancelled.[52] Peter Tripp, who had worked on ending the contract, pointed out that for most of his time in Libya in the early 1970s the dispute over the BAC contract was the key bone of contention between the British government (supporting BAC) and the Libyan government, asking for the money it had already paid.[53] Negotiations between the British Aircraft Corporation and representatives of the Libyan government failed to reach any agreement on the matter. A Foreign Office spokesman said that the British government was very sorry but not very surprised. He accepted that the Libyans were clearly dissatisfied with this very expensive contract they had inherited from King Idris and added that Idris's regime had had different defence priorities from the revolutionary regime, fearing an attack from Egypt, which had now become Libya's ally.[54]

The cancellation of the air defence system should not be taken to suggest that the new Libyan government was not interested in buying British weapons. On the contrary, Libya was still eager to follow through on the contract for the purchase of 200 Chieftain tanks which had been signed by the monarchical regime.[55] As Donald Maitland was able

to observe of his dealings with the new Libyan leadership, the supply of Chieftain tanks was regarded by them as 'the earnest of our good intentions.'[56] In Cairo a Libyan official said that although Libya had cancelled the air defence contract, she would spend the money on purchasing other British weapons.[57] But Britain not only turned down the Libyan offer but also held up the delivery of the Chieftains for which Libya had already paid £9 million.[58] At that point, tension between the two countries became evident. Libya demanded the return of £9 million if the Chieftains were not supplied.[59] She also claimed that Britain owed Libya £16 million under an aid agreement which Britain had terminated in 1965.[60] At a press conference held in London on the 2nd November 1970, Major Jalloud said that at that time the main outstanding problems between the Libyan and the British governments were two contracts signed between Britain and the Libyan monarchical regime which had not been fulfilled and for which Libya had already paid a total of £42 million.[61] He made it clear that he considered the British government, and not BAC, responsible for the air defense contract.[62] As for the contract for the supply by Britain to Libya of the 70-ton Chieftain tanks, anti-aircraft guns, and self-propelled artillery signed in April 1969,[63] Jalloud said that Libya had already paid £9 million towards the tank contract and the British government was refusing to supply the tanks on the pretext that the internal situation in Libya had changed.[64] Libya rejected such an excuse and also rejected Britain's offer to supply the less sophisticated Centurion tanks instead.[65]

Britain's attempt to put pressure on Libya by holding up the delivery of the Chieftain tanks failed. Libya possessed enough financial resources to purchase arms from any source, and that is exactly what happened. In November, after a major review of the arms supply policy, France was chosen as an alternative arms supplier and a contract for the supply of more than 106 Mirage aircraft was concluded.[66] This alternative deal was a blow to the arms industry in Britain and the United States, whose governments maintained that they did not want to shift the balance of power in the Middle East in

favour of the Arabs by supplying Libya with arms.[67] Peter Tripp, a former British ambassador to Libya, pointed out in an interview that, from a commercial point of view, it was disappointing for the British.[68] It was, however, difficult for the Libyan government to avoid the conclusion that Britain's and America's real aim was to sustain Israel's military superiority. The French did not share what from a Libyan perspective was British and American hypocrisy and double standards in dealing with the Arabs, and were more than happy to sign with Libya the largest single agreement for the supply of French military aircraft to a foreign country.[69] France also agreed to start training Libyan pilots at bases in France and Libya.

The British were concerned and complained to the French that what they were doing was not very helpful.[70] Criticism of France's behaviour also surfaced in the media in Britain, the USA, Israel, and France on the ground that since Libya had committed herself to an alliance with Egypt against Israel, all arms that Libya acquired would be transferred to Egypt.[71] Al-Qathafi appeared to be greatly annoyed by the media criticism of the deal. When he was asked whether the aircraft might be made available to Egypt for use against Israel, he said that he believed that the motive for such a question stemmed from American and British anxieties over Israel's security. He did not deny that the Libyan Mirages might well be used against Israel, even if they were not made available to Egypt, and asserted that Israel had expansionist plans threatening the whole Arab world.[72] Al-Qathafi believed that neither Israel nor any other country had the right to ask Libya about the Mirage jet fighters. He said, 'We do not have to justify ourselves.'[73] The French government, for their part, made scathing attacks on critics of the deal, insisting that American and British fears were really grounded in frustration at losing an important market to France.[74] Speaking to the Defence Committee of the French National Assembly on the 21st January 1970, the French Defence Minister made the point that other countries supplied arms to the Middle East and he saw no reason why France should not do the same, especially as arms constituted 25 per cent of France's heavy

equipment exports.[75] Britain and the USA, he said, were afraid that if France sold arms to Libya they would lose a valuable market.[76]

The British attempt to hold up the delivery of the Chieftain tanks and prevent Libya from obtaining advanced arms from other sources proved counter-productive. Firstly, British firms lost the chance of gaining the lion's share of many new contracts under the development programme. Secondly the revolutionary regime was presented with the opportunity to break the British and American monopoly of training and supply to the Libyan Army of their own weapons.

However, as the decade progressed, Libya's policy of diversified arms supplies 'collided with the growing concern in the West for maintaining a military balance in the region.'[77] Following France, Libya turned to the USSR, which, unlike Britain and the USA, was prepared to supply Libya with her needs in arms without conditions or attempts to interfere in her internal affairs. As a result of the diversity of arms sources, Libya found room for manoeuvre, and the regime gained confidence in pursuing its independent foreign policy.

*6.4 The nationalization of the British Petroleum Company (BP)*

Although the evacuation of the British troops from Libya without complication provided a good opportunity to re-establish friendly relations between the two countries, subsequent events were to frustrate any such hopes that might have been entertrained on either side. Driven by their nationalist convictions, the revolutionary leaders linked Libya's relations with Britain to broader Arab issues, an indication of the ideological priorities shaping al-Qathafi's actions and policies.[78]. Al-Qathafi set Britain's evacuation from the Arab states of the Arabian Gulf as a prerequisite for any improvement in inter-state relations.[79] In a speech marking the first anniversary of the American evacuation, al-Qathafi declared that Libya's intention to cultivate good relations with

Britain would be based on mutual respect. He saw no real obstacle that could prevent the two countries from establishing friendly relations, apart from two specific issues, one domestic (Arabic *watani*) and the other national (Arabic *qawmi*). He explained that the domestic issue was the air defence system contract and the matters related to or dependent on it. The national issue was Britain's reluctance to withdraw her troops from the Arab lands in the Arabian Gulf region. In that speech al-Qathafi further threatened that Libya would fight Britain in the Gulf. He said,

> Let Britain know, and let all colonialist and reactionary circles know, that we here in the Libyan Arab Republic will not relinquish our national and religious duty towards our brethren in the Arabian Gulf... If Britain decides not to withdraw and there is a resistance to the British presence, the sons of Libya will fight alongside their brethren in the Gulf.[80]

Although Britain was prepared to withdraw, al-Qathafi's view was that Britain intended to leave the Shah of Iran to act as a surrogate. On the eve of British withdrawal from the region in November 1971, Iranian troops moved in and occupied three islands in the Arabian Gulf: the three Arab islands of Abu Musa and Greater and Lesser Tunb, which, although tiny, were of highly strategic importance in the Strait of Hormuz that controlled the entrance to the Gulf.[81] The Iranian invasion and the perceived British collusion were met by anger and protest throughout the Arab world and in Libya in particular. In Tripoli, the broadcasting and newspaper media attacked Britain and accused her of selling out the Arab cause in the Gulf.[82] In an attack on British policy, Libyan Radio said, 'Britain has plotted against the whole Arab nation by handing Arab islands over to Iran...'[83] On the 13th December 1971, Libyan Radio quoted the army newspaper *Al-Jundi* as warning Britain that unless she returned 'what she has unlawfully taken and given to those who do not deserve it,' she must expect to receive 'one blow after another.'[84] The reaction was not limited to words but extended to deeds; on the 7th December 1971, the Libyan government announced the nationalization of the assets of the British Petroleum Company (BP), estimated at between £60 million and £150 million, in

retaliation for Britain's failure to prevent the Iranian occupation of the Arab islands. Although BP's nationalization would very likely have taken place anyway, perceived British collusion with the Shah of Iran certainly precipitated Libya's plan. The British government's 49-per-cent share-holding in BP appeared to be the prime motive for the choosing of this particular company among many others. Oilmen inevitably saw this as one more instance of the dangers of governments getting involved in the ownership of the oil industry.[85]

The British government considered the decision by the Libyan government as a breach of international law and therefore invalid.[86] A strong protest was made to the Libyan Ambassador, Khairi Ben 'Amir, when he met the British Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Anthony Royle.[87] Looking at the issue from the legal perspective, the British government accepted that nationalization might be legitimate if carried through for a public purpose required by the state concerned and if followed by prompt, adequate, and effective compensation. The Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, J. Godber, said, 'we have never said countries are not entitled to nationalise, but we expect prompt and adequate compensation when that occurs.'[88] The Libyan government regarded this statement as a clear admission that it had the right to nationalize the assets of BP.[89] As for the question of compensation, the Libyan government said that the Minister of Oil had formed a committee in accordance with the law enacted by the RCC on the 7th December in order to nationalize BP. It added that article 5 of this law provided for compensation and this committee had been instructed to take stock of the assets of BP in Libya and assess a fair and adequate compensation within a period of three months.[90]

As had happened before on the question of evacuation, the two governments appeared to have looked from different angles at the issue of nationalization. While for the British government it was a legal issue, its Libyan counterpart, in addition to its

intention to play according to the international norms, saw it as a question of national sovereignty. In a speech made on the 7th October 1972, marking the second anniversary of the expulsion of the Italian settlers, al-Qathafi said,

> We have nationalized BP because the right of sovereignty gives us the right to nationalize whatever we want on Libyan land. Britain's non-recognition of our right of nationalization means non-recognition of our liberty and sovereignty... The issue is not one of oil, monies, or income only, but of the sovereignty of an independent country.[91]

He firmly believed that there was no body of international law that could prevent a country owning oil resources from nationalizing these, halting the pumping of it, and in general taking full control of oil operations within its borders.[92]

Nevertheless, BP and the British government, with the experience still in mind of how the former Iranian Prime Minister, Muhammad Musaddiq, had nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and been defeated by an oil boycott in 1951, did not recognize Libya's action. Libya's behaviour had made it clear that the nationalisation of BP's assets had been a political act. Therefore, in the eyes of the British government (and, of course, BP), the Libyan measure was not legitimate. Britain determined to resort to confrontation to reverse the decision[93] and possibly to bring al-Qathafi to the same fate that Musaddiq had suffered. Al-Qathafi was, however, not unaware of a possible repetition of what had happened to the Iranian Prime Minister, but knew that neither the men nor the circumstances were now the same. In a speech made on the 11th June 1972, he said,

> We assert to the world today that the nationalization has become an established fact... and that the year 1951 is not the year 1971, and the government of Iran at that time was not the revolutionary leadership which rules according to public will in the Arab homeland.[94]

Britain's attempt to exert pressure on Libya commenced with the withdrawal of the 150 British BP staff working on the BP Bunker Hunt Concession, but it proved to be an empty gesture since there were enough trained Libyans to maintain production. The more serious step came when the British government formally warned the leading non-communist oil-consuming countries against buying oil from what it called 'British Petroleum properties seized by Libya.'[95] Before that, BP itself warned its customers that they would be sued if they bought oil from al-Sarir oilfield in Libya from anyone else, including the Libyan government.[96] In January 1972, BP unsuccessfully took legal action in an Italian court in an attempt to prevent crude oil from being shipped to Sincat refinery in Sicily for processing.[97] In the face of these threats by Britain, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) came to Libya's assistance, announcing that it would take measures against oil companies attempting to boycott Libyan oil because of the nationalization of BP. OPEC's General Secretary, Nadim Pachachi, said, 'OPEC nations will certainly take counter measures if such a boycott is attempted.'[98] Ultimately, however, all the British government's and BP's attempts to impose an embargo failed miserably. A number of East European countries, including Bulgaria, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and the USSR, were more than delighted to do business with Libya regardless of whether the oil they bought came from al-Sarir oilfield or from somewhere else.[99] This bi-polar international structure gave Libya the chance to play one power off against another until the collapse of the USSR. When the breakdown of the Eastern bloc occurred after the end of the 1980s, it severely limited Libya's space for such manoeuvres.

Eventually, after a complicated legal action by BP against the Libyan government and various foreign companies which had bought oil from al-Sarir oilfield, the two parties reached a settlement in November 1974, under which BP accepted a total compensation payment of £150 million. After taxes, royalties, and other monies due to the Libyan government, however, the company received only £42 million.[100]

*6.5 The withdrawal from the sterling area*

The nationalization of BP was combined with the withdrawal of Libya's sterling balance from London. The RCC appeared to see the existing financial arrangement between the two governments as of no benefit to Libya, and decided to withdraw.[101] Since the overthrow of the monarchical regime, the revolutionary government had threatened to withdraw the country's sterling holdings on many previous occasions.[102] Earlier in 1971, it had also refused to renew its guarantee to hold a given proportion of its reserves in sterling. In September 1971, Libya's total currency reserves amounted to $2,441 million.[103]

In a desperate move to deprive Libya's withdrawal of her deposits of its defiant meaning, the British government announced that it had expelled Libya from the sterling area. The war of words continued as the Libyan government denied that it had been excluded by Britain from the sterling area, asserting rather that it was Libya which had decided to leave. The Libyan Treasury Minister stated that the revolutionary government had decided to leave at the same time that it had decided to abolish the 1953 Treaty and the occupation by British troops of bases in Libya.[104]

The inclusion of Libya within the sterling area had been based on the financial agreement attached to the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance of 1953. At that time, the British, as the occupying military authority, had pressured Idris into announcing to the Americans and the United Nations Commissioner that Libya would join the sterling area.[105] British determination to have Libya within the sterling area had led Roger Allen, the Head of the African Department of the British Foreign Office, to note that if Pelt attempted to block Libya's entry into the sterling area, then the British would 'run him down.'[106]

The aim, as noted in the previous chapter, was undoubtedly to strengthen the pound and protect the British balance of payments at the expense of other rival countries. A statement by the Libyan Treasury Minister after the Revolution noted that Britain was in fact the beneficiary and that Libya did not benefit from being in the sterling area as her oil revenue ensured her access to other currencies.[107] Indeed, if one could find any sound justification for Libya's motives in 1953, surely they would have been invalid by 1969, especially with the growth of the country's oil wealth. With a vigorous flow of new revenues, Libya had no need to abide by the measures imposed on her under the agreement, such as the placement of her total reserves of gold and foreign currencies in London, as she had done when in a weaker position.

Libya's threat to withdraw her foreign exchange holdings deposited in Britain while talks with the British on the missiles and Chieftain tanks were going on may suggest that the new revolutionary leaders believed that Libya's withdrawal might have a serious effect on the pound (sterling) and tried to use that as a bargaining lever in the talks.[108] The action was, however, unlikely to cause great harm to either country. From the British point of view, the main significance of the change was that Libya no longer ranked as a 'scheduled territory' and movement of funds to Libya became subject to the same stringent official controls as applied to most other countries.[109] Peter Tripp, a former British diplomat, made it clear in an interview that although the issue did not make any great difference either for Libya or Britain, it certainly contributed to the deterioration of relations between the two countries.[110]

However, Libya's withdrawal from the sterling area is hardly more than mentioned in passing in the existing secondary literature on Libya and is only examined here as a clear indication of the pattern of increasing conflict that was emerging in the relations between Libya and Britain.

*6.6 The neutralization of Malta*

Among the other sources of disagreement between Libya and Britain was Libya's intervention in the 1971 negotiations on the future status of British and NATO military facilities in Malta. When the Maltese government asked for both aid and security guarantees from Mediterranean countries, Libya responded enthusiastically.[111] She explicitly supported Malta's wish to end the presence of all foreign military bases and other military facilities on the island, and promised political and financial aid. In a press conference on the 1st August 1971, al-Qathafi said,

> Malta deserves Libya's aid for several reasons, among them her proximity to Libya and her vulnerability to the competition between the so-called Big Powers... Free aid to Malta would help the island to stay out of the Eastern and Western sphere of influence and would maintain peace in the world and in the region of the Mediterranean in particular. We have, therefore, started a new chapter of co-operation with Malta and will extend aid to her.[112]

Al-Qathafi did not disclose what form this aid might take, but stressed that no conditions would be attached to it.[113] When the new Maltese Prime Minister, Dom Mintoff, commenced talks with the British over the future of their military presence, the Libyan government supported him by making up the shortfall the island would lose in the way of rentals.[114] The Libyan government also supplied petroleum at an undisclosed price believed to be the same as for domestic Libyan consumers.[115] Moreover, the two governments signed numerous trade and economic agreements.[116] The Libyan aid was appreciated by the new Maltese Governor-General, Sir Anthony Mamo, who praised Libya for standing 'shoulder to shoulder' with Malta 'so that by their joint efforts Malta, in as short a time as possible, may be changed from an instrument of war into a center for peace.'[117]

Libya's motives behind her support for Malta stemmed from both ideological and strategic considerations. Having had British and American troops removed from Libya, the revolutionary government was determined to follow a policy of absolute neutrality

without partiality to the East or to the West. This was reflected in its attempts to neutralize the Mediterranean Sea by eliminating the presence of NATO forces in it, especially those operating from Malta. In this regard Major Jalloud made clear that it was in the interest of Malta and her people to get rid of the military bases in the island, so that 'the Mediterranean might become a sea of peace instead of a sea for fleets,' since such bases, 'especially bases belonging to either of the two big camps in the world,' posed a danger to the Maltese people.[118] The Libyan revolutionary government felt that the military presence in Malta and other Mediterranean countries constituted a threat to peace and security, not only that of Libya but also of the whole region. The Libyan government was particularly concerned with Libya's security (and that of other Arab countries). At one point Libya offered the Maltese government a grant of at least $25 million if Mintoff could persuade the British government to sign a pledge guaranteeing that Malta would never be used as a base from which to attack an Arab state.[119]

Strategically, al-Qathafi had to safeguard Libya's long maritime frontier, not only by military means but also by creating a surrounding zone of friendly countries. He did not want to see Libya being encircled by hostile regimes or foreign military bases. Although British troops were out of Libya, from the security point of view, that removal would be meaningless as long as they were still stationed in Malta, which lay no more than 300 km from Libya's shores. Al-Qathafi told a Maltese audience, on his second visit to Malta in July 1978, that

> the security of Libya is tied to the security of Malta and vice versa... through the ages the aggressors, before they reach Libya, used to cross Malta... therefore, Malta should be determined not to be a bridge in the future... We are ready to defend your gains. It is our duty to co-operate with you and to help you until your economy and territory are liberated.[120]

The new orientation of Libyan foreign policy had coincided with the coming to power of the Maltese Labour Party in 1971. Dom Mintoff, as the incoming Prime

Minister, suggested that Britain should either pay an annual rent of £30 million for the use of the harbour, in which case NATO would have exclusive rights, or pay only £20 million, in which case countries other than NATO members, such as Libya, would also be entitled to use the facilities.[121] Simply, his bargaining was based on the position that NATO should pay up or Britain must pull out.[122]

Britain viewed this problem as essentially one for NATO as a whole and not one which concerned herself alone. She therefore asked her partners to agree to contribute to the increased cost of maintaining the facilities in the island.[123] It was reported that by 1971 Britain had a naval base at Lascaris in Malta and a Royal Marine commando group at Valletta. In addition, the RAF had two squadrons stationed on the island, one of Canberras and the other a mixture of Shackletons and Nimrods.[124] Despite this heavy military presence, there was no agreement either among the NATO members themselves[125] or between them and the Maltese government on the question of payment. Britain offered an annual rent of some £9.5 million under a form of agreement acceptable to the British government, but this was unacceptable to the Maltese government, which demanded £18 million.[126] At this point, Malta turned to her southern neighbour, Libya, who was apparently prepared to help. Less than a week later, Mintoff paid a visit to Libya, where he was promised political, military, and economic aid to ensure that the island of Malta would never again have to suffer foreign military bases on her soil.[127] Libya also promised to invest in industry and tourism.[128] Later, on the 1st October 1971, Mintoff said that unconditional aid from Libya and the promise of more aid if needed had saved his island from economic difficulties as it negotiated with Britain over use of its bases.[129]

At that time, and even at the present date, an association between Malta and Libya appeared logical, as the two countries had much to offer each other. The expectation was that a sizeable number of skilled workers could fill some of the positions vacated by the

Italians and people of other nationalities who had either been expelled or had left voluntarily after 1969.[130] During his visit to Malta, from the 21st to 23rd May 1976, al-Qathafi emphasized Libya's readiness to co-operate extensively with Malta in order to sustain the economic freedom of the island. Directing his words to the Maltese people, he said, 'We welcome you in Libya to work alongside your Libyan brothers and we regard you in the same way as other workers coming from the Arab countries [i.e. not as foreigners].' He added, 'Co-operation with Libya is a co-operation for neutrality, for freedom... for the dignity of the Maltese man and for the development and progress of Malta.'[131] He linked the constructive role that Malta could play alongside Libya in the Mediterranean basin for the benefit of the two peoples with the expulsion of the British military bases. Al-Qathafi assured his audience that Libya would be with them in their battle for the termination of the British bases and in the battle for the neutralization of Malta. He said,

> Libya declares that it is the first country ready to protect the neutrality of Malta, and declares her readiness to be the first country in the Mediterranean standing alongside Malta to eliminate the foreign bases, and to be free and able to live economically without the foreign bases.[132]

Eventually, however, the Maltese government agreed to a short-term usage of facilities in Malta by NATO forces, providing that the bases and facilities in Malta would not be used against any Arab country.[133] This was a victory for Libya and her policy to neutralize the island. The final victory, however, came in March 1979 when Libya outbid Britain and the last British soldier left Malta. When al-Qathafi visited Malta on the 30th and 31st March 1979 as a guest of honour at ceremonies marking the British military evacuation of the island, he attacked Britain as a common enemy of Malta and Libya, and pointed out the important role that Libya had played in helping to realize the day of Britain's evacuation from Malta eight years after the evacuation of foreign forces from Libya's mainland.[134] He also promised the Maltese people unlimited support. He said,

> We will provide facilities and concessions to thousands of Maltese workers to find work after the departure of the colonialist British bases... We will also work for the establishment of many joint economic activities which will help Malta to overcome any deficit as a result of evacuation of the British bases... and we will provide oil at reasonable prices so that the Maltese people will be able to confront any problem that may arise as a result of the expulsion of the colonialist British bases.[135]

In Britain, Libya's economic and military support for Malta was seen as leading to a Libyan foothold in Malta.[136] Peter Tripp has made it clear that although Britain did not believe that the Libyans would be able to support Malta with the same sort of practical help Britain used to deliver, Britain's main concern was the Libyans' establishing a foothold in the island to pursue their own national aims, which might be inimical to the British interests.[137]

Libya's support for Malta did not aim at the expulsion of the British in order that they might be replaced by another power. Although the Maltese government, under economic pressure, was prepared to accept whoever might pay more, al-Qathafi stipulated no conditions for his support of Malta. He repeatedly pointed out that it was the behaviour of the colonialist powers to take advantage of the island's poor economy and made it clear that Libya's support was for the sake of achieving a neutral Malta in a peaceful Mediterranean.[138] He told Mirella Bianco,

> I think it is rather the Great Powers who impose conditions for the aid they offer to others... in Malta's case, here is a small people, our neighbours, struggling to regain their independence. Moreover, the fact of helping them to escape from spheres of influence, whichever they are, contributes to world peace and more particularly to peace in the Mediterranean. Here is reason enough for our good-neighbour policy and for co-operation between our two countries.[139]

When he was asked by a reporter for the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* what his aim was in sending technical experts to Malta, he said that Libya wanted to give aid to people who needed it. He stated, 'We helped Guinea and supported the admission of

China to the UN for instance... and Libya would help Malta regardless of whether the British are there or not... We prefer the Mediterranean to be void of military bases and fleets and we want the Maltese people to be free.'[140] In her support for Malta, Libya appeared to wish to counter not only the British but also Israeli, Chinese, and Soviet influence in an area which lies only 300 km from Tripoli.[141] Indeed, al-Qathafi was firm in his determination to keep the USSR out of the island. He sent a message to Mintoff warning him that Libya would consider any Russian bases in Malta just as seriously as she had done British bases up to that time.[142] A Spanish newspaper, *ABC*, reported that al-Qathafi had warned Mintoff that the acceptance of any Soviet offer to pay for port facilities in Malta would be considered 'an unfriendly gesture' to the countries of North Africa and the Mediterranean basin as a whole.[143] He was also said to have emphasized that Libya's foreign policy was intended equally to reduce both Soviet and Western influence in the Mediterranean.[144] Libya's support for Malta was a part of a broader non-alignment foreign policy towards the whole Mediterranean area. As early as 1973, al-Qathafi promoted an initiative to turn the Mediterranean basin into a zone of peace. At the European-Arab Youth Conference in Tripoli, al-Qathafi declared that 'nothing is currently more urgent than an appeal by this meeting for peace and justice, the removal of foreign fleets and the return of the Mediterranean to its former vocation as a zone of peace and security.'[145]

However, although the final evacuation of the British and NATO forces from Malta appeared at the time as an opportunity for even closer economic and political alliance between Malta and Libya, relations did not run altogether smoothly. Libya's relations with Malta first became troubled in the spring of 1979 when Libya's Malta-based radio station, The Voice of Solidarity and Friendship, was closed down, presumably because of disagreement over the scope of Libyan aid and a dispute over the demarcation of the two countries' maritime borders. Relations improved later in the year and talks held in mid-November resulted in an agreement whereby Libya was to invest $50 million

in development projects in Malta.[146] In addition, Libya donated £500,000 to the Maltese government as 'a gesture of friendship'.[147] In March 1980, Malta's Premier, Dom Mintoff, disclosed that a temporary defence agreement had been signed with Libya, pledging 'all possible aid to strengthen Malta's defences against any eventuality.'[148] Yet before the end of 1980, the dispute over the demarcation of the off-shore zone grew sharper. Malta ordered a group of 33 Libyan personnel to leave the island and Libya suspended cheap oil shipments to Malta.[149] In 1984, relations improved once more and al-Qathafi, in a joint press conference with Mintoff, stated that they had signed a treaty of friendship and co-operation which included provisions for Libyan military assistance to strengthen the Maltese Army.[150]

*6.7 Support for the Irish Republican Army (IRA)*

In addition to the issues of the evacuation of British troops, the nationalization of BP installations, the withdrawal from the sterling area, and the support for Malta in her efforts to expel British and NATO forces from her territory, Libya's support for the Irish Republican Army and its struggle against 'British colonialism' in Northern Ireland has been another source of conflict between Tripoli and London.

In its support for the IRA, the Libyan government was fundamentally motivated by ideology as well as by a legacy of opposition to Britain's colonial past and her contemporary policies. After accusing Britain of handing over Palestine to the Jews and criticizing Britain for 'abandoning her obligations' by allowing Iran to occupy the Tunb islands in December 1971, al-Qathafi said that Libya would fight Britain on her own territory and 'if the Irish revolutionaries want to liberate Ireland, we will support them without limit.'[151] From its early days, the Libyan Revolution committed itself to fighting against colonialism and neo-colonialism by all means and throughout the world. This commitment was to include support for national liberation movements from Northern Ireland to the Philippine islands.[152] The Irish question and the struggle being waged

by IRA were considered to be within the scope of Libya's concern to support national liberation movements whereaver they had legitimate grievances to fight for.[153]

Although the Libyan government has supported many liberation movements, its support for the IRA seemed to be inspired by extra motives. It was seen as an opportunity for the revolutionary leaders to pay Britain back for the harm she had done to the Arabs. In contrast to Idris, who believed that Britain had helped Libya to gain her independence, al-Qathafi and the majority of the younger generation believed that Britain had been behind most of the problems faced by the Arab nation. Last but not least was Britain's collusion with the Shah of Iran when she connived in his seizure of the three Arab islands in the Arabian Gulf. Al-Qathafi took the occasion of the evacuation of the American bases to declare that Libya had been supporting and would continue to support the IRA. On the 11th June 1972, he said,

> ...We declare our support [for the IRA] and practise it because we want to assert before the world that the Arab nation is capable of moving from defensive to attacking positions. We decided to fight Britain in her home and create a problem in the heart of Britain in order to weaken her and make her realize that what she has been fabricating against other people will move on to her own lands... and she will pay twice as heavily... and will pay dearly.[154]

Al-Qathafi's declaration of support for the IRA in a public ceremony on the 11th June 1972 led the British Ambassador, Peter Tripp, to walk out in protest against what he called 'al-Qathafi's offensive remarks about the internal affairs of Britain.'[155] The Foreign Office summoned the Libyan Ambassador, Khairi Ben 'Amir, and delivered to him a 'strong oral protest' against al-Qathafi's remarks.[156] But the British authorities still had no tangible evidence that Libya's support for the IRA actually exceeded a political and moral posture at a merely rhetorical level. A Ministry of Defence official confirmed that there was no evidence of any Libyan arms' getting through to the IRA for use in Northern Ireland.[157] However, it was not long before such evidence did come

to hand. In March 1973, the Irish Navy intercepted a fishing vessel, *S.S. Claudia*, off the south-east coast of Ireland and, when the ship was searched, 5 tons of weapons, including rifles, small arms, and anti-tank rockets, were discovered on board along with Joe Cahill, a leading IRA figure.[158] The British government again strongly protested to Libya about her support for the IRA. The Minister of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office told the Commons on the 31st January 1974 that Libya had been told on a number of occasions that her action was 'blatant interference' in the internal affairs of Britain.[159]

Libya's support for the IRA had been a major point of disagreement between the two countries. In an interview, Peter Tripp pointed out how the issue of the IRA made it very difficult for the two countries to have normal relations.[160] He expressed his belief that neither al-Qathafi nor Jalloud had really appreciated the difficulties from the British side in persuading the House of Commons and the British people to take a better view of Libya while the latter was supporting what he called terrorist acts such as those of the IRA.[161] Tripp claimed that, talks with al-Qathafi and Jalloud while he was the British Ambassador to Libya, made it clear that al-Qathafi had had no idea of what was actually involved in the conflict in Northern Ireland.[162] Tripp felt that al-Qathafi took a very simplistic view that Libya as a revolutionary country was against any form of oppression and that the British had oppressed the Irish for nearly three hundred years; therefore Libya was bound to help the revolutionary IRA.[163] Britain, of course, could never accept that, and thus the issue of the IRA became one of the most difficult problems that Tripp had to face during his stay in Libya.[164]

By the end of 1974, however, Britain appeared to have begun to think that Libya might no longer regard the IRA as among the world's liberation movements. Following a visit to Libya, the Shadow Foreign Secretary, John Davis, reported that talks in Libya suggested that the country was no longer prepared to support the IRA. He stated, 'I

formed the impression that Libya wants to see improvements in relations with Britain which have not been good for years.'[165] However, although Libya did wish to see improvements in her relations with Britain, that did not necessarily indicate a change of her stand with the IRA. When al-Qathafi was asked by the BBC correspondent if Libya's support for the IRA might destroy her relations with Britain, al-Qathafi's answer was that it should not. He said, 'Our relations with the British people should not be destroyed by our stand with people fighting for their liberty. We would be sorry if that happened.'[166]

Nevertheless, later, in 1986, a large cache of Libyan arms was discovered in the Republic of Ireland and, in 1988, the French Navy halted a Panamanian-registered ship, the *Eksund*, carrying a cargo of 150 tons of arms destined for the IRA. This acceleration of support can be understood in the light of the deterioration of relations between Tripoli and London after 1984. When Libya failed to prevent the breakdown of relations and Britain increased her support for the Libyan opposition, the former stepped up her support for the IRA in retaliation against the latter's hostile policies.

Libya's gains from supporting the IRA were summed up by al-Qathafi when he told the correspondent of *Al-Ahram* on the 27th May 1973 that

> aid to Ireland [the IRA] enables us to achieve three aims: we will support liberation movements; we are showing the whole world that the Arab revolution is passing from the defensive to the attack; and we will pay Britain back in some way, even though minimally, for the harm she has done and continues to do in our countries.[167]

*6.8 The Palestine Question*

Although the British government perhaps did not consider Libya's position on the Palestine question to be as significant as the latter's stance on Malta or the IRA, the

historical British role in creating the State of Israel in Palestine was given great weight by al-Qathafi.[168] He was in particular highly critical of Britain's Balfour Declaration in 1917, which had promised a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine.[169] His criticism of Britain goes back to his school days at Sabha when he used to lead demonstrations denouncing the Balfour Declaration and the British collusion with the 'Zionist gangs'. Later, when he came to power, al-Qathafi continued to believe that it was Britain that was to blame for the creation of the State of Israel by issuing the Balfour Declaration. In a speech marking the second anniversary of the American evacuation, on the 11th June 1971, al-Qathafi explicitly accused Britain of handing over Palestine to the Jews and of tearing off the Arab nation and planting the seeds of dissension among the Arab people.[170] As a due punishment for Britain's culpability, he asserted that Libya would fight Britain on her own territory by supporting the IRA.[171] In his own words al-Qathafi said,

> Who handed over an entire Arab country to the Jews, and dispossessed an entire Arab community still until todayliving in agony?The principal responsible in the world is Britain. She is the one who gave Palestine to the Jews and the weapon by which the massacres of children and women at Deir Yassin was committed was a British weapon. Therefore we are with the revolutionaries of Ireland if they want to fight Britain.[172]

On his first meeting with the Libyan Foreign Minister, Salih al-Buyasir, on the 16th September 1969, the newly appointed British Ambassador, Donald Maitland, was surprised by al-Buyasir's emphasis on the Palestine question.[173] He also noticed that someone had painted a slogan in red on Peter Wakefield's residence in Benghazi: '1948 + 1956 + 1967 = 1 September', which, as Maitland has pointed out, meant that the establishment of Israel, the Suez affair, and the Six-Day War were the historical causes of the Libyan Revolution.[174] Facing the same emphasis by al-Qathafi and other RCC members on the Palestinian question, the British Ambassador said, 'I was surprised that a country such as Libya, which was not very near to Palestine and which had a lot of problems of its own, should give such priority to that.'[175]

The perception of Britain's involvement in the creation of the state of Israel would thus appear to have created a sense of suspicion regarding Britain's intentions towards the Arabs, and this was to be reflected in Libya's foreign policy towards Britain for many years to come.

The importance of the revolutionary leaders' perception of Britain's historical role in creating the State of Israel at the expense of the Arabs in Palestine and its impact on Libya's foreign policy towards Britain was confirmed by the former British diplomat Peter Tripp, who used to have meetings with al-Qathafi and other RCC members. The then British ambassador to Libya had said that he found in Libya more than in any other Arab country that the Balfour Declaration still informed the Libyan leaders' thinking about Britain's current attitude toward the Middle East.[176] He noted that one of the points which struck him very much in his discussion with al-Qathafi and Jalloud was that they could not disassociate Britain's championing of the Balfour Declaration and her support for the establishment of the State of Israel from Britain's current policies and that they thought that because Britain had been instrumental in the establishment of Israel, she would therefore be likely to go on supporting her at any cost.[177]

Whether this view held by the Libyan leaders of Britain was right or wrong is obviously beyond the scope of this study. What is important here is the fact that it was always at the back of their minds whenever they dealt with Britain. Indeed, the feeling of betrayal and the desire for revenge against Britain were always there, working as both background for Libya's understanding of and reaction to Britain's foreign policies. As an example of an act of revenge, on the 2nd November 1969, the Libyan government did little to protect the British Embassy in Tripoli from demonstrations marking the fifty-second anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, if not instigating the demonstrations in the first place. The demonstrators wrecked cars and stoned the Embassy, and ripped the

plaque off the front of the building.[178] The feeling of betrayal was obvious in a comment published in the Tripoli official daily *Al-Thawra* on a visit to Morocco by the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home, in which it said that on the 16th September 1971 Sir Alec, 'just like others who disguise themselves in the attire of monks, is playing the famous historic role of Lawrence of Arabia and is attempting to cheat the Arabs after the game has been discovered and the sly intentions of our enemies revealed.'[179] In a major public address on the 7th October 1972 to mark the second anniversary of the Italian evacuation of Libya, al-Qathafi also bitterly attacked British imperial policy and the 'history of British betrayal of the Arab nation.'[180] The Tripoli official daily *Al-Fajr al-Jadid*, in its turn, said in response to press reports of British arms sales to Israel that this was yet another betrayal of the Arabs by Britain, 'which created the Zionist enemy, nurtured him, handed him the land of Palestine and rendered the Palestinian homeless over long years of conspiracy in the days of the mandate.'[181]

For al-Qathafi and his colleagues, Britain was not only responsible for the loss of Palestine but also for the continuing existence of the state of Israel through her substantial political and military support, and they acted on these perceptions. For example, on the 22nd September 1969, the Libyan Foreign Minister, Salih al-Buyasir, summoned the British Ambassador and expressed Libya's concern over Britain's reported intention to supply tanks to Israel. Such a step by Britain, the Libyan Minister said, 'would harm Anglo-Libyan relations in particular and Anglo-Arab relations in general.'[182] Later, on the 7th October, the British Ambassador was also told by al-Buyasir that the delivery of British arms to Israel would have 'an adverse effect on British relations and interests concerning Libya.'[183] The Libyan acts obviously indicated Libya's concern not only for Libya's security but Palestinian and Arab national security as a whole, since the Israeli tanks were a long distance from its own borders. In other words, the question of Palestine had become a central issue in Libya's foreign policy. Indeed, just four months after the Revolution, al-Qathafi asserted to the students of Tripoli University on the 2nd January

1970 the importance of the Palestinian issue in the context of Libya's foreign policy and made it clear that Libya's attitude towards other states would undoubtedly be determined by their stand on the Palestinian cause.[184] As a result, Britain's and America's arms supplies to Israel were considered by the Libyan government as reflecting a hostile stance. Therefore, the Libyan government warned the British and Americans that 'Israel's persistent defiance and attacks on civilians with arms supplied by the West might lead to an escalation of fighting in such a way that it could not be stopped.'[185]

Libya's suspicion of Britain as a result of the latter's historical role in creating the state of Israel was reinforced by a belief that Britain was shadowing the United States in her support for Israel. Indeed, even when the Americans became the main supplier of arms and financial aid to Israel, al-Qathafi and his colleagues appeared to believe that the British were as keen on helping the Israelis as were the Americans.[186] In response to press reports that the British Labour government had negotiated sales of tanks, radar, and electronic equipment to Israel, the Tripoli daily *Al-Fajr al-Jadid* on the 16th September 1974 wondered whether on this occasion Britain was the 'cat's paw' of the USA, or just affirming her old policies.[187]

The Libyan government's belief that Britain was shadowing the American polices was shared even by a former British diplomat who said that 'all over the Middle East Britain has not pursued an independent policy, particularly on the Arab-Israeli dispute... The British have followed too closely whatever lead was taken by the Americans.'[188] Donald Maitland also supported the view, although not during his own service in Libya, that Britain had followed American policies in the Middle East; this had been particularly the case during Mrs. Thatcher's period as head of government.[189]

Another point of disagreement between the two governments over the Palestinian question was the way of solving the problem. Whereas Britain recognized Israel in her

1948 borders and promoted and accepted the UN Security Council's resolution 242 of the 22nd November 1967,[190] which again accepted implicitly the Israeli state, Libya regarded Israel as an occupying force implanted by the Western colonial powers to serve as a base furthering Western imperial designs within the Arab world, and believed that it should be eliminated.[191] In an interview published in *Le Monde* on the 6th May 1971, al-Qathafi rejected a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of UN resolution 242 or any other resolution dealing with the Palestinians as refugees. He said, 'that resolution is completely out of date now,' as was borne out by 'Israel's present behaviour... In addition, the very fate of the Arab nation is bound up in the fight against Zionism. For us, border questions and strategic positions are secondary matters. What we want is to win back the land and dignity of a people who have been despoiled and scattered in refugee camps.'[192] On the 27th February 1971, the Libyan Army newspaper *Al-Jundi* published an interview in which al-Qathafi said that 'the Arab-Zionist struggle' had gone beyond the point of being solved peacefully and that 'war has become the only possible means as a positive move...' Al-Qathafi added, 'We are not interested in the UN mediator and we do not accept that the states that call themselves great powers are capable of solving the problem.'[193]

Al-Qathafi also strongly opposed the Camp David Accords and strongly condemned Sadat's visit to Israel since they would not lead to the restoration of all the occupied Arab land, including Palestine. Until now, he is still one of the few Arab leaders who have refused to have any contacts with Israel. This adherence to the ideal of complete liberation of Palestine and his uncompromising attitude towards Israel have conflicted with peace settlement attempts initiated and supported by the USA and other Western countries. In general, Libya's stance on the Palestinian question has appeared to be in conflict with American and British goals in the Middle East.[194] Libya has consistently called for not only the recognition of Palestinian rights and the return of the Arab lands occupied in 1976, but for the liberation of the whole of Palestine.[195]

Thus, for al-Qathafi, Britain was not only to blame for the creation of the Zionist state on the land of Palestine, but also for the strong backing given to Israel at the expense of the Arabs. Therefore, he never missed an opportunity to remind Britain of what he saw as a betrayal of the Arabs and he acted on the basis that it was up to the British government to rectify her stance on the Palestine question if she wanted to have a friendly relationship with Libya.[196] On the 23rd October 1973, for instance, al-Qathafi was reported to have said that Europe must take a stand on the Middle East that was clearly separate from American policy.[197] Major Jalloud, for his part, said on the 3rd August 1971 that Britain and West Germany were wrong to support the USA's 'anti-Arab policy'.[198]

*6.9 The breakdown of relations*

Despite their disagreement on the previously discussed issues, Libya and Britain expressed a desire to maintain at least a 'normal' relationship. Their desires stemmed from the actual and potential benefits that each country could offer the other; whereas Britain was an ideal trading partner for Libya, the latter, on account of her wealth and location, was an ideal oil-supplier and goods-importer for Britain (see Table 5).

It has been observed that

> Most responsible Libyans looked on Britain as an ideal cultural and trading partner. Traditional links with Italy might be stronger, but English was now the second language in Libyan schools. Ambitious young Libyans regarded it as essential for mastering technology and commerce in the modern world. In 1983 around 8,000 of them were studying (mainly practical and scientific subjects) at colleges, polytechnics and universities throughout the United Kingdom—more than in any other foreign country. Increasingly, as they returned home and climbed the bureaucratic hierarchy, they looked to British consultants to assist them in the serious business of developing their country.[199]

However, the two countries' opposition on many world issues were to prove stronger than their desire for good working relations.

**Table 5**
**Libya's balance of trade with Britain (in LD millions)**

| Years | Exports | Imports | Trade balance |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1969 | 106.6 | 29.8 | +76.8 |
| 1970 | 127.7 | 18.6 | +109.1 |
| 1971 | 157.3 | 24.9 | +132.4 |
| 1972 | 129.6 | 29.9 | +99.7 |
| 1973 | 194.3 | 37.0 | 157.3 |
| 1974 | 305.5 | 40.6 | +264.9 |
| 1975 | 80.7 | 57.7 | +23.0 |
| 1976 | 84.7 | 51.0 | +33.7 |
| 1977 | 80.3 | 64.0 | +16.3 |
| 1978 | 51.9 | 96.6 | -44.7 |
| 1979 | 51.1 | 108.1 | -57.0 |
| 1980 | 10.5 | 139.7 | -129.2 |
| 1981 | 21.2 | 172.3 | -151.1 |
| 1982 | 161.5 | 169.4 | -7.9 |
| 1983 | 77.6 | 134.4 | -56.8 |
| 1984 | 37.4 | 109.7 | -72.3 |
| 1985 | 51.8 | 87.7 | -35.9 |
| 1986 | 54.5 | 133.3 | -78.8 |
| 1987 | 52.8 | 128.2 | -75.4 |

Source: Ministry of Planning, Census and Statistical Department, *Census of foreign commerce* (various issues).

Although the breakdown in the relationship had a broader context, as my discussion has underlined, the immediate cause was a belief that Britain purposely harboured certain figures whom the Libyan government had come to call 'stray dogs', a dismissive term used for the Libyan opposition. For example, the pro-monarchical

Constitutional Union was based in Britain, as were members of the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL).[200] Also, the Libyan National Democratic Grouping, headed by Fadel Messaoudi and Sulayman al-Maghribi, who had defected to Britain and was granted political asylum, had been operating mainly from Britain.[201]

The Libyan government appeared to be concerned with Britain's recognition of the opposition groups as a legitimate political opposition.[202] For the Libyan government, they were not primarily so, but were, in fact, criminals who had misappropriated government funds and traitors who had collaborated with foreign states against their country's national security. In an interview with a reporter for the Italian periodical *Panorama*, al-Qathafi denied that Libyans living abroad and opposing him were dissidents. He said, 'These individuals are the remnants of a society of exploitation, of corruption, of slavery, of the class system.' He added that the old era would be eliminated by the new, using all the means at his disposal. He further threatened that whoever placed himself in opposition to the masses and to the revolutionary forces that guided them 'would inevitably be fought, defeated, and eliminated.'[203] Jalloud, for his part, informed another Italian newspaper on the 4th June 1980 that many people who had fled abroad had taken with them goods belonging to the Libyan people and placed their illicit gains at the disposal of the enemies of the Libyan people. He maintained that although they were not guilty of political crimes, they were thieves and for that reason must be extradited through Interpol.[204] This same line was echoed by Musa Kusa, the Secretary of the People's Bureau in London. Addressing Libyan students demonstrating in support of al-Qathafi outside the Bureau, he said,

> They [the Libyan opposition] are former government employees and they have misappropriated funds. Now they represent themselves in this country as spokesmen of the anti-revolution but they are thieves... we don't like to break the law here but we are fighting these people because they worked against our revolution.[205]

Although the Libyan government undoubtedly wanted to discredit the Libyan opposition by these remarks, the accusations do nevertheless appear to have carried some conviction. Muhammad al-Meqaryaf, the leader of the NFSL, for example, was regarded as having been unable to satisfactorily account for $8 million that disappeared from the Libyan People's Bureau in Delhi while he was Ambassador there.[206] The man suspected of responsibility for the death in Bonn in 1980 of Omran al-Mahdawi, who used to be the second secretary at the Libyan Embassy in West Germany until April 1978, told the German police that he had killed his victim because the latter had refused to repay a debt of 20,000 Libyan dinars to the Libyan government.[207]

In addition to their denial that the Libyan opposition groups living in Britain were dissidents, the Libyan government appears to have believed that the harbouring of such groups in Britain was a part of an international conspiracy led by the USA to end the revolutionary regime in Libya.[208] For Libya, Britain was another part of this conspiracy, especially with the accession to power of Margaret Thatcher. From the Libyan perspective, the harbouring of the opposition groups was a clear policy of support for the opposition and was combined with the view that Britain shadowed the hostile American attitude towards Libya.[209]

The strengthening of the view that the USA wanted to squeeze Libya coincided with the deterioration of relations between the two states; because of their implications for Libyan-British relations, it is important to briefly detail the growing tensions between these two governments. Libyan-American relations had been in decline since the latter part of the Carter administration and the inauguration of Ronald Reagan in 1981.[210] On the 7th May 1980, the State Department expelled several members of the Libyan People's Bureau in Washington D.C.[211] In September of that year, the Sixth Fleet conducted exercises in the Gulf of Sirt, which Libya has claimed as sovereign waters since

1973. Although the Fleet stayed outside the zone claimed by Libya, the US Air Force flew along the edge of the Libyan airspace in a show of muscle-flexing.[212]

Following Reagan's take-over at the White House in January 1981, it became clear that the USA wanted to tighten the 'squeeze' on Libya as far as possible.[213] Reagan presented himself as the man who would reassert the global authority of the USA after the series of humiliations she had suffered at the end of the Carter administration.[214] Within a week of Reagan's inauguration ceremony, a campaign against what the new administration called Soviet-sponsored terrorism was launched and Libya was spotlighted as a base for Soviet subversion. Fred Halliday has pointed out that

> since entering the White House in January 1981, Ronald Reagan has pursued a policy of comprehensive hostility to Third World social revolutions. He has linked upheaval in the Third World to the East-West conflict, and argued that a firm stand on the latter requires an equally firm stand against the former. He has built up America's potential for intervention in the Third World, and engaged in a variety of measures—military, political and economic—against radical states.[215]

The American tactic was to isolate Libya internationally and to promote the downfall of the revolutionary regime in Libya.[216] Claudia Wright, the *New Statesman* correspondent, wrote that the

> North Atlantic Treaty (NATO) allies, Italy in particular, were asked not to permit state visits by Qaddafi... and to prevent the Libyans from purchasing military spare parts... The Mitterand administration was asked by Washington to maintain the embargo on arms deliveries and oil exploration... American oil companies were urged to withdraw personnel from Libya, and to stop importing Libyan crude to the United States... American diplomats lobbied several African members states to move motions of censure against Libya, and to shift the venue of the OAU summit meeting, as well as the presidency of the OAU for the year, from Libya to alternative sites in Senegal and Niger. A major effort combining economic and military aide, naval portcalls, the despatch of military advisers, and diplomatic pressure was focused on the Liberian government to persuade it to break relations with Libya, and expel the Libyan mission.[217]

In addition to her attempts to isolate Libya, disrupt her trading relationship, and reduce her oil revenues, the Reagan administration 'sought to intensify direct military pressure on the Libyan forces, and if possible provoke al-Qathafi into creating a *casus belli*.'[218] For example, on the 23rd May 1981, two radar-surveillance AWACs aircraft were sent to Egypt to monitor the Egyptian and Sudanese borders with Libya.[219] Three months later, on the 19th August, US fighters from the Sixth Fleet, in co-ordination with Egyptian military manoeuvres on the border, shot down two Libyan warplanes in an act of provocation.[220] American provocation was repeated immediately after the assassination of Sadat in Egypt by sending two AWACS aircraft to operate along the Libyan border and by conducting a large-scale military exercise with Egypt and Sudan near to the Libyan borders.[221]

American officials, including the President, spoke of al-Qathafi in terms which implied their support for his downfall and death. When Reagan was asked just after the shooting-down of two Libyan aeroplanes if he would 'not be sorry to see Qaddafi fall,' he replied, 'Diplomacy would have me not answer that question.'[222] The Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, was reported to have referred to al-Qathafi as 'the most dangerous man in the world' and as 'a cancer that should be removed'.[223]

The Reagan administration did indeed appear to have either plotted to assassinate al-Qathafi or to frighten him into believing it was doing so by leaking news about assassination attempts. Claudia Wright has written,

> of American involvement in clandestine plots to kill Qaddafi, there have been reliable reports of a CIA plan, prepared in the first two months of the administration by the then deputy director for operations, Max Hugel. This included proposals for disinformation and propaganda dissemination about Libya, sabotage of Libyan oil installations, financial and military support for the Habré guerrillas in Chad and for Libyan dissident groups based in Morocco, Egypt, Sudan and the United States, and assassination attempts against Qaddafi himself. A detailed review of American press reports emanating from official sources and encouraging the campaign against Qaddafi runs into dozens of items, and includes the most prominent and influential American media.[224]

Among these prominent and influential American media was *Newsweek* magazine. On the 3rd August 1981, the magazine disclosed details of the CIA's activities, which, according to the magazine, involved the assassination of al-Qathafi:

> The operation was a large-scale, multiphase and costly scheme to overthrow the Libyan regime of Muammar Qaddafy... The CIA's goal was Qaddafy's 'ultimate' removal from power. To members of the House Intelligence Committee who reviewed the plan, the phrase seemed to imply Qaddafy's assassination.[225]

The magazine further disclosed:

> It seemed to be a classic CIA destabilisation campaign. One element was a 'disinformation' programme designed to embarrass Qadhafi and his government. Another was the creation of a 'counter government' to challenge his claim to national leadership. A third, potentially the most risky, was an escalating paramilitary campaign, probably by disaffected Libyan nationals, to blow up bridges, conduct smallscale guerrilla operations and demonstrate that Qathafi was opposed by an indigenous political force.[226]

The existence of another bizarre scheme to kill al-Qathafi was reported on the 22nd November 1981 by the French newspaper *Dimanche*. The newspaper stated that it had confirmation of an American-inspired plan to kill al-Qathafi with the assistance of the security services of several Western and pro-Western regimes. According to the newspaper, the plan went back to 1974 when officials of the French Secret Service, the SDECE, met CIA officials in Paris in the presence of Alexandre de Marenches, the head of the French Secret Service, and his opposite number in the CIA. The newspaper said that the plot was put together at the suggestion of the CIA and that it had the cooperation of the British and West German secret services (and the complicity of Egypt and Israel). Israeli planes were to have flown under Egyptian colours to carry out a lightning bomber strike on Tripoli in the hope of hitting al-Qathafi's house. While air raids were going on, the group of Libyan dissidents opposed to al-Qathafi and trained in France, the USA, and Israel would attack the Libyan leader.[227] Whether this newspaper's report was true or

not, and if it was, whether it was intended to actually kill or only frighten al-Qathafi, it is most unlikely to have been ignored by the Libyan government.

More threatening for the Libyan government was the American support lent to the Libyan opposition in Sudan and Egypt. Libya believed in the possibility of invasion from neighbouring countries using groups of Libyan exiles as a cover and there were certainly grounds for such concern.[228] Evidence indicated that the CIA had been the source of much of the financial aid and training for the Libyan opposition in these two particular countries. Sudanese government officials admitted that arms from the USA had been passed to the Libyan opposition in Sudan.[229] The CIA took advantage of the deteriorating relations both between Libya and Sudan under Numeiri and between Libya and Egypt under Sadat to promote the Libyan opposition, particularly the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL). Survivors of the assault attempt on Bab al-Aziziya barracks on the 8th May 1984 later admitted in Libya that they had been trained in Sudan, Britain, and the USA.[230] What made al-Qathafi and his inner circle believe further that they were dealing with a sophisticated Western intelligence operation was the professional nature of the assassination of the Secretary of the Libyan People's Bureau in Rome, 'Amir al-Tagazi, in late January 1984 and that of another diplomat, Faraj Makhyun, in January 1985, in front of his home also in Rome.

Britain also appears to have supported the Libyan opposition groups. Blundy and Lycett reveal that an investigation by the German magazine *Stern* in 1986 revealed a potentially threatening network against Libya linking Berlin and London.[231] According to court testimony in the trial of a German involved in providing handguns and silencers for Libyan opposition groups, London was a key site for the hand-over of weapons and one of the meeting-places of those engaged in these transactions was the Royal Lancaster Hotel.[232] The risk is evident that the Libyan government would conclude that such an operation could not have taken place without the knowledge and the complicity of the

British authorities. Later, with the assassination of Sadat and the overthrow of Numeiri, Libya appeared to believe that Britain had become the centre for the opposition's activities abroad and that Britain had been generous in providing shelter to its opponents and granting them political asylum.[233] Thus, the most likely explanation which can be offered of why al-Qathafi was so serious in his attempt to silence his opposition abroad - to the extent that he managed to harm relations with several European countries, gravely so in the case of Britain - was the distinct possibility of these opponents' being used by foreign powers.

The hostile American and British policy towards Libya and the attempts to assassinate al-Qathafi or at least frighten him clearly support the assumption that although al-Qathafi had been apprehensive of Western intervention, he knew that that would be difficult unless they used his opponents as a cover for such intervention. One might hypothesize that the worst scenario for al-Qathafi might have been a counter-government, encouraged into being and funded by the USA and Britain, which would infiltrate Libya from Egypt, Sudan, Chad, or Libya's own long coast and call for outside military assistance. Any American or British intervention would then not be seen as naked aggression but as legitimate assistance for one contender in a struggle for power in Libya.

Prior to 1980, Western states did not have any great interest in Libyan exiles, and oppositional individuals and groups living in foreign countries had never been a major problem for al-Qathafi. After he came to power, the opposition was confined to pro-monarchist families, a handful of discredited politicians, and several officials and members of political parties purged during the cultural revolution.[234] In May 1976, the former RCC member, 'Umar al-Mahishi, was granted political asylum by Egypt and began broadcasting from Cairo on behalf of what he called the Libyan National Rally, a political organization led by himself and another former RCC member, 'Abd al-Mun'im al-Huni, with the membership of a few Libyan exiles. After al-Mahishi's mental breakdown, the

remaining members linked up with the Libyan Democratic Front to form a new organization called the Libyan Democratic National Rally, headed by Sulayman al-Maghribi, who had served as the first Prime Minister after the Revolution. Another former politician who emerged to form his own opposition organization was 'Abd al-Hamid al-Bakush, a former Prime Minister under the monarchy. However, his dubious reputation and dependence on the Egyptian authorities did not help him to win even the support of Libyan exiles in Egypt. The supposedly most prominent and best organized opposition grouping was the NFSL, which has founded in October 1981 by Muhammad Yusuf al-Meqaryaf, a former Ambassador to India, and Ahmad Ahwas, another former diplomat.[235]

Apart from the USA and other Western powers, the NFSL was supported at different times by various Arab and foreign regimes which were hostile to the revolutionary government in Libya. These regimes included Sudan under Numeiri, Egypt under Sadat, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia.[236] The war in Chad produced a useful stream of recruits to the NFSL, notably Colonel Khalifa Haftar, who became the commander of its military wing after the death of Ahwas. Members of the military wing were recruited largely from former Libyan prisoners of war in Chad and were trained under the auspices of the CIA in Chad until the defeat of Hussein Habré in December 1990, when they were flown to a training camp in the USA.[237]

Although there are more than ten opposition groups, according to specialists on Libya writing for the Economist Intelligence Unit, all of them are 'fragmented, poorly institutionalized, ideologically divided,' and, above all, 'discredited.'[238] Few of them could claim grass-roots support or genuinely represent a political force inside Libya. *Africa Confidential* considered the Libyan opposition groups as 'badly split along ideological and tactical lines' and noted that until the time of writing (1980) they had 'so far failed to find a common denominator.'[239] Blundy and Lycett, while appearing

sympathetic toward the Libyan opposition, admitted that the opposition were 'not a threat to the Libyan state.'[240] The Libyan opposition themselves admitted that fact. A NFSL spokesman said, 'We are not a real challenge to him [al-Qathafi]'[241] A member of the Constitutional Union noted that al-Qathafi 'has a generation which grew up under his regime and knows nothing else.' He added bitterly, 'He is becoming stronger while we fight each other.'[242] Claudia Wright has also pointed out that

> there have been few solid links between the Libyan National Democratic Movement, the Libyan National League and other groups abroad, and critical sections at home. The distinguishing feature of those known to be involved in the exile groups is their tie to the urban middle class from before the revolution. They have no appeal to the new generation of Libyans.[243]

By 1980, however, al-Qathafi appeared to see the opposition abroad as a real threat and decided to go on the offensive. Following up al-Qathafi's warning that he would pursue his opponents even if they went to the North Pole, the Revolutionary Committees issued a communique in their second annual conference in Benghazi calling for the 'physical liquidation' of political opponents living abroad, as well as of elements within Libya considered to be obstructing 'revolutionary change' in political or economic ways. It stated,

> Physical elimination becomes the end stage in the conflict of the revolutionary struggle for a final solution when removing economic, political, and social weapons from the counter-revolutionaries fails to put an end to their activities... the Revolutionary Committees will set about the elimination of the enemies of the Revolution abroad.[244]

Since the hard core of the expatriate opposition remained in Western Europe, with Britain as the main centre, it seemed inevitable that the 'stray dogs operation' would severely strain Libya's foreign relations with these countries. Al-Qathafi appeared either to have underestimated the host countries' reaction or to have decided to shoulder the consequences whatever they might be. Between early April and mid-June 1980, twelve

Libyans were 'eliminated', two of them in Britain. This caused the British government to protest that such acts were unacceptable.[245] William Whitelaw, the Home Secretary, said, 'We have made it clear that we expect our country's law to be carried out.'[246] The Foreign Secretary, Douglas Hurd, on his part, said, 'We are determined that London should not be a battle-ground for Middle East factions.'[247] Later, Britain expelled Musa Kusa, the Head of the Libyan People's Bureau, after he had disclosed that the Revolutionary Committees in London had decided to eliminate two more members of the Libyan opposition in Britain and that he approved of the decision.[248] Kusa's announcement epitomizes the striking feature of the Libyan campaign. Although it is not unusual for regimes to resort to assassination to rid themselves of opponents, such acts have always been publicly denied by the responsible regimes. Kusa's announcement was therefore strikingly exceptional since the Libyan government admitted and even boasted about the murder of its own citizens. This created the impression that a part of the campaign's aim was a show of strength by the Libyan state intended to discourage the growth of opposition, particularly among the students. The Libyan government appeared to have become concerned with the effect of opposition literature and sentiments on the 8,000-10,000 students it sent abroad to study each year (4,000 in Britain alone).[249]

Despite these incidents, the two countries maintained relatively normal commercial relations. In 1980, Libya was the most important Middle East market for West European countries after Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Britain's share of the Libyan market was 7.5 per cent, following in size the amounts of Italy, West Germany, and France. As Table 6 shows, in 1983 Britain exported to Libya goods to the total value of £274 million, including pharmaceuticals, other chemicals, vehicles, machinery, and other manufactures. In return, she imported goods to the total value of £224 million, of which £212 million went on the purchase of oil.

**Table 6**
**UK Trade with Libya in £m, 1983**

| Imports | | Exports | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total 224, of which: | | Total 274, of which: | |
| Oil = | 212 | Pharmaceuticals = | 19.5 |
| | | Other Chemicals = | 30.5 |
| | | Vehicles = | 21 |
| | | Other Machinery = | 113 |
| | | Other Manufactures = | 73 |

Source: *The Times*, 26 April 1984.

However, political relations between the two countries went rapidly from bad to worse during 1984. Tension reached a peak on the 17th February 1984 when numbers of revolutionary students marched on the Libyan People's Bureau in London and announced the formation of a new People's Committee. In a press conference, the spokesman of the new Committee summed up the main points seen by Libya to constitute the principal obstacles in the way of better understanding.[250] He said that the new Committee's aim was to present 'a more resolute profile of the Libyan people's criticism of Britain's role in the Middle East' and to seek 'ways of ending the British Government's hostile stand towards the Jamahiriya.' Libya was particularly annoyed, he added, with Britain's role in 'the so-called multinational force in Lebanon, which... is really a NATO;' with British support for US military manoeuvres in the Gulf region; and with Britain's 'hostile action' in providing refuge for Libyan 'criminal elements' seeking 'to escape justice in the Jamahiriya.'[251] The last point echoes the resolution of the GPC a few days earlier to take a tougher stand towards 'the enemy of the revolution abroad.' The resolution seemed to have been influenced by the death of al-Tagazi in January 1984. Although the Libyan media accused the chief of the PLO security, Salih Khalaf, of planning the murder in retaliation for Libyan support of the anti-Arafat rebels within the PLO, an unknown Libyan opposition group calling itself *al-Burkan* (the Arabic word for 'volcano') claimed responsibility for the murder. If so, he would have been the first senior Libyan official to have been murdered since 1973, when the Israelis shot down a Libyan airliner, killing

all its passengers. The other impact of al-Tagazi's murder was the decision taken by the GPC to set up an External Security Secretariat (for a full list of GPC members, see Table 7).

**Table 7**
**The Composition of the General People's Committee in 1984**

| Portfolio | Incumbent (as of 16th Jan. 1984) |
|---|---|
| Secretary of the GPC | Muhammad al-Zaruq Rajab |
| Justice | Muftah Muhammad Ku'ayba |
| Health | Murad 'Ali Lanqi |
| Economy and Light Industries | Musa Ahmad Abu Furaywa |
| Heavy Industries | 'Umar Mustafa al-Muntasir |
| Treasury | Muhammad Qasim Sharlallah |
| Energy | 'Abd al-Majid al-Qa'ud |
| Electricity | Jum'a Salim al-Arbash |
| Planning | Fawzi al-Shakshuki |
| Education | 'Abd al-Hafiz al-Zalaytani |
| Social Security | Ibrahim al-Faqih Hasan |
| Public Services | Muhammad al-Mabruk |
| Agrarian Reform and Land Reclamation | Abu Zayd 'Umar Durdah |
| Petroleum | Kamil Hasan al-Maqhur |
| Utilities, Housing, and Production | Muhammad 'Ubayd al-Shukri |
| Foreign Liaison Bureau | 'Abd al-Salam al-Treiki |
| Universities | Yusuf Hamid al-Shin |
| Communications and Maritime Transport | Mubarak al-Shamikh |
| Sport | Muhammad 'Uqaylah |
| External Security | Col. Yunis Bilqasim |

Source: The People's Bureau for External Liaison and International Co-operation

On the 10th-11th March 1984, relations between Tripoli and London once again came under strain following a series of bomb explosions in London and Manchester, where

relatively large communities of Libyan exiles were living.[252] Britain was not sure whether there was any link between these incidents and the Libyan People's Bureau. The British Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, told the House of Commons that 'there was no firm evidence linking the People's Bureau with these incidents.'[253] Even though the Foreign Office warned that relations between the two countries could be badly damaged and emphasized that the use of British territory for acts of terrorism by any foreign group was 'totally unacceptable'.[254]

Libya denied any involvement and protested sharply against the subsequent arrest of twenty-three Libyan citizens. Tripoli stated that the detainees were 'students, tourists, or patients receiving medical treatment.'[255] Libya also strongly protested against British provocations which were 'tantamount to Britain's alignment with the enemies of the Libyan Arab People,' and threatened that such provocations would 'be met with all the necessary measures.'[256] The statement once again highlighted Libya's disapproval of Britain's harbouring the Libyan opposition. However, ignoring the hint of retaliation, Britain deported five Libyans held in connection with the explosions. For her part, Libya threatened that 'if Britain wants bad relations it can have them... it will not hurt the Libyan people to take their trade elsewhere,'[257] thus hinting at the possible use of trade and commerce as a political weapon.

The last straw in the breakdown in Anglo-Libyan relations came on the 17th April when a British policewoman was shot dead in front of the Libyan People's Bureau.[258] Britain blamed Libya for the shooting, but the latter denied any responsibility and warned Britain against the consequences of storming the People's Bureau.[259] It has been reported that Leon Brittan, the then Home Secretary, contemplated this option, but was dissuaded from such an action by Foreign Office staff.[260] As an officially recognized diplomatic mission, the Bureau was covered by Article 22 of the 1949 Vienna Convention, which expressly stated that 'the premises of a mission shall be inviolate' and cannot be

entered by the agents of the host country 'except with the consent of the heads of the mission.' The Foreign Office was possibly thinking of the safety of about nineteen British diplomats in Tripoli, not to mention some five thousand British workers in Libya.[261] Libya, for her part, continued to demand the immediate lifting of the police siege of the Bureau and rejected Britain's demands to search the building. As a result, the British government decided to sever diplomatic relations with Libya.[262] The Libyans inside the Bureau were ordered to leave the country on the 29th or 30th April and the same date was set for the return of the British diplomats from Tripoli.[263]

Libya reacted angrily to the British government's decision, suggesting that she had not been expecting Britain to go that far. Al-Qathafi said,

> I was sorry that relations between the Libyan Arab and British people were severed and I know that it is not the wish of the British people but that of the authorities, which do not represent the people because authority is in the hands of a small group, not in the hands of the people.[264]

The anger to which the Libyan statement gave vent should be understood as having complex and diverse roots - as I have tried to show in the discussion earlier in this chapter. Across a range of differences which had arisen between the two countries, the British government had appeared to the Libyans to be too little willing to show the degree of responsiveness to the Libyan position that would indicate a serious desire to engage in relations based on mutual understanding and trust; the manner in which Britain was appearing to provide a haven for Libyan opposition groups had now produced a tragic diplomatic incident with grave consequences for relations between the two governments for the foreseeable future. From the Libyan government's perspective, if Britain were really seeking good relations, she would have prevented the anti-Qathafi demonstrators on the 17th April from getting near to the People's Bureau, by diverting them to another place, just as she had officially been asked to do by the Libyan Bureau. According to *The Times*, Whitehall sources confirmed that two Libyan officials called on the Foreign Office

on the Monday night with a request that the demonstration in St. James's Square should be banned.[265] The Foreign Office chose not to heed the request and the result is now well known.

*6.10 Conclusion*

Since 1969, Libya has pursued a revolutionary foreign policy based on the ideology of the new leaders. Al-Qathafi and his colleagues were determined to end Libya's passive role in international politics and to actively involve the country in Arab affairs. They were also determined to follow an independent foreign policy and to take no part in Great Power conflicts.

As far as Britain was concerned, al-Qathafi showed open and unrelenting hatred toward the British for the country's colonial past in the world generally and in the Arab world in particular. He has been highly critical of British policies in the Arab world dating as far back as the Balfour Declaration of May 1917. In his view, if the USA was to blame for supporting Israel since the state's establishment in 1948, Britain was to blame for creating the state of Israel in the first place. Britain was also to blame, along with other Western powers, for her role in dividing the Arab nation into small and weak states, and for planting the seeds of division among the Arab people. In addition to these historical reasons for the strained relations between the two countries, al-Qathafi and his colleagues believed that Britain had not shed her colonial and imperialist mentality, but still showed minimal respect in her dealings with other nations. Therefore, they insisted that if Britain wanted to have friendly relations with Libya, she should be prepared to expiate her colonial outlook and learn to respect the Libyan people's right of self-determination.

Although the evacuation of the British bases from Libya appeared at the time as an opportunity for a continuation of the strong ties that had prevailed between the two

countries during the monarchical regime, the new revolutionary leaders were not concerned only with domestic affairs. Their aim was to change the unfair and unjust *status quo* and viewed Britain as a major pillar of it. As a result, the two countries sharply contradicted each other on many national and international issues, among them the nationalization of BP, Libya's policy of neutralizing Malta, her support for national liberation movements such as the Palestinian organizations and the IRA, and her rejection of Western plans for the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Britain appeared to have shared with the USA the view that Libya's foreign policy was a threat to her interests and friends in the region, especially with the accession of Reagan to power in 1981 and the shared understanding on many foreign policy issues that quickly developed between Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Given this development, and against a background of increasingly strained relations with both governments over some years, mounting Libyan concern over media reports that the United States was now actively aiding Libyan opposition groups and fears that Britain was supporting such involvements, were inevitable. For Libya this was unacceptable and the government began to consider the expatriate Libyan opposition in Britain and the USA as a serious threat, comprising a virtual link in a chain of conspiracy masterminded by the Western powers.

Al-Qathafi's preoccupation with the Libyan opposition in exile had, and probably still does have, much to do with the fear of military intervention and regime subversion by foreign powers rather than with a genuine potential threat from his Libyan opponents. There is no doubt that al-Qathafi has been irritated by his opponents' activities, especially the smear campaignss against himself personally using the facilities of Cairo and Omdurman radio stations, but the possibility of these opponents' being used by the American administration, or by Sadat and Numeiri, was the real threat that he perceived. Therefore, al-Qathafi tried to eliminate that threat and, from that point on, relations

between Libya and Britain went from bad to worse, until their total breakdown with the murder of the British policewoman in front of the Libyan People's Bureau on the 17th April 1984.

Libya's conduct in foreign policy towards Britain has been an alternate application of carrot and stick. At first, al-Qathafi tried on several occasions to woo Britain away from her negative stance towards Libya. He made it clear that Britain would benefit from relations with Libya if she took a positive stand regarding a range of issues of concern both to Libya and the Arab nation, especially in the struggle against Israel, and if she ceased encouraging the Libyan opposition. The benefits that Britain would gain were said to be varied, ranging from better chances for the British oil companies to increased imports of British goods. When the carrot was spurned, al-Qathafi resorted to the stick, trying to use every means available to him. He threatened to halt oil supplies, to withdraw Libyan deposits from British banks, or to support the IRA. He also threatened to demand reparations from Britain for the minefields and unexploded bombs and shells that had taken a toll of hundreds of Libyan dead and injured since 1943.

Although Libya and Britain maintained a web of common economic interests, ultimately their national interests and their stands on international questions were diametrically opposed and made it increasingly difficult for them to work together.

**NOTES**

1. See al-Qathafi's speech of the 13th March 1970, *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I (1969-70), 191-205.

2. Maitland, *Diverse times*, 166.

3. *New York Times*, 4th Sept. 1969.

4. Maitland, *Diverse times*, 166.

5. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 51-60.

6. Donald Maitland, *Diverse times*, 166.

7. *The Times*, 31st October 1969.

8. Maitland, *Diverse times*, 168.

9. *Ibid.*

10. For instance, the Libyan government issued statements in 1964 and again in 1967 confirming its intention of not renewing or extending the military agreements with Britain and the United States, but no follow-up action occurred.

11. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

12. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 75-88. See also *The Economist*, 6 Sept. 1969.

13. Personal interview with Donald Maitland, Bath, 30th October 1996.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Maitland, *Diverse Times*, 166.

16. See the account in the *New York Times*, 14th Nov. 1969.

17. *The Times*, 31st October 1969.

18. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 77.

19. *The Times*, 2nd September 1969.

20. For further details, see *Africa report*, June 1968, 31.

21. Personal interview with Donald Maitland, Bath, 30th October 1996.

22. *The Guardian*, 31st October 1969.

23. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

26. *The Guardian*, 31st October 1969.

27. *Asrar al-qawa'id al-Baritaniyah fi Libya*, 137-8.

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 131-3. See also *Asrar al-qawa'id al-Baritaniyah fi Libya*, 133 f.

30. Shembesh, *The analysis of Libya's foreign policy*, 206.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Arab report and record* (*ARR*), 1-15 Dec. 1969, 512.

33. Personal interview with Donald Maitland, Bath, 30th October 1996.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

36. Ivor Lucas has pointed out that British diplomats assumed there was the feeling among the Libyan populace that the King slept more serenely in his bed because the British troops were there ready to help him if required (interview, London, 22nd October 1996).

37. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 193.

38. For the full text of the speech, see *ibid.*, 191-205.

39. Maitland, *Diverse times*, 171. See also Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 77-78.

40. Personal interview with Donald Maitland, Bath, 30th October 1996.

41. *The Times*, 16th January 1970.

42. *Ibid.*

43. For more details on the deal, see *Africa report*, June 1968, 31. See also *The Economist*, 4th May 1968.

44. *The Times*, 8th November 1969.

45. *ARR*, 16-30 April 1969, 165.

46. See al-Qathafi's criticism of the deal in *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 174.

47. *The Times*, 31 Jan. 1969.

48. *The Economist*, 15 Nov. 1969, 30.

49. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

50. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I (1969-70) 174.

51. See the statement by the Libyan Defence Minister quoted in *The Times*, 8 Nov. 1969. See also *The Economist*, 15 Nov. 1969, 30.

52. *ARR*, 16-31 Dec. 1969, 537.

53. Interview with Peter Tripp, Powys, 7th October 1996.

54. *The Times*, 30th December 1969.

55. Interview with Donald Maitland, Bath, 30th October, 1996.

56. Maitland, *Diverse times*, 172.

57. *ARR*, 1-15 Sept. 1969, 477.

58. *The Times*, 13 Nov. 1970.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. *ARR*, 1-15 November 1970, p. 611.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*

66. For more details, see *Africa Confidential*, XI, 3 (30 Jan. 1970) 6-7; *ARR*, 16-31 Jan. 1970, 66.

67. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 78. See also *Africa Confidential*, XVIII (5 Sept. 1969) 7.

68. Interview with Peter Tripp, Powys, 7th October 1996.

69. *ARR*, 16-31 Jan. 1970, 66.

70. Interview with Peter Tripp Powys, 7th October 1996.

71. *ARR*, 1-15 Jan. 1970, 41.

72. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 182.

73. *ARR*, 1-15 May 1973, 207.

74. *New York Times*, 22 Jan. 1970.

75. *ARR*, 16-31 Jan. 1970, 66.

76. *Ibid.*

77. St. John, "The Soviet penetration of Libya", 134.

78. In an interview with the present writer in Tripoli, Abdul 'Ati al-'Ubaidi, a member of the civilian cell of the Revolution and a former Foreign Secretary and former General-Secretary of the GPC, pointed out that the national dimension of the Revolution's foreign policy was one of the factors that led to the deterioration of the relations between Libya and Britain.

79. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, II, 299.

80. *Ibid.*, II, 298 f.

81. For more details on the Iranian occupation, see, for example, Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 70-71; Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 90; Al-Alkim, *The GCC states in an unstable world*, 111-115.

82. Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 70. The present author also read and listened to these accusations in the Libyan media at the time.

83. Quoted in *ARR*, 1-15 Dec. 1971, 628.

84. Libyan Radio, 13th December 1971.

85. *The Economist*, 11 Dec. 1971, 94.

86. *The Times*, 24 Dec. 1971.

87. *Ibid.* See also *ARR*, 16-31 Dec. 1971, 652.

88. *The Times*, 9th Dec. 1971.

89. *Ibid.*, 24 Dec. 1971.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 52.

92. *Ibid.*, IV, 796.

93. In a personal interview with Peter Tripp, the present author was told that the nationalization of BP was a shock for the British government, which was very concerned that al-Qathafi was taking the lead in upsetting the agreed arrangements which had been established between the oil-producers and the oil consumers.

94. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, III, 435.

95. *The Times*, 31st December 1971.

96. For more details on BP's legal battle with the Libyan government, see *The Economist*, 8 Jan. 1972, 58.

97. Waddams, *The Libyan oil industry*, 251.

98. *Ibid.*

99. It was reported that the USSR's purchase of al-Sarir crude rose to more than 100,000 b/d. See *Petroleum Intelligence Weekly*, 22 May, 12 June, 31 July 1972.

100. Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 72; *The Times*, 25 Oct. 1973; *ARR*, 16-31 Oct. 1973, 496.

101. See *The Economist*, 11 Dec. 1971, 71.

102. See, for example, *The Times*, 13 November 1970.

103. *The Times*, 15 Dec. 1971.

104. *The Times*, 17th December 1971.

105. Louis, "American anti-colonialism", 408. For more details, see Pelt, *Libyan independence*, 701-716.

106. F.O. 371/90363, Memorandum by Allen, 14th June 1951.

107. *The Times*, 17th December 1971.

108. *ARR*, 1-15 Nov. 1970, 611.

109. *The Times*, 15 Dec. 1971.

110. Personal interview with Peter Tripp, Powys, 7th October 1996.

111. *The Economist*, 7 April 1979.

112. *Al-Sijill al-qawmi*, II, 321.

113. *ARR*, 1-15 August 1971, 413.

114. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 117.

115. On Libya's aid to Malta, see Micallef, "Mediterranean maverick", 238-251. See also Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 117-8.

116. *Ibid.*

117. *ARR*, 16-31 Aug. 1971, 442.

118. *ARR*, 1-15 July 1971, 353.

119. Micallef, "Mediterranean maverick", 243.

120. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IX, 712.

121. *The Times*, 2nd August 1971. See also *The Economist*, 7 Aug. 1971.

122. Dowdall, "Mintoff's Malta: problems of independence", 190.

123. *The Times*, 2 Aug. 1971.

124. *The Times*, 31st December 1971. For more details on the British military presence in Malta and the whole of the Mediterranean, see *The military balance 1969-70*, 17, 19.

125. See *The Economist*, 15 Jan. 1972, 30; 7 Aug. 1971, 33.

126. *The Times*, 1 Jan. 1972. For more details on Malta's demands and Britain's reaction, see *The Economist*, 1 Jan. 1972, 27; 8 Jan. 1972, 28.

127. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, II (1970-1) 321.

128. *Ibid.*

129. *ARR*, 1-15 Oct. 1971, 533.

130. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, VII, 628.

131. *Ibid.*, VII, 628.

132. *Ibid.*, 624.

133. Alexander, "The foreign policy of Libya".

134. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, X, 364.

135. *Ibid.*, 365.

136. Interview with Peter Tripp, Powys, 7th October 1996.

137. *Ibid.*

138. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, II (1970-1) 321.

139. Bianco, *Gadafi*, 157.

140. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, III, 221 f.

141. *Africa confidential*, XIV, 3 (2 Feb. 1973) 7. For more details on the Soviet and Chinese involvement, see Micallef, "Mediterranean maverick", 238-251.

142. *The Times*, 18 Aug. 1971.

143. Quoted in *ibid.*

144. *The Times*, 18th August 1971.

145. For the full text of al-Qathafi's speech at the Conference, see *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 731-750.

146. *Middle East contemporary survey*, IV (1979-80) 646.

147. *Ibid.*

148. *Financial Times*, 21st March 1980.

149. *Ibid.* *Africa report* (Nov.-Dec. 1980, 28) put the figure as high as 50 military advisers. See also *Arab world*, 25 Mar. 1981, 8.

150. *The Times*, 20th November 1984.

151. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, III (1971-2) 434-5.

152. See *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 781.

153. For more details on the primacy of ideology in Libya's foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular, see Chapter Nine of this study.

154. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, III, 434 f.

155. *The Times*, 13 June 1972.

156. *Ibid.*

157. *Ibid.*, 13th June 1972.

158. *ARR*, 16-31 Mar. 1973, 133.

159. *The Times*, 31st January 1974.

160. Interview with Peter Tripp, Powys, 7 Oct. 1996.

161. *Ibid.*

162. *Ibid.*

163. *Ibid.*

164. *Ibid.*

165. *The Times*, 24th January 1978.

166. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 692.

167. *Ibid.*, 781.

168. This was confirmed in an interview with Peter Tripp, the British Ambassador to Libya from 1970 to 1974.

169. For the full text of the Balfour Declaration, see Kimche, *There could have been peace*, 343.

170. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, III (1971-2) 435.

171. *Ibid.*

172. *Ibid.*, 437.

173. Maitland, *Diverse times*, 163.

174. *Ibid.*, 162.

175. Personal interview with Donald Maitland, Bath, 30th October 1996.

176. Personal interview with Peter Tripp, Powys, 7th October 1996.

177. This sense of suspicion was expressed to Tripp by Major Jalloud, who used to accuse the British of being colonizers who had sucked the blood of the Arabs.

178. *The Times*, 3 Nov. 1969; *ARR*, 1-15 Nov. 1969, 460.

179. Quoted in *ARR*, 16-30 Sept. 1971, 507.

180. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV (1972-3) 51.

181. *Al-Fajr al-Jadid* (*The New Dawn*), 16 Sept. 1969, 388.

182. *ARR*, 16-30 Oct. 1969, 413.

183. *Ibid.*, 1-15 Oct. 1969, 413.

184. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 781.

185. *ARR*, 15-28 Feb. 1970, 121.

186. This was confirmed by Peter Tripp in a personal interview with the present author on the 7th October 1996.

187. *Al-Fajr al-Jadid*, 16 Sept. 1974.

188. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

189. Personal interview with Donald Maitland, Bath, 30th October 1996.

190. For more details on the UN Security Council's resolution 242, see Kimche, *There could have been peace*, 344.

191. For more details on al-Qathafi's position, see *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 122.

192. Quoted in *ARR*, 1-15 May 1971, 240.

193. *Al-Jundi*, 27 Feb. 1971.

194. See Deutsch, "Dealing with Gaddafi", 47-53.

195. For further details on al-Qathafi's views on solving the Palestinian question, see *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 122.

196. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 52.

197. *Ibid.*, V, 104.

198. *ARR*, 1-15 Aug. 1971, 413.

199. Blundy & Lycett, *Qaddafi*, 160. In an interview conducted by the author in 1994, Mr. al-'Ubaidi emphasized the fact that most of the Libyan educated elite had an Anglo-Saxon educational background and that as Libyan-American relationshad deteriorated, Britain had become the favorored destination for Libyan students seeking higher education and for Libyans needing specialist medical treatment.

200. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 245-7.

201. *The Middle East*, July 1984, 20. For more details, see *ibid.*, June 1983, 28-33; *Middle East contemporary survey 1984*, 581-7.

202. See *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, XI, 494.

203. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, XI, 494.

204. Blundy & Lycett, *Qaddafi*, 138. See also *The Arab world*, 25 June 1980, 8.

205. *The Times*, 13th June 1980.

206. Concern over the loss of this money circulated widely within the Libyan People's Bureau at the time I served there in the early 1980s.

207. *The Arab World*, 13 May 1980, 10; *New York Times*, 12 May 1980.

208. Libya accused Britain and the USA of aiding 'terrorist activities' against her (*Financial Times*, 14 May 1981).

209. This view was made clear to the author by Mr. al-'Ubaidi in a personal interview in Tripoli in 1994. The view was also expressed to the author by Ivor Lucas, a former British diplomat in Libya, who indicated that he felt that the British followed too closely whatever lead was taken by the Americans regarding Libya and regarding other parts of the Middle East (personal interview, London, 22nd October 1996).

210. For a useful discussion of US-Libyan relations from 1969 to 1984, see Haley, *Qaddafi and the United States since 1969*.

211. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 228.

212. On the background to the US attempt to isolate Libya, see *The Financial Times*, 12 Dec. 1981.

213. *The Arab World*, 13 May 1980, 9.

214. Examples of these humiliations were the US hostage crisis in Iran, the fall of America's friends such as the Shah of Iran and Somoza of Nicaragua, the burning of the American Embassy in Pakistan, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

215. Halliday, *Beyond Irangate*, 8.

216. Wright, "Libya and the West", 13.

217. *Ibid.*, 13 f.

218. *Ibid.*, 15.

219. Claudia Wright argued that an apparent slip by Anwar Sadat during a US television interview had disclosed the use of these planes in what may have been an unsuccessful coup attempt against al-Qathafi. See *The Middle East*, Sept. 1981, 16.

220. For more details on the incident, see *The Arab World*, 20 Aug. 1981, 2-7; Wright, *New Statesman*, 21 Aug. 1981, 12-14. For the official American account of the incident, see *Department of State Bulletin*, LXXXI, 2055 (Oct. 1981) 57-61.

221. The Assistant Secretary of State, Chester Crocker, was reported as saying that the USA intended to funnel military aid to any of al-Qathafi's neighbours 'who see the problem as we see it' (*Newsweek*, 20 July 1981). *The Arab World* (5 June 1981, 11) claimed that the American assistance programme proposed $95 million for Tunisia, $100

million for Sudan, and over $900 million for Egypt, countries which all shared borders with Libya. *Africa Report* (March-April 1982, 50) similarly claimed that 54 M60A main battle tanks had been sent to Tunisia, that assistance to Egypt had been hugely increased, and that military aid to Sudan had more than tripled in 1982.

222. Quoted in Wright, "Libya and the West", 16.

223. *The Arab World*, 24 Aug. 1981, 10. See also *Newsweek*, 20 July 1981.

224. Wright, "Libya and the West", 16.

225. *Newsweek*, 3 Aug. 1981, 32.

226. *Ibid.*

227. *The Guardian*, 23 Nov. 1981. For further details on the French attempts to overthrow al-Qathafi, see *The Middle East*, Aug 1981, 35 f.

228. *The Middle East*, Aug. 1981, 24.

229. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 248.

230. The present author watched the confessions of some of the survivors on Libyan television. For more details on the attack of the 8th May, see Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 250; *Middle East contemporary survey 1984*, 585-7; *Financial Times*, 9, 14 May 1984.

231. Blundy & Lycett, *Qaddafi*, 156.

232. *Ibid.*, 156.

233. This view was presented to the author by Mr. al-'Ubaidi in a personal interview in Tripoli in 1994. The view was also confirmed by Saleh Ibrahim and 'Ali Musbah in personal interviews with the author in Tripoli in 1994.

234. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 244.

235. See *Africa Confidential*, XXII, 1 (Sept. 1981) 1 f.; XXV, 9 (25 Ap. 1984) 1-4; *Middle East contemporary survey 1984*, 581-7. For more details on the Libyan opposition, see *Libya under Gaddafi and the NFSL challenge: an anthology of the NFSL news report 1989-92*; Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 243-250; Al-Khawas, *Qaddafi: his ideology in theory and practice*, 106-111.

236. According to opposition sources, the USA encouraged al-Meqaryaf to set up the Front with $30 million supplied by Saudi Arabia (*Africa report*, July-Aug. 1984, 46).

237. Information supplied to the author by relatives of soldiers returned from Chad.

238. EIU, *Libya in the 1990s: can its resources be salvaged*, Special report no. 2134, 66.

239. *Africa Confidential*, XXI, 21 (15 Oct. 1980) 3.

240. Blundy & Lycett, *Qaddafi*, 135.

241. *The Middle East*, July 1984, 21.

242. *Ibid.*

243. Wright, "Libya and the West", 29 f.

244. *Al-Zahf al-akhdar* (the green march) (Tripoli, 7th February 1980).

245. *The Times*, 7 May 1980.

246. *Ibid.*

247. *The Arab World*, 13 May 1980, 9.

248. Musa Kusa made these remarks in an interview conducted by Michael Horsnell, a journalist on the staff of *The Times*. Horsnell subsequently passed the remarks to the police and the Foreign Office. (*The Times*, 14 June 1980.)

249. *Africa Confidential*, XXV, 9 (25 Ap. 1984) 1.

250. *Jamahiriya international report*, 3rd March 1984.

251. *Ibid.*

252. For more details, see *New York Times*, 13 Mar. 1984.

253. Blundy & Lycett, *Qaddafi*, 172. Richard Luce, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, also said in a radio interview just after the explosions that there was no conclusive proof that Libyans were behind the terrorist attacks. See further *The Times*, 12th March 1984.

254. *The Times*, 12 Mar. 1984.

255. *JANA*, 11th March; Radio Tripoli, 12th March 1984. This point was confirmed by 'Ali Musbah, who was a student in London at the time, in an interview conducted by the author in Tripoli in 1994.

256. *JANA*, 11th March; Radio Tripoli, 12th March.

257. *Jamahiriya international report*, 17th March 1984.

258. For more details on the incident, see *The Times*, 18, 19, 20 April; *New York Times*, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 April 1984.

259. A recent British television programme has cast grave doubt on Britain's accusation of Libyan responsibility for this incident, offering evidence to show that the bullet which killed policewoman Yvonne Fletcher could not have been fired from the Libyan People's Bureau ("Despatches", Channel 4, 10th April 1996).

260. Blundy & Lycett, *Qaddafi*, 177.

261. See *The Times*, 12 Mar. & 23 Ap. 1984. *The Financial Times* (19 Ap. 1984) gave the number of Britons working in Libya as high as 9,000.

262. For the full text of the statement made by the British Foreign Minister, Richard Luce, on Britain's decision to sever diplomatic relations with Libya, see *New York Times*, 23 Ap. 1984.

263. For a full account of the siege of the Libyan Bureau and the break-off of relations, see *The Times*, 18, 19, 23, 24 Ap. 1984; *The Guardian*, 18, 23 Ap. 1984; Blundy & Lycett, *Qaddafi*, chap. 12 "Murder in London", 160-178.

264. *JANA*, 29th April 1984.

265. *The Times*, 18 Ap. 1984.

# PART THREE

# THE ROLE OF OIL AND LEADERSHIP IN LIBYA'S FOREIGN POLICY

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# OIL AND LIBYA'S FOREIGN POLICY

*7.1 Introduction*

Since against an unchanging background of location, size, topography, and climate, radical changes have occurred in Libya's foreign policy, it will be worth considering what changes have in fact taken place in Libya during the period under study that have affected the foreign policy of the country. Clearly, the two most significant changes in Libya have been the discovery of oil in 1959 and the emergence of al-Qathafi as the country's leader in 1969.

The present chapter is devoted to a consideration of the former of these two changes. It is obvious to all that the discovery of oil in huge quantities has marked a turning-point in Libyan history on account of the new economic capacity that it gave to the country. Economic capacity is, of course, an important instrument in shaping any country's foreign policy. Not only may economic resources be used as a means of convincing, rewarding, or punishing other countries, but they are also essential if a country is to pursue an independent policy and be able to defend its national security.

As far as Libya has been concerned, oil has been, since its discovery, the mainstay of the country's economy. Apart from oil Libya had few natural resources; thus currently more than 90 per cent of the country's foreign earnings come from oil revenues. Oil revenues rose exponentially from $3 million in 1962 to $1.175 billion in 1969, by which time Libya had the second largest oil income within OPEC. In succeeding years, these

revenues jumped ahead again, from $5,100 million in 1975 to about $22,000 million in 1980.[1] Although it was short lived, this rapid rise in oil income has transformed Libya from poverty to abundance in less than ten years.

This chapter will examine the impact of oil on Libya's foreign policy during the monarchical regime and during the revolutionary period, but it will be prefaced by a brief discussion of Libya's oil policy under both regimes. The discussion will not cover all aspects of Libyan oil policy, but will focus rather on certain elements of oil policy, such as control, pricing, production, and revenues, and on the implications of these for Libya's foreign policy towards Britain.

When Libya became independent in 1951, she was one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. *Per capita* income was estimated at $35 per annum, the lowest in the Arab world, malnutrition was widespread, and among the million inhabitants 90 per cent were illiterate. The country's main exportable items were esparto grass and scrap metal collected from abandoned military equipment left by the Europeans during the Second World War, during which Libya had been a major theatre.

Although part of this gloomy picture resulted from by Libya's harsh topography and weather, the lion's share was caused by the successive colonial invaders whose aim was to serve their own national interests at the expense of the indigenous people. As has been discussed in Cahpter One, the colonial experience and ensuing years of the Second World War brought to a halt most domestic economic activity. Lisa Anderson has pointed out that 'even by third world standards, Libya's experience of Western imperialism was unusually damaging.'[2]

The colonial experience not only halted all forms of agricultural and local semi-industrial production, but also entailed a neglect of education and training. By the end

of the Second World War, the Libyan people were seriously impoverished and under-educated. Not surprisingly, on the eve of independence, there were only fourteen Libyan university graduates. Therefore, the most serious problem facing Libya after independence was the virtual non-existence of educated and trained manpower. Libya's desperate economic situation led Benjamin Higgins, in a study sponsored by the United Nations and the USA in 1953, to conclude that if Libya could be brought to a stage of sustained growth, there was hope for every country in the world.[3]

*7.2 Dependence on foreign aid*

Like the colonial economy that preceded it, the post-independence economy had to rely on foreign subsidies, mainly from Britain and the USA, to make up for its deficits. This dependence inevitably enabled these two Western powers to tighten their grip on Libya's foreign and domestic policies. As has been mentioned in Chapter Three, it was obvious that the financial and technical assistance given by the foreign countries was not motivated by friendship or humanitarian considerations, but rather by self-interest and desire for dominance. Indeed, the way in which economic and technical aid was granted to Libya during the early years of independence revealed the real intention of the colonial powers, which was to keep Libya subordinate to the donor states' sphere of influence. As has been observed, 'Control and influence over the periphery was also sustained by the way economic aid was granted and administered, and by the conditions imposed when loans were granted.'[4] As a result, Libya's independence was cast in doubt. True economic and political independence cannot be secured in a country that relies heavily on foreign aid.

Thus, economic dependence inevitably led to political dependence and the Libyan government appeared to have no control over its foreign policy. As a result, the Libyan government involved itself in policies and schemes which had no real benefit for the people, but only served to win the satisfaction of Britain and the USA. An example of

this was Ben Halim's support for the so-called 'Eisenhower Doctrine', which was an economic and military aid programme intended to keep the Middle East under Western domination in the face of what was perceived by the USA as communist infiltration. After a visit to Libya made by then Vice-President Richard Nixon, Premier Ben Halim expressed enthusiasm for the doctrine and echoed the Doctrine's strong anti-communist aims. He declared,

> We, like the American people, abhor international communism... it is contrary to the principles of our faith. We are aware that communism, with the American people as with us, is Public Enemy No. 1, and that all measures possible should be taken to counter it.[5]

This strong anti-communist tone can only make one wonder who was actually speaking—the Libyan Premier or Eisenhower himself? Ben Halim's statement was unlikely to have directly reflected the views of a significant proportion of Libyans. Although, as Muslims, the Libyan people felt repugnance for the communist theory on account of its atheist principles, they did not regard the USSR as a threat. To the average Libyan, threat from the USSR has always been inconceivable at any time. The USSR was 6,000 miles away and never provoked any trouble with Libya. A warning against a threat from Italy, France, Britain, or Israel would indeed have been more comprehensible, but what could have been expected from a regime dependent on powers such as Britain, with her long history of colonialism, or the USA, which wanted to take over from Britain, not only to pay for Libya's financial deficit but also to protect her from internal and external threats?

*7.3 Dependence on oil revenues*

The discovery of oil was indeed a turning-point in the recent history of Libya. It has transformed Libya from one of the poorest countries in the world to one of the richest in a very short time. National income rose, in the period 1958-1962, to 155 million dinars, an average of 120 dinars per individual as a result of the start of oil production. In the period between 1962 and 1969, oil began to be exported in large quantities. Daily

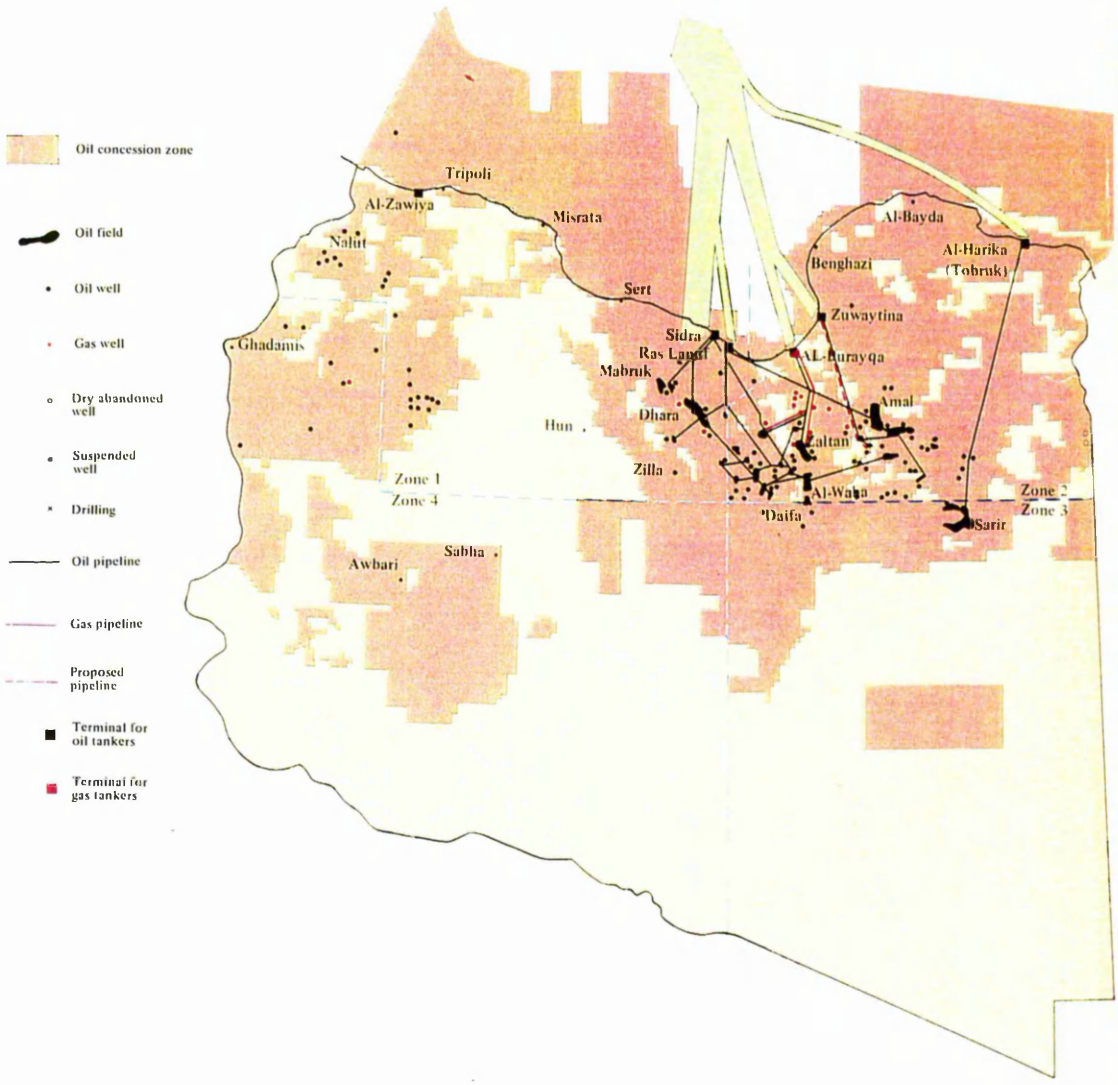
production rose from 0.5 million barrels in 1963 to about 1.5 million barrels in 1966, and to 3.1 million in 1969.[6] However, this oil surplus created a distorted economy relying on one single sector and the expertise of other economic activities. Moreover, foreigners held almost total control of key economic sectors such as banking, insurance, foreign trade, and the best farming. This foreign control further stifled the national economy.[7] As far as foreign policy was concerned, the huge oil revenues did not, however, mean that the monarchical regime was immediately freed from its dependence on the Western powers but, to the contrary, the dependent foreign policy was further confirmed by the discovery of oil since the monarchy had neither the technology to exploit it nor the power to defend it.

During the late fifties, the search for oil resources had become one of the principal concerns of the Libyan government.[8] In July 1955, Libya passed her Petroleum Law, which was the first step towards establishing an oil industry. The law divided Libya into four zones, which were further subdivided into 95 concessions. It stipulated that one quarter of concessionary areas were to be handed back within five years from the date of the original grant for subsequent re-offer to another concessionaire. The law further stipulated that the government was to receive 50 per cent of the income from company operations after the deduction of operating costs.[9]

The clauses of the law indicated that the Libyan government intended to prevent any single foreign company or group of companies from gaining a grip over the oil industry, as had occurred in other Middle Eastern countries. Yet it was generous in terms of its pricing mechanism and tax allowances to the extent that it made the country prone to oil-company abuse and manipulation. Under this law, the oil companies were not obliged to publish crude posted prices. In fact, despite a number of amendments to the law, such as Petroleum Regulation No. 6 of 1961, which required the publication of the

**Map 2**

**Locations of oil production.**




Source: adapted from *Al jamahiriya*, prepared by the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, Department of Moral Guidance, p. 41

posted prices of crude oil, most of the oil companies refused to do so. According to Frank Waddams, 'The favourable terms of the Libyan Law of 1955 and the concessions were a foretaste of paradise for the oil companies.'[10]

The breakthrough came with Esso's discovery of the Zelten field in 1959, which offered a high capacity of production (see Map 2). Once confidence in Libyan oil was strong, oil companies, both majors and independents, swarmed like bees to the Libyan honeycomb. As a result, Libya was converted into a principal oil-exporting state within a short time. The process was helped considerably by the country's strategic location, her pro-Western government, and the high quality of the Libyan oil. Lying west of Suez on the southern Mediterranean coast, Libyan oil was not only much nearer to the thirsty oil markets of Southern and Western Europe, but also immune to adverse events in the Suez Canal area. The closure of the Suez Canal after the 1956 tripartite aggression helped to reinforce this perception. It also soon became clear that Libyan crude was light and of such a high quality that it required very little refining because of its very low sulphur content. The most important factor, however, may have been the presence of Western bases in Libya that could be relied upon to intervene in emergencies. So, for instance, BP's choice of al-Hariqa as its export terminal must have been largely influenced by the presence nearby of the British troops in Tobruq (see Map 2).

The Libyan oil industry was unique in its unprecedented rate of growth. Libya became the first oil-producing country to surpass production of a million barrels per day in less than five years from the start of production. By 1969, in fact, Libya was supplying a quarter of all European needs, which set her in the position of the world's sixth largest oil-producer and the fourth largest oil-exporter.

*7.4 Foreign policy implications*

Prior to the discovery of oil, the monarchical regime blamed the harsh economic conditions for Libya's heavy dependence on Britain and the USA, but with the inflow of oil revenues these justifications became patently invalid. It had been thought that the flow of oil revenue would liberate Libya's foreign policy from subordination to the two Western countries. Libya was expected to be henceforth free to express her own aspirations in the international arena and to pursue the cause of Arab nationalism[11] and yet, as events were to prove, money alone was not enough to engender any major change. Contrary, in fact, to these expectations and speculations, Libya only moved from dependence on foreign aid to dependence on oil companies, so that the country remained still subordinated to Western interests and ultimately to British and American foreign policy.

The failure of oil revenue to inspire an independent foreign policy may be attributed to several factors. The oil industry requires a high degree of technology and experience, which the Libyan government neither possessed nor was willing to obtain from sources other than the West. Instead of diversifying sources of aid and assistance, under American and British pressure, the Libyan government, in line with Britain and the USA, mistrusted the USSR and other Eastern bloc countries, and turned down their offers of economic and technical assistance. This limited Libya's manoeuvrability and put her at the mercy of the oil companies and their home governments.

Indeed, the replacement of dependence on foreign aid by almost complete dependence on oil revenues provided by Western oil companies gave the latter great leverage on the Libyan government. In reality, some major companies became virtual states within the state. For example, oil companies refused to post and publish a price for Libyan crude oil and even those which did agree to do so posted their prices at a very low level (see Table 8). Moreover, the oil companies paid less for Libyan oil than for oil from almost every other producer, although it was of high quality and cheaper to transport to

major customers. The result was that Libya suffered a massive loss of revenues. One oil expert believed that the Esso posting price, for instance, should have been about 40 cents higher, since oil of similar quality was at the time posted at $2.65, more than 40 cents higher.[12] The issue of price was never brought to a head by the monarchical regime. In fact, the corrupt pro-Western monarchy was unwilling or unable to compel the oil companies to pay even normal rates for the oil they extracted. It appeared to have accepted the companies' oil royalties without demur. Even when the government did protest, its complaints were sporadic and were casually treated by the companies as mere pro forma grumblings.[13]

**Table 8**
**Libyan oil exports and prices before the Revolution**

| Year | Oil exports (m barrels) | Revenues ($ m) | Receipts per barrel ($) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1961 | 6 | 3 | .50 |
| 1962 | 67 | 40 | .60 |
| 1963 | 167 | 108 | .65 |
| 1964 | 314 | 211 | .67 |
| 1965 | 443 | 351 | .79 |
| 1966 | 547 | 523 | .96 |
| 1967 | 621 | 625 | 1.01 |
| 1968 | 945 | 1,002 | 1.06 |
| 1969 | 1,120 | 1,175 | 1.08 |

Source: derived from *Petroleum economist, OPEC oil report*, 1979.

Another example of the oil companies' increasing irreverence for the monarchical regime was their ignoring the regulations and instructions issued by the Libyan Ministry of Petroleum Affairs. Depending on a decision taken by OPEC at the Baghdad meeting in 1968, giving its members the right to make conservation regulations, the Libyan

Ministry of Petroleum issued Regulation No. 8 for the oil companies to follow, but in practice the Libyan government was in no position to enforce OPEC's resolution since any change in the agreement with the oil companies had to be mutually acceptable. The oil companies retained enough leverage to beat off even the timely reforms proposed by OPEC. Frank Waddams recalled that when OPEC's formula was under discussion in Libya, a representative of one of the oil companies working in Libya told the Prime Minister, Husayn Mazeq, that the situation in Libya might become politically precarious if the government aroused opposition to US interests.[14]

Even the highest authority in the country appeared to have been under the influence of the oil companies and their home governments. The King seemed to have believed that since the success of the oil industry was dependent on the oil companies, Libya should accept their conditions. He even appeared to have been more accessible to the oil companies' representative than to his own government's members. Ruth First relates the story of one oil company executive who closed his meeting with the Oil Minister by saying, 'I am on my way to see the King: is there anything you want me to tell him?'[15] Ivor Lucas also recalled an incident where the general manager of the BP Company had managed to obtain permission for laying a pipeline from the interior of Barqa to the port of Tobruq, by seeking audience with the King after he had encountered difficulties in obtaining permission from the tribal leaders of the area through which the pipeline had to pass.[16] In this position of apparent subservience, the Libyan Ministers and high-ranking officials tried to appease the oil companies' representatives at the expense of Libya's interests. As an Arab proverb says, 'If the head of the family is a drummer, you should not blame the children for dancing.'

However, as Libya grew richer with the massive inflow of oil revenues, Idris and his inner circle started to become concerned for Libya's national security. Surprisingly their anxiety was not engendered by the colonial powers but rather by Arab neighbours,

particularly Egypt.[17] This surprise disappears, however, when we remember that the monarchical regime's anxiety was caused by their habit of shadowing Britain's extreme suspicion of Egypt and other Arab nationalist countries.[18] Long years of contact with the British appeared to have made Idris adopt the British point of view that Egypt was a threat to Libya's security and Britain could provide the protection that Libya needed.

Oil income was also the main creator of growing public awareness, though indirectly. Oil money led to the spread of education and urbanization, which brought with them increased public awareness of national and international events. A consequence of this was that opposition groups became more outspoken in their attacks on the government and often chose foreign policy issues as the focus of these attacks. Just as the illusion of threat from nationalist Arab states had done, internal unrest also pushed the monarchical regime to rely even more on Britain and the USA to preserve internal stability. The discovery of high-quality oil in huge quantities not only led Libya to throw herself even more into the arms of Britain and the USA, but it also made these two Western countries keener than ever to strengthen their grip on the country. The size of the presence of British and American oil companies testified to the economic benefit that both countries could gain. The USA's private investments in Libya were estimated in 1967 at $456 million.[19] Therefore, any attempt by the Libyan government to change its domestic or foreign policy could have been viewed by Britain and the USA as damaging to their own interests.

Given these reasons, the expectation that oil money would free Libya from her dependence on Britain and the USA did not materialize. The potential impact of oil revenues on the monarchical regime's foreign policy was far greater than the actual one. For instance, despite the regime's promises that it would negotiate the termination of the foreign bases, Britain and the USA continued using their military bases until they were evacuated after the Revolution of 1969. The monarchical regime's pronouncements turned

out to be mere lip service to the Libyan public, who wanted a less pro-Western and more pro-Arab foreign policy. Ivor Lucas made it clear that the Libyan government was not terribly serious about its demand for the evacuation of the foreign troops and that it was only a political move to take the steam out of opposition resentment.[20] As Cecil pointed out,

> The request to discuss the future of the American air base and the British forces in Libya springs not from a governmental conviction that as a nation whose national power is growing it is beneath its dignity to have foreign troops on its soil. It springs instead from the fact that leaders of the government realize that growing social and political unrest, encouraged by Libya's neighbor Egypt, requires the government to acknowledge its sympathy for pan-Arab goals by asserting its independence from Western influence.[21]

If oil revenues did not liberate the monarchy's foreign policy, they did create the socio-economic conditions which precipitated the demands for political change. For a developing country such as Libya, oil is both a blessing and a curse. On the one hand, it provides badly needed development cash, but, on the other, it leads to many social ills such as corruption, favouritism, intrigue, and graft. Thus, although oil had a minimal effect on the monarchy's foreign policy, it did create the preconditions for the Revolution on the 1st September 1969.

*7.5 The Revolution's oil policy*

From the early days of the Revolution, al-Qathafi made it clear that the a state's sovereignty over its natural resources always requires that such resources should be placed under its control.[22] Yet the RCC did nothing to interrupt the supply of oil down the pipelines during the early months. To the contrary, in fact, the initial signals assured foreign governments and oil companies that major changes were not on the agenda. On the 16th September 1969, Prime Minister al-Maghribi assured reporters that there would be no spectacular changes in Libya's oil policy as long as the interests of Libyans were taken into consideration. He went on to claim that these interests could be achieved by

an improved control of the oil industry's activities and the development of the Libyan National Company (LNC).[23] Later statements made by Anis Shtawi, the first Petroleum Minister after the Revolution, also stressed that there was no intention to nationalize the oil industry and that revisions to posted prices would be achieved only through negotiations with the oil companies in agreements satisfactory to both parties.[24] Al-Maghribi and Shtawi were clearly either working in co-ordination with the RCC to calm the oil companies and their home governments until the Revolution had consolidated its position, or they had no idea of the RCC's real intention.[25] It was soon to become clear that the oil policy in the post-Revolution period was to be more ambitious and aggressive.

The revolutionary government's foreign policy in general and oil policy in particular took its shape when the RCC abandoned the policy of working through intermediaries and proceeded to assert direct control over the government. Having received the resignation of Premier al-Maghribi in January 1970, oil policy came under the responsibility of 'Abd al-Salam Jallud and 'Izz al-Din al-Mabruk, under the supervision of al-Qathafi, who was at the same time the Premier, Defence Minister, and, more important, the leader of the Revolution and the architect of the country's domestic and foreign policy.

From its outset, the Revolution aimed to control the oil industry so as to assert full sovereignty. In doing so the Libyan Revolution pursued four goals. First, it cut production in order to slow the depletion rate of what is, after all, a finite natural resource. Second, it sought the highest price possible by all means, including the reduction of production. Third, it promoted the maximum possible development of potential additional resources by insisting upon further exploration as a condition of new concessions and contracts. Finally, it promoted the maximum possible transfer of technology in order to move toward total control.

In its moves to implement its aim of controlling the oil industry, the Revolution started by establishing a Pricing Committee to negotiate with the oil companies what Libya termed a 'correction' to their posted prices of Libyan crude oil. In its first meeting with the representatives of the twenty-one oil companies operating in Libya, the Committee asked for an extra 10 cents per barrel, but the companies refused any increases. Al-Qathafi, who opened the talks, warned the oil companies that the Libyan people could do without the oil companies and even the oil itself. He said, 'The people who have lived for five thousand years without oil are able to live again without it.'[26] Then the oil companies knew that the years of their domination were over. For al-Qathafi, Libyan independence would be incomplete as long as the country's economic affairs remained in foreign hands. In his speech on the day of the evacuation of the British bases, al-Qathafi declared, 'The battle with the oil companies is becoming ineluctable after the Libyan people decided to take their full rights from the oil companies... therefore we must be prepared to face up to it.'[27]

In its confrontation with the oil companies, the Libyan government followed the extraordinarily successful policy of putting pressure on individual companies rather than on the industry as a whole. The most vulnerable of all the oil companies in Libya was Occidental, since it was almost totally dependent on Libyan crude oil. In their meeting with Libyan officials in May 1970, Occidental's representatives were accused of damaging oilfield practices and were accordingly instructed to cut back their production from 800,000 to 485,000 barrels per day. In the interim, Esso, Amoseas, Mobil, and Oasis were also forced to reduce production.[28] In addition to demanding a cut-back in production, the Libyan government also took a series of supportive actions. It imposed new port dues of 1 cent a barrel on oil-tankers, nationalized the internal marketing of oil products, and banned overseas payments to employees and contracts in Libya.[29]

The oil companies attempted, albeit half-heartedly, to hold back the Libyan government's attempts to reduce oil production, but there was little solidarity in their efforts. The majors, for example were not entirely displeased that the independents should be attacked in this way and refused to help Occidental.[30] As expected, Occidental was quick to succumb. On the 4th September, it was announced that the RCC had accepted Occidental's offer of a 30-cent increase in its posted price, plus an additional 2 cents for the five succeeding years. In the area of taxes, the agreement ended the old 50-50 profit-sharing pattern based on the posted price. The rate of income tax was increased to as high as 58 per cent. Occidental also agreed to make back-payments for having underpriced Libyan oil, with effect from 1965 or the start of production.[31]

The September Agreement, as it came to be called, marked the first significant increase in the posted price since the establishment of OPEC in 1960. It also ended the myth that only the oil companies could decide the posted price of crude oil. On the 4th September 1970, al-Qathafi celebrated the Revolution's first anniversary by proudly announcing in Benghazi what was regarded by oil experts as the first big rise, from a position of depressed prices, in crude oil postings in over thirteen years, and the largest were recorded.[32] He said,

> It was inevitable after the Revolution to reconsider the oil prices because they were unfair. Therefore, we asked the oil companies to correct the price of Libyan crude oil and, in the last week, Occidental readjusted its posted price for Libyan crude oil by an increase of 30 cents per barrel, to rise from $2.23 to $2.53 per barrel, plus 2 cents every year until 1975, to reach $2.63 per barrel by 1975. This increase obtains about LD 13 million of new income for Libya every year from Occidental alone.[33]

Following Occidental, Continental, Amerada, and Marathon agreed to similar terms, but without their major partner, Shell. When Shell refused to sign, the revolutionary government shut down its terminal and took away its one-sixth share in Oasis production. BP, on the other hand, agreed to raise the price of Libyan crude oil following

the Foreign Office suggestion that 'it would be helpful if BP and Shell changed their position and accepted the Libyan demands.'[34]

Libya's revolutionary leadership was not content with its initial success, but was determined to put an end to the oil companies' abuses. On the 3rd January, Jallud summoned representatives of the twenty-one companies and laid down new demands which included a rise of 69 cents per barrel. Moreover, linking oil policy to other foreign policy issues, Jallud warned that British and American oil companies would be under severe pressure until their home governments changed their hostile stance towards the Arab nation.[35] This was a clear indication of the political and ideological motives that were influencing Libya's oil policy and also of the revolutionary leaders' willingness to use oil as a political weapon.

The oil companies tried to present a common front to counter Libya's aggressive oil policy. They agreed to a secret pact known as the Libyan Producers' Agreement, which specified that none of its members would make any agreement with the Libyan government without the other members' consent. It further stated that if the Libyan government ordered a cut-back in the oil production of one of the members, then all the members would share the cut-backs in specified proportions.[36] In this effort at solidarity, the oil companies were backed by their home governments. In the case of the American companies, for example, even though the agreement would be a violation of anti-trust legislation, the companies applied for and received a special dispensation. Bearman has pointed out that there was strong evidence that the Nixon administration tacitly encouraged the development of a cartel agreement to thwart the Libyan leadership. According to Pierre Terzian, 'the US government decided to intervene by calling on its friends within OPEC to facilitate the companies' risk.'[37] In this connection, Simons adds that President Nixon personally intervened by sending John N. Irwin, the US Under-

secretary of State, to the Middle East with a message calling on the oil-producing states to moderate their demands.[38]

Nevertheless, the oil companies' machinations failed. Libya rejected the principle of collective bargaining and insisted on dealing with the companies individually. When the companies sent Charles Piercy, an experienced negotiator from Exxon, as representative of all the companies operating in Libya, Jallud refused to meet him except as an Exxon representative.[39]

Furious with the Tehran agreement in February 1971, which was designed to frustrate Libyan efforts to seek better terms from the oil companies, by allowing the oil companies to raise production in the Gulf, the Libyan government negotiated and signed a separate agreement with each oil company.[40] It achieved a new posted price of $3.447 per barrel, which was well above the Tehran increase. The Libyan position 'was strong and growing stronger. World oil supplies were getting tighter. Tankers to haul the oil to refineries and consumers were becoming scarcer. Western Europe was increasingly thirsty for Libya's high-quality nearby oil.'[41] The companies had to give in again. They agreed to make retroactive payments on every barrel of oil exported for the duration of their concession in order to compensate for previous underpricing. They also agreed to the Libyan demand for further exploration. Although exact figures are not available, St. John estimated that the price increases and retroactive payments in the Tripoli agreement brought the Libyan government a net increase in revenues of around $1 billion in the first year of the agreement alone.[42]

It was yet one more triumph for the Libyan Revolution over the oil companies and indicative of the Libyan government's capacity to break ranks with the pro-Western oil-producing states of the Gulf. By concluding the Tripoli agreement, the Libyan Revolution had marked a turning-point in the history of the international oil industry. John Wright

pointed out that 'the power of the companies had been visibly curtailed and had been shown to be less than the producing states had long feared. Up to then, the companies had decided government revenues by unilateral changes in posted prices, and by setting production rates.'[43] So, with this combination of the Libyan government's will and determination and successful tactics on the one hand, and the lack of a unified counteractive policy by the oil companies on the other, revolutionary Libya won success in her oil-pricing policy. *Africa confidential* pointed out that 'Libya's successful bargaining with the world's leading oil companies on higher oil revenues and associated matters has certainly enhanced her position in the Arab world, and indeed with the world at large.'[44]

*7.5.1 The policy of nationalization*

For al-Qathafi the right of the proprietor country to nationalize its own oil assets was a sacred principle. Speaking on the third anniversary of the American forces' evacuation on the 11th June, he said,

> The right to nationalize is one of the rights of the state which owns the oil. There is no law in the world which prevents the states that own oil from nationalizing oil resources and from handling oil operations or halting the pumping of oil and taking full control of all oil operations. At the same time, any people already moving along the road of revolution cannot in any circumstance halt in the middle of the road.[45]

Although the Libyan government had announced that full nationalization would come only when the country had gained sufficient expertise to operate the industry by itself, it soon became clear that Libya could resort to outright nationalization in particular circumstances.[46] In the early seventies, there were cases where nationalization was a way of penalizing a company, or its national government, for actions viewed by the revolutionary leadership as hostile towards Libya or the Arab nation as a whole. However, nationalization usually went hand-in-hand with the country's economic policy of taking control of its national resources. The process began at the end of 1971, when the

companies agreed to resist a demand for increased revenues to compensate for the devaluation of the US dollar. Libya retaliated by taking the disputed amount, which was about $1 million, from Esso's Tripoli bank account.[47] When, in November 1971, Britain withdrew from the three Arab islands in the Persian Gulf, leaving them to Iranian occupation, the Libyan government perceived this to be connivance on the part of Britain and decided to punish her for it. On the 7th December, the RCC announced the nationalization of BP in retaliation for what was described as British treachery in the Arab Gulf.

In 1973, furious at the unlimited American support for Israel and her hostile attitude towards Libya and other Arab states, al-Qathafi turned on the American oil companies. Speaking on the third anniversary of the evacuation of the Wheelus Field Airbase on the 11th June 1973, he said,

> This day has a great meaning; it is the victory of a small people over a big power which never thought of being defeated. America needs to be taught a lesson, especially when we see her recklessness in the Arab world and her bias to the Israeli side. The USA, which thinks that she dominates the world with her monopolistic oil companies and aggressive military bases and fleets, needs a big, hard slap on her cold, insolent face.[48]

This 'big, hard slap' became manifested in the nationalization of the Bunker Hunt oil company. Al-Qathafi described the action as a decisive step in the struggle of the Arab masses to restore their own wealth and to end the drainage of Arab oil by foreign monopolists.[49] The decision was held up as a warning to other companies to accept the Libyan terms. By this action the Libyan government aimed to achieve two goals, *viz*: further control of the country's natural assets and, at the same time, the exertion of pressure on the American interests in Libya. By doing so, the Libyans hoped to compel the Americans to moderate their stance toward Libya and other Arab national issues.

However, following Occidental's acceptance of the Libyan terms, the three independent companies in the Oasis group (Amerada, Continental, and Marathon) agreed to 51-per-cent government intervention in their Libyan operations. Shell, with a 16-per-cent share in the consortium, decided to hold out. Further nationalization came about in September 1973. Celebrating the fourth anniversary of the Revolution, al-Qathafi announced a general nationalization covering 51 per cent of the assets and business of all the producing majors and their partners operating in Libya. Furthermore, in February 1974, in response to President Nixon's decision to convene the Washington Energy Conference, which was considered by Libya and other Arab states as an American attempt to intimidate them, the Libyan government completely nationalized the Amoseas consortium and took over the Liamco share in Esso Sirt. By May, Esso and Mobil had agreed to the government's terms, while Shell's one-sixth interest in Oasis was nationalized. Under constant pressure from the Reagan administration, Exxon withdrew unilaterally from Libya in 1981 and was followed in 1982 by Mobil.[50] In 1986, when the USA imposed trade sanctions on Libya, five American companies (Occidental, Conoco, Marathon, Amerada-Hess, and W.R. Grace) withdrew, leaving their assets frozen by the Libyan authorities. Following the partial lifting of the American trade sanction in 1989, negotiations were resumed for the companies' return, but George Bush's decision early in 1991 to continue trade sanctions against Libya deadlocked the negotiations, which were then frozen by the UN sanctions imposed in April 1992. However, by 1995, the Libyan state had an 80-per-cent overall share in the Libyan oil industry, controlled by the National Oil Company.

By 1974, as a result of the Libyan Revolution's tough and bold oil policy, the oil companies lost control over production as well as prices in Libya and many other Arab, African, and Latin American countries. John Wright correctly observed that 'the swift revolution in company-government relations was due primarily to Libyan initiative,

hardheaded boldness, and well-timed insistence on the recognition of economic "rights" that other producers had long claimed but had been unable or unwilling to achieve.'[51]

Indeed, the Libyan Revolution caused such a turn-around in the oil industry that the country was able to enjoy the fruits of its success for many years to come. Matching its success in implementing its oil-production policy, the Revolution was particularly aggressive in its pricing policy. By April 1973, the posted price of 40-degree Libyan crude oil was over $4 per barrel, reaching $4.60 in October.[52] Following the Arab-Israeli War in October 1973, the price of Libyan crude jumped again from $8.925 to $15.768 per barrel in January 1974.[53]

These high prices meant a huge increase in Libya's annual oil revenues. Indeed, Libyan oil revenues more than doubled in less than five years. As Table 9 indicates, between 1970 and 1975, oil revenues rose from $2,357 million to $6,677 million, a huge amount that was gained despite the reduction in production. Production reached a peak in 1970, with 3.32 million barrels per day, but declined to 1.48 barrels per day in 1975 in accord with the government's declared policy of conservation.[54]

Another boost to prices came with the eruption of the Iranian Revolution in February 1979 and the outbreak of the Iraq-Iran War in September 1980. In October 1979, the official listed price of Zueitina 40 API reached $26.27 per barrel. After OPEC failed to agree on a uniform price in December 1980, Libya decided to go for the top by charging $41 per barrel (see Table 10). In 1980, Libyan oil income was no less than $21.4 billion, almost ten times that of ten years previously. This huge oil income greatly contributed to the consolidation of the Revolution during the early years. It enabled the regime to spend generously on education, housing, health, agriculture, communications, and other areas. All these early reforms, combined with other nationalist successes, helped

to consolidate the new regime's power base and gave it legitimacy and recognition among the Libyan people.

**Table 9**
**Oil revenues, 1965-1990**

| Year | Revenue ($ million) |
|---|---|
| 1965 | 351.1 |
| 1970 | 2,357.0 |
| 1975 | 6,677.0 |
| 1980 | 21,378.0 |
| 1985 | 9,962.0 |
| 1986 | 5,438.0 |
| 1987 | (estimated) 5,432.0 |
| 1988 | (estimated) 5,169.0 |
| 1989 | (estimated) 7,500.0 |
| 1990 | (estimated) 11,200.0 |

Sources: EIU, *Libya in the 1990s: special report* (April 1991)

However, Libya's huge revenues from oil were not to flow for long. In 1981, they dropped as low as $16 billion and, in 1982, fell to less than $10 billion. This decline was sustained to 1985, when revenues fell to less than half those obtained in 1980, but they still continued to fall until they ultimately began to pick up again in 1989 (see Table 9). This deterioration of prices was a result of the world economic recession and resulting oil surplus as well as the embargo placed on Libyan oil by the USA. Libya responded to the slump in two ways: first, by resorting to her substantial cash and gold revenues and, second, by imposing austerity measures. The country's development budget was reduced and many major industrial and agricultural projects were cancelled or trimmed, with the exception of the Great Man-made River Project.[55]

**Table 10**
**Official and spot crude oil prices: Libyan Zueitina**
**(US $ per barrel)**

| Year | Spot | Official | Differential |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1980 | | | |
| July | 36.5 | 37 | -0.50 |
| August | 33.5 | 37 | -3.50 |
| September | 33.5 | 37 | -3.50 |
| October | 38.25 | 37 | +4.35 |
| November | 42.25 | 37 | +5.25 |
| December | 39.5 | 37 | +2.50 |
| 1981 | | | |
| January | 39.5 | 41 | -1.50 |
| February | 38.25 | 41 | -2.75 |
| March | 38.25 | 41 | -2.75 |
| April | 37.25 | 41 | -3.75 |

Source: *Middle East economic survey*, V (1980-1)

*7.5.2 Oil as a political weapon*

Driven by his strong anti-imperialist and Arab nationalist convictions, al-Qathafi believed that oil could and should be used as a political weapon in the struggle against imperialism and Zionism. The clearest example of such use being made of the oil resource was the nationalization of the BP and the Bunker Hunt oil companies. Although some economic arguments could be brought to justify the nationalization, al-Qathafi made it clear that the decision to nationalize was in the first place intended to punish the British and American governments for their hostile attitude towards Libya and the rest of the Arab nation.[56]

The policy of using oil as a political weapon was even more evident in the October 1973 War.[57] Despite his disapproval of the direction and objectives of the military operations, al-Qathafi was behind the resolution of the Arab oil-producing countries to

impose an export embargo against countries which stood behind Israel. Even when other Arab countries, under great pressure from the USA and al-Sadat of Egypt himself, left the embargo, Libya kept firm to its position until 1975, ten months longer than the other Arab states.[58]

On a number of other occasions, al-Qathafi threatened to cut off all exports to the USA unless she ceased supporting Israel.[59] For instance, as early as 1973, , in an interveiw arranged by an American network, al-Qathafi declared that Libya was prepared to cut off oil suplies to the USA. He said, 'We are seriously considering this step, if it is necessary.' He explained that such a decision would be taken when Libya felt that anti-Palestinian and anti-Libya policies were being adopted by the USA. He added that scuh policies would force Libya to use the oil weapon against her enemies.[60] In response, President Nixon delivered a televised warning to al-Qathafi, reminding him of what had happened to Musaddiq of Iran twenty years earlier when he had tried to challenge the Western oil companies and their home governments. Furthermore, in 1979, al-Qathafi threatened to cut-off oil supplies to the USA after President Carter vetoed the delivery of eight C-130 civilian aircraft and, in May 1980, al-Qathafi threatened another embargo, this time on Britain, Italy, and West Germany if they refused to compensate Libya for the war damages they had caused during the North Africa Campaign.[61]

However, with the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the USA as the world's sole superpower, not only had the scope for using oil as a political weapon narrowed, but such a policy would no longer be tolerated. When the USA saw the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait as a threat to the flow of oil, she was able to manipulate the UN Security Council to send more than 600,000 troops on an expedition ostensibly to 'liberate' Kuwait. As Simons points out, 'If any country, for whatever reason, threatens an international framework that guarantees US access to oil, then it had better look to its own security.'[62] In this regard, the USA and Britain seem not yet to have forgotten Libya's

challenge to their interests and her inciting of OPEC to follow the same line. Simons convincingly argues that

> the bitter hostility to Libya over the years has nothing to do with terrorism (the US has always supported its own approved terrorists); the hostility stems from the simple fact that Libya was able to rock the international oil industry and, in so doing, embarrass and inconvenience the global corporations.[63]

The USA tried to punish Libya by imposing on her a full-scale political and economic isolation after 1986, but this met with a cool response from the Western European countries. Seeking her own interests, Europe found it difficult to dispense with the Libyan oil on account of its proximity and high quality. Neither did Western European countries want to lose Libya as a market for their products and a source of lucrative contracts which Libya found affordable as a result of her oil wealth. It was clear that the states of Western Europe did not want to participate in an American scheme that could do unnecessary harm to their economic interests. Indeed, apart from reducing Libyan diplomats in their capitals, Western European countries continued to compete for lucrative business deals with Libya. In 1986-91, EC and other West European states' imports of Libyan crude oil averaged 897,000 barrels per day and in 1992 more than 63 per cent of Libya's total crude exports went to her two major European customers, namely Italy and Germany. Italy alone took about 43 per cent of Libyan oil exports.[64] Even Britain, which remained aloof, continued her commercial ties with Libya. British exports to Libya were worth over $380 million in 1986.[65]

However, it would be a mistake to assume that the pressure on Libya is over. The USA still tries to impose an international boycott on Libyan oil. Recently, she won Britain's support and used the Lockerbie incident as a pretext for her demand for an international boycott of Libyan oil. It would certainly be a catastrophe for Libya if the USA were to persuade her European allies to join in an oil embargo.

*7.6 Conclusion*

Prior to the discovery of oil in the late fifties, the pro-Western monarchical regime relied heavily on foreign aid, particularly from Britain and the USA. This economic dependence led to political dependency and consequently Britain and the USA were able to tighten their grip on Libya. Following the discovery of oil, the inflow of revenue created the impression that Libya would be free to follow an independent policy in foreign and domestic affairs, but that optimistic outlook soon vanished. Libya's dependence on foreign aid was replaced by dependence on oil revenues from companies engaged in exploiting Libyan oil, dominated by the mighty British and American corporations. As a result, Libya became even more subordinated to the West. By supplying the metropolitan centres with crude oil, Libya was further integrated into the capitalist world system. She not only became dependent on the international oil market, but also on the import of foodstuffs, foreign technology, and skilled labour. In short, despite the inflow of oil money, Libya was unable or unwilling to end the British and American domination of her foreign and domestic policies. So, for instance, she did not terminate the presence of foreign bases on Libyan soil, nor take any active role in wider Arab affairs.

This tendency was completely reversed after the Revolution. From the outset, the new regime viewed the control of the oil industry as a question of sovereignty and acted on this premise. The revolutionary leaders asserted their control over the country's resources by intervening in pricing policy and by achieving state participation in actual production. As a result, Libya gained a huge oil income, which enabled the new regime to spend generously on developmental and social welfare schemes. This in turn gave the revolutionary regime legitimacy and consolidation.

As far as Libya's foreign policy was concerned, in contrast to the monarchical period, where oil made Libya more dependent on the USA and Britain for protection from external aggression, as well as for technical and administrative expertise, the Libyan

Revolution used oil as a means of emancipation from the Western sphere of influence. From the outset, it was determined to fulfil the people's aspirations by pursuing an independent foreign policy. For example, the Revolution was quick to respond to the call for the evacuation of the British and American bases. To conclude in short, it was oil that provided the means for the revolutionary leaders' being able to follow an independent foreign policy. But that should not diminish respect for their will and courage since oil had also been available to the monarchical leaders, who could not or would not use it to end Libya's subordination to foreign powers.

It needs to be emphasized that while oil revenues gave the Libyan Revolution the means to reorient the country's foreign policy, it did not dictate the content of that policy. Oil has always been an instrument and nothing more. This fact explains why the revolutionary regime at many times pursued a type of oil policy which was not in Libya's best economic interests. Thus the Libyan regime's oil policy has often been incongruent with that of many other oil-producing countries more concerned with the pursuit of internal economic development goals. On many occasions the Libyan government's decisions to nationalize were taken as a punishment for countries which were regarded as hostile to the Arab nation. Although that does not rule out the existence of some economic benefit for Libya, other priorities always had the upper hand. In other words, Libyanism and narrow regionalism were replaced by broader concern for the whole Arab nation, although the latter concern was not allowed to contradict the former just as the former was not allowed to overshadow the latter.

Whereas oil only made the monarchical regime more dependent on the British and Americans for protection and technology, it was used by the revolutionary regime to enable them to pursue an independent and self-reliant policy. The foreign policy of both regimes regarding Britain and their different attitudes towards the presence of British military bases are a good example of how the Revolution, not the oil, has changed the

course of Libya's foreign policy. Whereas Idris strongly rejected the idea of evacuation of the British and American bases and considered their presence as essential to Libyan security, al-Qathafi acted decisively to rid the country of their presence, which he viewed as a violation of Libyan sovereignty and a threat to Arab national security. Thus, it is clear that the unprecedented and drastic change in Libya's foreign policy occurred as a result of the Revolution of 1969 and not because of the advent of oil and its revenues in 1959.

However, since the flow of oil wealth during the sixties did not lead to the evacuation of the British and American bases, which had been allowed in basically because of economic necessity, the discussion of the next chapters will focus on other factors which determined the change in Libya's foreign policy regarding Britain - in particular the contrasting socio-economic backgrounds of King Idris and al-Qathafi and the differing ideological perspectives that these backhgrounds helped shape.

**NOTES**

1. Wright, *Libya: a modern history*, 227.

2. Anderson, "Assessing Libya's Qaddafi", 198.

3. Higgins, *Economic and social development*, 37.

4. Magdoff, "Imperialism", 25.

5. Quoted in Hayford, *The politics of the Kingdom of Libya*, 471.

6. *Al jamahiriya*, 51.

7. *Ibid.*

8. See Kubbah, *Libya: its oil industry*, 64-72 on the 1955 Petroleum Law.

9. For more details, see Ateqa, *Athr*, 29-40. See also Waddams, *The Libyan oil industry*, 57-70.

10. Waddams, *The Libyan oil industry*, 70.

11. Cecil, "Determinants", 24.

12. Ghanem, *Pricing*, 90.

13. First, "Libya: class and state", 128.

14. Waddams, *The Libyan oil industry*, 144.

15. First, *Libya*, 198.

16. This point was confirmed by Ivor Lucas in a personal interview with the present author in London on the 22nd October 1996.

17. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

18. In an interview with the present author (London, 22nd October 1996), Ivor Lucas pointed out that 'the British saw the threat from Nasser and from Radio Cairo propaganda as being a very real threat... and we did try to take action in Cairo to persuade the Egyptians to cool it.'

19. Rouleau, "Oil and monarchies donot mix", 24.

20. Personal interview with Ivor Lucas, London, 22nd October 1996.

21. Cecil, "Determinants", 27.

22. See al-Qathafi's speech at Derna on the 8th April 1970 in *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I (1969-70) 222 f.

23. Ansell & al-Arif, *Libyan Revolution*, 70.

24. Waddams, *The Libyan oil industry*, 229 f.

25. For more details on the revolutionaries' early actions in the oil field, see *The Economist*, 11 July 1970, 28; 25 April 1970, 79; 20 Jan. 1971, 63.

26. Waddams, *The Libyan oil industry*, 230.

27. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 221-3.

28. Oasis, Occidental, and Amoseas were ordered to cut back production by a total of 570,000 barrels a day between them in order to help conservation. *Africa confidential*, II, 15 (25 July 1970) 6.

29. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 84. See also St. John, *Qaddafi's world design*, 109.

30. For more details, see Cooley, *The Libya sandstorm*, 59-79.

31. *Ibid.*, 63 f.

32. Wright, *Libya: a modern history*, 238.

33. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, II, 40.

34. Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 181.

35. Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 73.

36. For further details, see Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 57; St. John, *Qaddafi's world design*, 111.

37. Quoted in Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 87.

38. Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 182. See also Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 67.

39. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 87.

40. The Tehran agreement, which was backed by the Shah of Iran and signed on the 14th February 1971, involved six Gulf countries and twenty-two major international companies. These countries were Abu Dhabi, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Iran. The oil companies were British Petroleum, Gulf, Shell Petroleum and Royal Dutch, Standard Oil (New Jersey), Texaco, Compagnie Française des Pétroles, Marathon, Continental, Nelson Bunker Hunt, Occidental, Amerada Hess, Atlantic Richfield, Grace Petroleum, Hispanoil, Sohio, Gelsenberg, Petrofina, Ashland, Aminoil, and Arabian Oil. The six countries and the oil companies agreed on a uniform increase of 35 ¢ US a barrel in the posted prices of crude oil at Gulf terminals. The aim was to frustrate Libyan efforts to seek better terms from the oil companies by raising production in the Gulf if 'unreasonable' demands from Libya led to a breakdown in negotiations and the cutting of supplies by al-Qathafi. For more details, see *The Economist*, 20 Feb. 1971, 63 f.

41. Cooley, *The Libyan sandstorm*, 68.

42. St. John, *Qaddafi's world design*, 113.

43. Wright, *Libya: a modern history*, 243.

44. *Africa confidential*, XXII, 1 (6 Sept. 1981) 1.

45. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 796.

46. For details on the process of oil participation in the Middle East in general, see *Strategic survey 1972*, issued by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 32-36.

47. Wright, *Libya: a modern history*, 244.

48. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 795.

49. *Ibid.*

50. For more details on the Exxon withdrawal, see *The Arab World*, 18 Nov. 1981, 12.

51. Wright, *Libya: a modern history*, 248.

52. *Ibid.*, 236.

53. *Ibid.*

54. EIU, *Libya in the 1990s*, 43.

55. The Great Man-made River Project was projected to convey up to 5.7 million cubic metres of water a day from the south to the north coastal belt.

56. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 197 f., 222 f.; II, 40; IV, 795 f.

57. For more details on the use of oil as a political weapon during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, see *Strategic survey 1973*, issued by IISS, 30-36.

58. See *Africa report*, XX (1975) 32 f.

59. For more details, see *The Economist*, 17 May 1980, 11 f.

60. *The Arab World*, 19 May 1980, 4.

61. *The Times*, 7 May 1980.

62. Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 189.

63. *Ibid.*

64. EIU, "Libya in the 1990s", 57.

65. *Ibid.*

# CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE LEADERS' SOCIO-EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUNDS

*8.1 Introduction*

As was argued in the introduction to this study, in developing countries the role of the leaders in deciding the direction of foreign policy is stronger and more explicit than it is in developed ones. This situation exists because of two conditions. First, the presence of strongly structured political institutions and organizations in developed countries places limits and constraints on the power of the leader. Second, most of the developing countries are usually passing through either a traditional or transitional stage in their social, economic, and political development. In both stages, decision-making powers are usually held by one individual leader.[1]

During her recent history, Libya has known only two political leaders: first, King Idris and, subsequently, al-Qathafi. This has meant that since independence in 1951, Libya's foreign policy has been shaped first by Idris and then by al-Qathafi. During the monarchical period, although the political system was designed to resemble that of Britain as far as the King's constitutional accountabilities were concerned, Idris was an absolute monarch. He played the role of the benevolent monarch and powerful leader who could call and dismiss Cabinets at his own pleasure.[2] He was to be consulted on every decision, large or small, and he was the one who ultimately approved everything.[3] The Prime Minister and his Cabinet were administrators of the King's policies and had to keep in the King's good graces.

After the September Revolution, al-Qathafi became the leader who had the final word on any foreign or domestic policy, although he had no official position in the governmental structure. After he resigned his post as the state's President in 1977, he remained the leader of the Revolution, the Chief Commander of the Armed Forces, and the main source of foreign policy decisions and choices. Therefore, it is agreed among scholars interested in Libya's affairs that Libyan foreign policy cannot be understood without understanding al-Qathafi's thinking and personality.[4]

Thus, the centrality of both leaders to the formulation and execution of Libya's foreign policy was evident. But at the regional, national, and international levels, each of them perceived the country's role differently. However, since perception is a reflection of various stimuli, among which are ideology and socio-educational background, this chapter will examine Idris's and al-Qathafi's socio-educational backgrounds and how they affected Libya's foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular, leaving the role of ideology to the next chapter. While this examination of these leaders' socio-educational backgrounds may be of not unlimited significance in terms of the conclusions it may allow us to draw, it does help clarify the context in which their ideological perspectives were developed. Certainly one can argue that because of their different socio-educational backgrounds, the two Libyan leaders had profoundly different perceptions of the internal and international environments with which they had to interact.

*8.2 Idris's socio-educational background*

Muhammad Idris al-Sanusi, who reigned over Libya from the 24th December 1951 until the 1st September 1969, was born on the 12th March 1890 in the remote oasis of Jaghbub to an Arab family said to have traced its descent from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). On the death of his father, al-Mahdi, who was the head of the order, in 1902, Idris was too young to take charge of the Sanusi Order, especially as it was then in the midst of a military struggle with the French in Equatorial Africa. Consequently, his

cousin, Ahmad al-Sharif, who was then 16, took over. Being a devoted Muslim and a warrior leader, Sheikh Ahmad was the logical person to carry out the traditional spiritual task of the head of the order and to direct a military campaign against French threats from the south-west.

Meanwhile, Idris in Kufra continued his education in the Qur'anic school at the Taj. The main subjects taught were the Qur'an, *Hadith* (the Traditions of the Prophet), *Tafsir* (Qur'anic interpretation), *Shari'a* (Islamic law), *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Tarikh* (history) and *Hisab* (arithmetic).[5] In that oasis, Idris was said to have been brought up in a sedentary and bookish way of life and not in the hard way of other Libyan children. Although Kufra produced little but dates, the Sanusi adherents continued to tithe income to their spiritual leaders. Supplies from lodges in the coastal region were sent by caravans partly in local produce such as grain, butter, honey, meat, animal skins, and wool, and partly in money or imported goods such as rice, tea, sugar, and cloth. Although the Sanusis had started as ascetics in their devotion to Allah, by the third generation they had become more interested in secular than in spiritual leadership . Later, al-Qathafi was to describe the Sanusi family members as aristocrats and by no means ascetics. He recalled the bedouin saying used to describe participation in a really good meal: 'to eat like a Sanusi.'[6]

In accord with his relatively easy life in comparison with the rest of the Libyan people, Idris was not expected to provide military leadership. Evans-Pritchard, who met Idris in Egypt in the thirties and came to know him better when appointed political officer to the British Military Administration in November 1942, wrote,

> Nurtured, as were all the Sanusi family, in piety and learning in oasis retreats and accustomed to a refined and sedentary life, he has never been a man of action or of a hardy constitution... It is evident from the part he played in the events leading up to the truce [with the Italians] and during the period of the truce that he is astute and a man of sound political judgment. That he is often vacillating and evasive cannot be denied, and

> even though these characteristics may sometimes have been a wise response of the weak negotiating with the strong... they seem to be weaknesses to which he is temperamentally prone and to have become an aversion to directness in either thought or action.[7]

Moreover, De Candole has sympathetically pointed out that

> Idris was not qualified to head a guerilla resistance in the field. He was by character a man of peace and religion in the pattern of his grandfather and father, the first two heads of the Senussi Order. His value to the Libyans lay in his prestige in the Arab world as head of the great Senussi order, the loyalty he inspired in his followers and his skill in negotiation and experience in affairs.[8]

The Sanusis were in fact admired for their scholarship and sanctity, but not for their patriotism or their leadership skills. It was the status of their grandfather as *murabit* and *baraka* which won them the devotion of the people. In the eyes of the Libyans, the members of the Sanusi family lacked in full measure the manly qualities of courage and endurance that the Libyan tribal society demanded in its own folk. As a result, apart from Ahmad al-Sharif, the Sanusi family as a whole played an inconspicuous and inglorious part in the resistance movement; the real leadership was provided by 'Umar al-Mukhtar, who led the *Jihad* movement until he was hanged on the 16th September 1931.

Indeed, Idris willingly went into exile in Egypt in 1922 and failed to set foot inside Libya again for over twenty years. In Egypt, he and his family lived as pensioners of Britain; he was granted an allowance of £1,200 per annum in addition to the rental of a flat at Zamalek costing £360 per annum. Members of his family also had allowances, ranging between £180 and £250 per annum.[9] In short, Idris's life in Cairo was by no means similar to that of the average Libyan, who continued to suffer from hunger and disease in consequence of the war. However, even if we accept that Idris could not participate in the military struggle because he was not by nature a man of war, he could certainly have supported his country's cause in many other ways. Instead, he enjoyed a

very comfortable life of retirement in exile. He became a member of the elite Gezira Sporting Club, playing tennis and golf while his people were dying in hundreds at the hands of the Italians. De Candole recalled that Idris 'led a quiet domestic life in a small villa with his secretary and two servants. Apart from going to the Gezira Club for a little tennis he remained alone and took no part in political or social life.'[10] Another friend of Idris, Evans-Pritchard, recalled that Idris could have become Amir after the First World War, but had fled rather than take any risks, having siphoned off money to Egypt to keep himself in comfort in exile.[11] Idris's passivity had in fact manifested itself even before 1922 when he left his people at a difficult juncture and went into exile. In 1913, when Sheikh Ahmad had moved to the north to fight the Italians, Idris had decided to go on the pilgrimage, from which he did not return until 1915.

This journey, which took about two years (1913-5), seems to have had its effect on Idris's perception of internal and international politics. During this time, he made two important contacts which had a great effect on his political outlook thereafter. First, Idris made contact with the Sharif of Mecca, Husayn ibn 'Ali. While staying in the Hejaz, Idris became aware of the Arab revolt and seems to have developed anti-Turkish sentiments. Later, in his negotiations for an accord with the Italian and British delegates in 1916-7, he did not conceal his admiration at the success of the Arab revolt and raised the example of the Hashimite family as one to be followed in Barqa. He hoped to fulfil, in the region under Sanusi influence, a similar role to that of the Hashimite family in the Arabian Peninsula and Muhammad 'Ali in Egypt.[12] In the new context of post-Second World War conditions, Idris took Transjordan as a model for his emirate under the guidance of British advisers.[13]

The other important contact Idris made was with the British on his way back from Mecca. He met General MacMahon, who had succeeded Lord Kitchener as British High Commissioner in Egypt, and other important figures, among them General Maxwell, the

Commander of the British forces in Egypt, and Colonel Clayton, the Sudan Agent in Cairo. In these contacts, Idris apparently made a favourable impression on the British and agreed to keep communication with them. The British, on their part, were, as Idris pointed out, 'anxious for us to break off relations with the Turks and support the British in the war, or at any rate to be neutral.'[14] These early contacts marked the start of co-operation between Idris and the British, who appeared to have found in Idris the man who could replace Sheikh Ahmed and serve their interests.

In fact, Idris's admiration for and appreciation of the British went as far back as 1909, when Britain intervened to stop the French invasion. In their hectic competition with other colonial powers, the French wanted to reach the full limits of the sphere accorded to them by their agreement with the British in 1899. They attacked the Sanusis in Equatorial Africa and set about the systematic destruction of the Sanusi Order. In less than ten years, the Sanusi Order in what is nowadays the northern Chad area was virtually eradicated. To salvage the situation, the Sanusis settled their previous differences with the Turks and asked for their help, but to no avail. The Turks were preoccupied by their problems at home and so could provide little military force to protect the Sanusis. Therefore, Sheikh Ahmad sent an appeal for help to Lord Kitchener in Cairo. Consequently, the British intervened to prevent the French from occupying Kufra on the ground that it belonged to the Ottoman dominions.[15] Although the British action was not entirely for the sake of the Sanusis, it seems to have greatly affected the young Idris. Ben Halim has pointed out that it was easy to imagine the feelings of admiration and appreciation toward the British experienced by the Sanusi leaders as a result of Britain's quick and successful intervention.[16] It was natural, then, for Idris as a young boy to be affected by what appeared to be a 'noble stand' on the part of the British. That stand, says Ben Halim, remained inscribed in Idris's memory until his death.[17] The British intervention also seems to have convinced Idris that Britain was indeed the strongest power

on earth, possessing not only military and economic strength but also the diplomatic skills of deception and shrewdness.

Idris's personal experience of foreign invasions of Libya was another influence on the broad orientation of his foreign policy. Having witnessed the destruction by the French of Sanusi *zawiyah*s in southern Libya while still a young boy and, as a young man, having observed first the bloody Sanusi War and later the devastations produced in his country by the Second World War, Idris believed that the new state of Libya was in need of an alliance with a power strong on land, at sea, and in the air.[18] The ally whom he believed possessed all these credentials was Britain, which was more than happy to establish military bases in Libya. Idris had consistently wished for a treaty with Britain ever since 1940, when he had staked everything on her final victory. Later, when the presence of the foreign bases became the most controversial issue in the country, Idris insisted on keeping them and stood firm against all attempts to revise the treaties governing their status. To the last days of his reign, he continued to view the West, particularly Britain, as a source of security for his person and for his regime.[19] His insistence on the continuance of the military bases was made clear to Ben Halim in the aftermath of the Suez Crisis, to Fkeni when the latter proposed their liquidation in 1963, and to al-Muntasir in 1964.[20]

It is quite clear that Idris's traditional upbringing and Islamic education, as well as his personal experience, shaped his image and perception of Britain and the world around him. His image of Britain in particular seems to have been based on two main elements: gratitude toward and fear of Britain, a close but very powerful ally. Idris's religious education and upbringing obliged him to feel grateful and consequently to keep faith with Britain. In his estimation, Britain had saved the Sanusi movement from destruction at the hands of the French. Britain had also helped him in exile, recognized him as Amir, and backed him as King. Therefore, from the very beginning, Idris

associated himself with Britain, even when that association was not acceptable to the majority of the Libyan people. Idris was also fearful of Britain's capacity for deception and shrewd calculation of its own interests. He knew that Britain would get rid of him at the first opportunity if he did not serve her interests in Libya.[21] These images and views, which Idris had formed during his life experience, continued to preoccupy him until the end.

Idris's traditional social as well as educational background motivated him also to recruit prime ministers and advisers from the same traditional background, so that most of the leaders of the monarchical regime came from a traditional social background and had experienced a traditional education. The majority of them either supported him in his manoeuvrings in the pre-independence period, or backed him after independence. Premier Muhammad Ben 'Uthman, for instance, was chosen first as a minster during the fifties and later as Premier, mainly because of the King's appreciation for his support shown to himself in assisting him to become King over all Libya.[22] Similar comments may be made concerning the recruitment of al-Badri, Maziq, al-Muntasir, and Wanis al-Qathafi. Whereas the first two were tribal leaders, al-Muntasir came from a well-known Tripolitanian family and Wanis al-Qathafi was a bureaucrat. All of them tried not to antagonize the King and accepted his ideas as forming the basis of Libya's pro-British foreign policy.

Those who did not try to please the King and introduced new ideas into Libya's foreign policy were marginalized or even dismissed. The best example was Premier Fkeni. By virtue of his age, Fkeni was not in a position to join Idris in his pre-independence political manoeuvrings, nor did he have a traditional educational background.[23] When he tried to make changes to the course of Libya's foreign policy, he was confronted by the King, who expressed himself in favour of the continuance of the bases agreements for legal and political considerations.[24] Later, Fkeni was dismissed as the scapegoat in place

of the Commander of the CYDEF, who had been responsible for the killing of three students in a peaceful demonstration.

To briefly conclude this section, the traditional background and life experience of King Idris, as well as that of his more traditional ministers, influenced both his and their perception of Libya and her foreign policy needs. Because of their traditional background, neither Idris nor his ministers were able to adapt themselves to the new circumstances prevailing in the late sixties. Instead, they continued their pro-Western foreign policy and remained uninvolved in Arab politics. The inevitable result of their policies increasingly out of touch with the realities of regional politics and Libyan popular opinion was the downfall of the monarchy and the rise to power of the revolutionary regime in 1969.

*8.3 Al-Qathafi's socio-educational background*

It has been noted from the outset that the majority of the revolutionary leaders came from almost the same social and educational background. With the exception of one or two, the Free Officers came from middle- or lower middle-class backgrounds. Most of them were descendants of bedouin Arab tribes, to which in fact most of the Libyan people believed they also belonged.[25]

As a result of the discovery of oil in the late fifties, urbanization became a major feature of Libyan society during the sixties. This drift from the interior to the two main urban centres—Tripoli and Benghazi—was inspired by the anticipation among the younger generation of a better standard of living. Al-Qathafi and the other revolutionary leaders were no exception. They moved to the major cities, seeking higher education in the universities or the Military Academy. Thus, like most Libyans, they came to combine a rural background with an urban residence.

However, because of their similar social background, al-Qathafi claimed that the Free Officers more faithfully represented the broad masses of the population than did other political factions based on the intelligentsia and the professional classes. In an interview with a reporter for *Le Figaro*, he said,

> Frankly speaking, the officers have the conscience to recognize the people's claims better than others. This depends on our origin, which is characterized by humbleness. We are not rich people; the parents of the majority of us are living in huts. My parents are still living in a tent near Sirt. The interests we represent are genuinely those of the Libyan people.[26]

Since al-Qathafi has emerged as the dominant figure among the RCC members and since detailed information on other revolutionary leaders is unavailable, the present discussion will be restricted to al-Qathafi himself unless otherwise necessary. After all, it is al-Qathafi's life experience, as it has contributed to his political behaviour, that has had the greatest impact on Libya's domestic and foreign policy.

The social and cultural experience that al-Qathafi lived through or learned from his family, tribe, or associates had a strong influence in forming his values, beliefs, and mental images of the outside world. Compared with his predecessor, al-Qathafi had in many respects a radically different social and educational background. Whereas Idris was brought up in a family that possessed status in both power and wealth, al-Qathafi was born in the spring of 1942 in humble circumstances into a minor tribe called al-Qathathfa, near the Gulf of Sirt. It is a *murabit* tribe, said to be descended from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh). The name of the tribe is derived from their progenitor Qathaf al-Dem, who was a *murabit* and cavalryman. In fact, many Western writers have tried desperately to cast doubt on al-Qathafi's origins by describing the Qathathfa tribe as Berbers.[27] In Libya, however, it is generally agreed that al-Qathathfa is an Arab *murabit* tribe along with other *murabit* tribes since the status of *murabit* is usually acquired by lineage to Arabs and to the Prophet Muhammad in particular. The Western writers'

allegations cannot be understood except as an attempt to discredit al-Qathafi's Arab credentials by suggesting that he is not a true Arab. Al-Qathafi, however, has always been proud of his Arab origins, of which he has never been in doubt. He has, for example, said,

> The first thing that has been deeply rooted in my memory was that we are Arabs, and the word 'Arab' was frequently used in the tribe's circle. When they ask, for instance, about a certain place, you hear them asking, 'Are there many Arabs over there?' When I grew up, I realized that I myself used the term 'Arab' as an indication of the people... I learnt from relatives that our tribe used to travel across huge tracts of land from Egypt to Morocco... They would mention Najd and the Hejaz, and were fanatically attached to 'Ali ibn Abi Talib and Abu Zayd al-Hilali.[28]

However, although al-Qathafi took pride in his origins, unlike his predecessor, he did not justify his position as the country's leader on the ground of his saintly ancestry.

Al-Qathafi's childhood was spent as a bedouin, herding the family's flocks by day and listening to the legends told around the fire at night. But, according to his father, unlike most children of his age, al-Qathafi was more interested in actual history rather than legends. He was told about the heroic Libyan national struggle that resulted in the martyrdom of his grandfather, the wounding of his father, and the loss of approximately half the total population of Libya through death and exile. These stories of Italian atrocities and Libyan heroic resistance seemed to have become inscribed in young al-Qathafi's memory and to have ignited in him a strong sense of nationalism, anti-imperialism, and suspicion and dislike of Western governments' policies towards the Arab nation. In 1979, al-Qathafi told the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci that 'even a thousand years ago, the blame was yours, the West. You have always been the ones who have massacred us. Yesterday as today.'[29] Thus, the Libyan experience of the colonial and neo-colonial situation provides an important frame of reference for an understanding of al-Qathafi's belief system and, consequently, of Libya's foreign policy also.

Indeed, the seeds of al-Qathafi's anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist feelings, which became the bedrock of Libya's foreign policy, were planted during his early socialization and were later watered by the postwar currents of neo-colonialism and the evidence of the arrogant and unsympathetic attitudes by the Western powers towards the Arab people, expressed particularly in the British collusion with the Zionists in Palestine, the French atrocities in Algeria, the tripartite aggression in 1956, and the Western support for Israel in 1967.

Al-Qathafi's educational background was a mixture of both Qur'anic and formal education at schools, much of it under Egyptian teachers. Since there was neither a local school for young al-Qathafi to attend, nor was he old enough to go to the city school, his father hired a teacher to tutor him at home. Al-Qathafi's father told Mirella Bianco,

> On one of my trips to the Fezzan, where I would often go to sell or buy animals, I brought a teacher back with me to teach him the Koran (Qur'an). How old was he then? Seven, eight maybe. And how quickly he learned. He would follow his teacher like a shadow. His cousins also took lessons, sometimes in the shade of the tent, but whenever they could they played truant.[30]

Thus, like Idris before him, al-Qathafi's early education was confined to reading the Holy Qur'an and learning numbers. But when he showed a quickness and eagerness to learn, his father sent him to the elementary school at Sirt, thirteen miles away from his home. Since he had no relatives or friends at Sirt, which was only a small village at that time, and could not afford to rent a room, al-Qathafi walked across the desert to attend his school. When he could not make it, he sought quarters in the local mosque. Although older than the other students, he was able to finish his elementary education within four years.

At Sirt Preliminary School, al-Qathafi was looked down on as a rustic bedouin by other students. One of his friends described that experience and al-Qathafi's response as follows:

> There were three or four of us Bedouin at the school and we were held in utter contempt. We were so poor that we often had nothing to eat at break... We felt ourselves to be outsiders in some way, and I believe that had it not been for Gadaffi we would have been ashamed of our origin. But he was proud of it. 'We are equal to anyone else,' he would say. 'And we can learn as well as anyone'... and he made up for the disadvantage of having come to school comparatively late because of his poverty.[31]

However, although, on the surface, al-Qathafi does not seem to have been bothered too much by such treatment, it nevertheless left its imprint on his belief system, at least at the subconscious level; it gave him a lasting hatred for social inequality and discrimination.

At the age of about fourteen, al-Qathafi moved to Sabha for his preparatory and secondary studies. At Sabha, which was a small village in southern Libya, al-Qathafi became more politically active. He founded the first cell for the Revolution in the form of a pro-Nasserist political study group with friends from a similar background to his own. During his study at Sabha, there were many events that helped to create his early nationalist sentiments, among them the eruption of the Egyptian Revolution in 1952, the start of the Algerian Revolution, the tripartite aggression in 1956, Nasser's struggle against the Baghdad Pact, and, last but not least, the unification between Egypt and Syria in 1958. In 1954, when the Algerian Revolution broke out, al-Qathafi gave speeches at schools and mosques, and collected contributions and donations for support of the Algerians. A couple of years later, he protested against the kidnapping of five leaders of the Algerian Revolution including Ahmad Ben Bella. In 1958, al-Qathafi celebrated the union between Egypt and Syria at his school in Sabha.[32] His political awareness was not only confined to Arab affairs, but extended also to international politics. He led demonstrations against the murder of the Congolese leader Patrice Lumumba. He also protested against France's testing of an atomic bomb in the Sahara.[33]

The next step in al-Qathafi's attempts to bring about change in Libya was his decision, with some of his friends, to infiltrate the Army, having realized that change was

impossible without military means. Army seizures of power became a common feature in the Arab world during the fifties and sixties. He therefore joined the Royal Military Academy in 1963, which was staffed by British officers. In the Military Academy, al-Qathafi created a nucleus of Nasserist officers, modelled on the Egyptian Free Unionist Officers in Egypt. With some of his friends, he graduated in August 1965 and, in April of the following year, he was sent to Britain for further training courses. During his short stay in Britain, al-Qathafi became fond of Britain's technological advancement and was impressed by the beautiful British countryside, but most of all by the scene of fresh milk being delivered in the early morning.[34] Upon his return, he enrolled in the University of Benghazi to study history while continuing his career in the military.[35]

It seems evident that al-Qathafi's bedouin origins, his early Qur'anic education, and his upbringing in the desert had an early impact on his personality and ideology. From his education, upbringing, and personal experience, he derived his firmly-held values and the principles of Arab nationalism, Pan-Islamism, anti-colonialism, etc. Haykal has rightly pointed out the main personalities and background influences that played a vital role in shaping al-Qathafi's personality and ideology. He commented,

> Two people and two backgrounds combined to make Qaddafi the man he was. The people were the Prophet Mohammed and Jamal Abdel Nasser. His thinking was an amalgam of the ideas of Islam at the time of Mohammed and the revolutionary doctrine of Nasser, particularly as expounded during the formation period of Qaddafi's life when, as a schoolboy and young soldier, he first became aware of what was going on in the world around him in the period, that is between the Suez war in 1956 and the June war in 1967. His two backgrounds were the army and the desert. It was in the army that he first really found himself, but it was to the desert that he would return for solace.[36]

Indeed, al-Qathafi is a product of his environment; memories of Italian fascist colonialism, the influence of bedouin culture, and the tenets of Islam have all moulded his perceptions of Libya and the outside world. He is a genuine son of the desert, of which he commented that although it did not grow grass, it did grow values and principles. He

admitted, 'The fact that I lived in the desert has most certainly been of importance in the course of my life. I was conditioned by my origins... The way I look at the outside world is the way of one who was born and raised in a desert environment.'[37] One of his close friends has described the impact of the desert on al-Qathafi as the master key to an understanding of his personality. He said,

> If one wants to understand Gadaffi one must always keep in mind the essential: he is a son of the desert. It was in the desert that he learned his first lesson, much more than at any school. It was the desert which taught him patience, endurance, generosity, and faith in God; and it is in the desert that he learned self-sufficiency, facing up to such difficulties as its storms , its immense distances, and the privations it inflicts...[38]

Indeed, it was the desert which gave al-Qathafi his stubborn and independent character. It was also the place where he obtained his puritanism, egalitarianism, simplicity, and asceticism of living habits, and his deep-rooted sense of personal honour, which are all typical of the bedouin man and part of bedouin culture.[39] Even until now, al-Qathafi feels more at home in the desert and still distrusts the sophisticated, axiomatically corrupt, urban politicians.

However, when al-Qathafi moved to Sabha, and later to Musrata and Benghazi, his horizons became broader. As Hinnebusch has argued, when al-Qathafi moved away from the small tribal milieu into the bigger world, he merged his bedouinism into an intense, personal identification with the Arab nation. Hinnebusch maintained that 'this identification remains the most distinctive trait of Qaddafi's belief system.'[40]

In addition to the desert, al-Qathafi has been greatly influenced by the charismatic leadership of the late President Jamal Abdul Nasser. During the fifties and sixties, the impact of Nasser on the younger generation of Libya, and indeed of all the Arab states, was immense, and al-Qathafi and his companions were no exception to this general upsurge of feeling. Al-Qathafi formed his impression of Nasser and the Egyptian

Revolution through the accounts of his relatives who used to travel to Egypt. That impression was given firmer features later by his reading and listening to radio. The Egyptian Revolution, which al-Qathafi came to call the 'mother Revolution', was seen by the young al-Qathafi as a turning-point in Arab history. It not only put an end to the corrupt monarchy but, more important, it regained for Egypt her rightful position in the Arab nation by sounding a clarion call for Arab nationalism and anti-imperialist policies. At that time, al-Qathafi and his colleagues were agitated by the British government's hostile stand against Egypt and Nasser. When Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company in 1956 and succeeded in repelling the tripartite aggression, al-Qathafi, along with the majority of the Arab people, admired him even more. As al-Qathafi later said, the tripartite attack on Egypt 'made me love and admire Jamal Abdel Nasser more and more.'[41] Nasser's anti-colonialist stance and his bold initiatives that seized the initiative from the West seem to have touched al-Qathafi's heart and echoed his own values and aspirations. He did not keep his admiration for Nasser to himself, but asked his colleagues to look to Nasser and learn from his experience. One of these colleagues recalled how al-Qathafi pointed to Nasser as the supreme hope around whom they ought to rally. He said that they were constantly reminded by al-Qathafi that

> if we [Arabs] were able to triumph at a certain moment in history it was because Egypt and Syria retrieved their unity under the rule of Salah el-Din (Saladin). After that, until Nasser's time, there seemed to be no hope left for us. Remember France's occupation of Algeria, Egypt's occupation by the British, our own country invaded by the Italians. Remember Palestine, the Hussein-MacMahon letters, the Balfour Declaration, the innumerable occasions upon which we have been mocked at and humiliated. But now we can take heart; now we have Nasser. He was the first Arab leader of modern times who knew how to get rid of the foreigner. It is to him that we must look.[42]

When they came to power, al-Qathafi and his companions described themselves as students of Nasser and as early Nasserists. They applied Nasser's ideas and sought to achieve the same goals of Arab independence, Arab unity, and radical domestic reforms which he tried to achieve. Initially, they borrowed Nasser's model of the Arab Socialist

Union (ASU), raised Nasser's slogans of freedom, socialism, and unity, and adopted the same national anthem as Egypt. Later, in a letter of censure addressed to Sadat, al-Qathafi described how closely they were following in Nasser's footsteps. He wrote,

> After the 1st September Revolution, the Libyan people accepted the Egyptian Revolution from A to Z. They accepted the Egyptian anthem—Allah Akbar—then they accepted the Egyptian flag, the Arab Socialist Union, its charter and its statutes. They also accepted the slogan 'freedom, socialism, and unity' as well as the eagle emblem.[43]

Al-Qathafi's Nasserist convictions should not be seen as mere imitation. It was only a stage in his political thought. The main divergence from Nasserism was al-Qathafi's emphasis on Islam. From his early days, al-Qathafi added a strong sense of Islamism to the Nasserist experiment in Libya. Then he developed his own theory of direct democracy, although it still contained many elements of Nasserism.

Islam has also had a great impact on al-Qathafi's personality. His devotion to Islam stemmed from his Qur'anic education and his Islamic upbringing. Unlike Idris, he had not been brought up in a very religious family but, rather, in an average Muslim family that saw Islam not only as a religion but as a way of life. As a result, Islamic values influenced his behaviour as a child. As his father told Mirella Bianco, 'He was a very pious little boy: he never forgot his prayers.'[44] During the period of recruiting for new members of the Officers Movement, the practice of prayers and avoidance of forbidden things were among the conditions for any new admission. When al-Qathafi was sent to Britain for a training course, he did not indulge himself in leisure pursuits and amusements. He showed no interest in such things, which only reinforced his rejection of Western materialist culture. Moreover, he did not betray any signs of inferiority or the profound ambiguity (in fact, a love-hate relationship) towards his own culture which characterized so many educated Arabs.[45] To the contrary, he felt pride in his Arab-

Islamic heritage; he wore the traditional Libyan dress in central London and hung a picture of his family's tent in his room in Britain.[46]

The other factor that left its imprint on al-Qathafi's personality was his military education. In Libya, as in a number of other Arab and Third World countries, a career as an army officer was restricted to the sons of the privileged families. It was only after independence that the doors of military academies were opened to sons of members of the lower strata. The career that was thereby made available to them offered new opportunities in higher education and consequently a much better standard of living. It therefore attracted young men from poorer rather than from wealthier families. Sons of wealthy families and ruling elites shun the military as a career in favour of more lucrative activities.[47] However, for al-Qathafi and his companions this did not seem to be the main motivation. For them the armed forces represented the only possible means for political action and rapid change. An army career was seen not necessarily in purely military terms, but as an avenue for political involvement. Although al-Qathafi and his colleagues entered the army because change was possible by military means, the military experience itself appears to have given them self-confidence as well as the values of discipline, hierarchy, and management.

*8.4 Conclusion*

It is obvious now that the socio-educational backgrounds of Idris and his close associates, and of al-Qathafi and his colleagues were different. Bearing in mind the generation gap, it is difficult to put the two groups in the same category. Whereas the first group was from a traditional social and educational background, the second had experienced formal education and training, and had developed a quite non-traditional political outlook and set of values. The inevitable result was that each group perceived

differently Libya's role in general and, in particular, her foreign policy regarding Britain and the West.

As far as Libya's foreign policy regarding Britain was concerned, the effects of both regimes' leaders' social and educational backgrounds were evident. As has been discussed earlier, the monarchical regime followed a pro-Western foreign policy and Idris himself was determined to oppose any attempt to terminate the presence of the British and American military bases in Libya. In marked contrast, the revolutionary regime was quick to end the British and American domination and to completely redirect Libya's foreign policy. The new foreign policy manifested itself in the early evacuation of the British and American military bases, the expulsion of the remaining Italians, the nationalization of all BP's assets in Libya, the withdrawal of Libyan reserves from British banks, and the economic withdrawal of Libya from the sterling area. The new leaders also called for Arab unity, the liberation of Palestine, and the neutralization of the Mediterranean Sea.

In short, while the monarchical regime's elite, by and large, followed a pro-Western, and particularly pro-British, line, the revolutionary leaders changed the country's orientation and pursued a more nationalistic, radical and anti-imperial foreign policy. This change of policy direction should be attributed to the change in leadership, i.e. from traditional and conservative, if not reactionary, leaders who had little or no education, to nationalist leaders who had experienced modern education and who shared an orientation shaped by a common military discipline and sense of revolutionary commitment.

**NOTES**

1. Haykal (Heikal), "Egyptian foreign policy", 714-727.

2. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 320.

3. Shembesh, *The analysis of Libya's foreign policy*, 161.

4. Among these scholars are Al-Khawas, El-Fathaly, Zartman, Hinnebusch, El-Kikhyia, Shembesh, Arab, Wright, Bearman, Harris, and Anderson.

5. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 15.

6. Bianco, *Gadafi*, 84.

7. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, 155 f.

8. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 44.

9. *Ibid.*, 66.

10. *Ibid.*, 63.

11. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, 155.

12. PRO, FO 371/2670, Idris to MacMahon, 9th September 1916; FO 371/2670, Talbot on Idris's character and status, 22nd November 1916.

13. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 34, 36, 59.

14. De Candole, *The life and times of King Idris*, 24.

15. *Ibid.*, 16 f.

16. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 73.

17. *Ibid.*, 84.

18. Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 59.

19. Sury, "Political development", 128.

20. Ben Halim, *Safahat*, 139.

21. *Ibid.*, 84.

22. Hayford, *The politics of the Kingdom of Libya*, 250.

23. Fkeni was the holder of a Doctor of Philosophy degree from a French university.

24. Sury, "Political development", 368 f.

25. See Hinnebusch, "Libya: personalistic leadership", 184.

26. *Le Figaro*, 30th September 1969.

27. Among these writers are Lillian Craig Harris, David Blundy and Andrew Lycett, and Jonathan Bearman and Harold D. Nelson. *Africa confidential* (II, 15 [24 July 1970] 6) even suggested that al-Qathafi was a Palestinian by birth and that this was why he was interested in the Palestinian question.

28. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, V, 33 f.

29. *New York Times Magazine*, 16th December 1979, 123.

30. Bianco, *Gadafi*, 5.

31. *Ibid.*, 8.

32. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, V, 36 f.

33. See the story of the Revolution in *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, VIII, 67-114.

34. *Ibid.*, 41.

35. For the full story of the Revolution, see *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, VIII, 67-114; V, 30-44; VI, 47-106. See also Muscat, *My president*; and *al-Wasat*, nos. 187-9.

36. Haykal, *Road to Ramadan*, 185.

37. Bianco, *Gadafi*, 81.

38. *Ibid.*, 9 f.

39. Nelson, *Libya*, 46.

40. Hinnebusch, "Libya: personalistic leadership", 189.

41. Quoted in El-Khawas, *Qaddafi*, 4.

42. Bianco, *Gadafi*, 35.

43. Message from al-Qathafi to Sadat, quoted in *October*, 5th June 1977, 14-17.

44. Bianco, *Gadafi*, 5.

45. Hinnebusch, "Libya: personalistic leadership", 188.

46. El-Khawas, *Qaddafi* 5 f.

47. Rouleau, "Oil and monarchies do not mix", 27.

# CHAPTER NINE

# BELIEFS AND IDEOLOGY:

# A COMPARISON OF IDRIS AND AL-QATHAFI

*9.1 Introduction*

The concepts of belief system and ideology are among the most elusive concepts in the field of political science. Obviously, a full discussion of the two concepts is beyond the scope of the present study, but it may be helpful to outline what is meant by each term as used in this study in order to distinguish between them. Here, whereas ideology will be seen as a set of ideas which link together beliefs and a programme for action that derives from these beliefs, a belief system is far less formalized and does not necessarily involve a programme for action. This analytical distinction enables us to compare and contrast the two leaders' roles in Libya's foreign policy.

However, both concepts play an important role both in domestic and foreign policy. It is through his or her ideological outlook that the leader not only perceives the world but also defines and understands his or her country's position and responsibility and how to act accordingly. However, the importance of the role played by the ideology and belief system varies from one country to another and from one time to another. As far as Idris and al-Qathafi were concerned, while both leaders had what could be called a set of beliefs, of the two only al-Qathafi consciously formulated a political ideology.

Nevertheless, in Third World countries, any clear understanding of their foreign policy cannot be achieved without analysing the leadership's beliefs and ideology. In such

countries, more than in developed countries, the dominant role played by one leader implies a strong relationship between the values and beliefs of that leader and the state's behaviour. This is so simply because of either the absence or the weakness of political institutions and organizations which would permit participation in a decision-making process and limit the pervasive influence of the leader's personal values and beliefs. This absence of political checks has presented many Third World national leaders with the opportunity to make their own values and beliefs the national ideology and their personal interests the national interests. Unlike the well-established states of the developed world, the majority of these Third World countries that have emerged only recently from colonial domination are still struggling to define their national interests. Consequently, the leaders of these countries tend to act according to the principle of 'l'état c'est moi' and see their own interests and those of their countries as synonymous. Thus, foreign policy in many developing countries is frequently used to consolidate the position of the leader and to legitimate and justify his or her policies.

As far as Arab states are concerned, it is rare to find a work on Arab politics which does not emphasize the importance of ideology. The prominence of ideology is better understood when we take into account of the environment in which Arab politics operate. In addition to the perennial Arab-Israeli conflict and the conflict over territorial issues born out of the colonial legacy, citizens of various Arab states still identify themselves with the values of Arabism and Islam. As has been observed by specialists in Arab politics, 'a basic component of Arab political culture is the belief that Arab nationhood will be translated into Arab statehood, and that the present division of the Arab nation into several states is both artificial and temporary.'[1] Indeed, throughout the history of the contemporary Arab states, there have always been two main elements that have shaped their domestic and foreign policy: Pan-Arabism and Islam. Belief in both of these ideologies, or in one of them at least, has been an important motivating force in Arab politics in general and in foreign policy in particular.

In this regard, Libya has been no exception. Arab nationalism and Islam have always affected the country during her history and greatly influenced her foreign policy during the revolutionary era. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the role of these ideologies, as held by both Idris and al-Qathafi, and their impact in formulating Libya's foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular. In this chapter I intend to examine to what extent those ideologies and beliefs held by the country's leaders affected their stand on the set of controversial issues mentioned in Chapter Six. It has to be made clear at the beginning that whereas al-Qathafi put his beliefs, values, and ideas in a written, formal ideology, Idris failed to develop his belief system into such a form. The argument is that the impact of the two leaders' ideologies and beliefs has been principally responsible for shaping the course of Libya's foreign policy (and of course its shifts in objectives over time). It has been through their ideologies and belief systems, formed from their social and educational backgrounds, that Idris and al-Qathafi perceived Libya's role in world politics and formulated and executed their foreign policies.

*9.2 Idris's belief system*

During the monarchical era, there was no clearly marked out ideology guidinging the regime. Loyalty was centred on Idris as both the temporal ruler of the country as well as the religious leader of the Sanusi movement. Deriving his legitimacy from religious factors, Idris had to claim Islam as the official ideology of the state. In practice, however, whether under pressure or otherwise, Idris attempted to secularize the political system. In the process, apart from the *Shari'a* Courts, he relegated the role of religion to a secondary position, dealing only with spiritual affairs rather than political matters. Although he encouraged religious education and established and reactivated several traditional Islamic institutions, Islam had little impact on foreign policy or on Libya's orientation to Islamic causes. Libya's stance on Islamic issues rarely exceeded expressions of sympathy and sometimes contradicted her identity as a Muslim state.[2] Thus, although

Islam was claimed as the religion of the state, it did not affect the state's foreign policy, but rather was used as a legitimating tool.

With the spread of education, the mass media, and urbanization, the legitimacy of the monarchical regime started to decline. Although Idris was admired and respected by the older generation on account of his status as the grandson of the Grand Sanusi, he did not present Islam as an ideology that would draw the lines in formulating and executing the country's domestic and foreign policies. Consequently, he failed to win the support of the younger generation and even allowed the support of his traditional supporters to drift away from him as he implemented what was to them a novel secular system.

Idris himself was not only unable to adopt any clear ideology, but also failed to create any sense of a distinctly Libyan identity or kindle a Libyan nationalism. This was because of his Western orientation and his identification with the Barqa region. From the outset, Libya was a creature of the West and Idris continued to rely on Britain and the USA until his overthrow. Internally Idris's preference was for Barqa and he showed a lack of enthusiasm for what a united Libya might represent. After the formation of the unitary state in 1963, some young ministers from Tripolitania tried unsuccessfully to promote a sense of Libyan nationalism built around the institution of the monarchy, but Idris was never at ease with Tripolitania's nationalist tendencies; his political interests were focused on Barqa. He knew that whatever real power he had lay in the loyalty he commanded as the leader of the Sanusi Order and as Amir of Barqa. Although he expressed devotion to Libya as a whole, he privately confessed different feelings. Henry S. Villard, the American Ambassador to Libya, noted this feature and commented, 'I had many teas as well as luncheons with King Idris during the two and a half years I resided in his realm. The unfailing subject of interest to him was the past, present, and future of Cyrenaica. Uppermost in his mind was the rebuilding of Benghazi.'[3] Indeed, by 1966, it was evident that much of the country's wealth was diverted to Barqa. A number of new cities were

planned in the east of the country and work was initiated on a third capital for a country whose population did not exceed two million.

Unfortunately for the monarchical regime, Libya's independence and rise to statehood in 1951 coincided with the rise of Pan-Arabism as a mass phenomenon throughout the Arab world. In the interim the regime was unable or unwilling to adopt an ideology compatible with Arab nationalist sentiments. Instead, it continued its pro-Western policies and turned its back on Arab affairs. The younger generation of the Libyan people, on the other hand, were more oriented towards the ideology of Pan-Arabism. This ideal had deep roots among the majority of the Libyans, who proudly regarded themselves as descendants of the Arab tribes of Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym. Like other Arab countries in the Maghrib, nationalism in Libya was closely linked to religion. Each ideology contains the other.[4] This may be attributed to the fact that Libya is predominantly a Muslim country without any non-Muslim Arabs. Therefore, Islamic and Arab identity became in Libya virtually synonymous. When Italy attacked Libya, the Libyans considered it an attack against an Arab and Islamic land, and waged their resistance under the banner of 'Islam and Arabism'. Islam, therefore, was the primary mainstay undergirding the rise and development of nationalism in Libya.

However, at the outset, support for Pan-Arabist ideology was confined to those who had received their education and/or sought exile in neighbouring Arab countries. But the rise of President Nasser made large segments of the Libyan people adherents to Arab nationalism and its brand of Nasserism in particular. As early as the mid-fifties, particularly after the Suez Crisis, young Libyans were enthralled and fascinated by Nasser. Nasserism became the most popular ideology among the young intellectuals, students, and army officers. Al-Qathafi and his friends were among those who believed in Nasserism and formed secret Nasserist cells.

Many specialists in Libya's politics have attributed the spread of Nasserism in Libya to the influence of Egyptian propaganda and the Voice of the Arabs radio station in particular, but one should ask why that particular radio station became popular among the Libyan people rather than other stations, including the Libyan one. Libya did not lack foreign radio stations beaming their programmes on the Libyan populace. Among these were the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Voice of America, Radio Tunis, Radio Morocco, and Radio London, but only the Voice of the Arabs genuinely caught the attention and imagination of the Libyan people. That was simply because it represented their own aspirations and dreams of liberation, unity, and development. Its messages found receptive ears and minds among the millions of Arabs who felt humiliated, dominated, and demoralized by the West.

However, Egypt's humiliating defeat in the June 1967 War was a painful blow to Nasser and Nasserism throughout the whole Arab world. The defeat, while it was seen by al-Qathafi and his comrades underground as only a temporary setback and in fact it inspired them to expedite their take-over, nevertheless presented the old regime with a chance to discredit Nasser and call on the Libyans to focus solely on Libyan nationalism. In the face of widespread Nasserism and other rival ideologies, the Libyan government tried to use Idris's status as a way of competing with other ideologies. Efforts were made to glorify Idris and present him as a symbol of Libyan nationalism. He was described in such glowing phrases, among many others, as 'the father of the people', 'the master of the country', and 'the wise leader'.[5] Moreover, ceremonial occasions featuring the King and some of his close aides became common features in Libya's main cities. Several Libyan national holidays, including the King's Birthday and Army Day, were commemorated to foster a sense of Libyan national identity. This Idris-centred campaign of Libyan nationalism was intensified by the appointment of 'Abd al-Hamid al-Bakkush as Prime Minister on the 24th October 1967. He had been a leftist during his student days in Cairo, but he later changed his views in order to become consistent with his mentor, King Idris.

Al-Bakkush claimed that Libyan national identity had deep roots stretching far back into prehistory and he placed emphasis on the integrity and unity which the Libyan people had been able to preserve throughout their long history.[6] He urged the Libyan people to cling to their land and to take pride in their identity, their history, and their heritage.[7] In his attempt to direct the attention of the Libyan people away from Arab nationalism and to fulfil the emotional needs of the younger generation, al-Bakkush renewed emphasis on glorification of the person of Idris as a basic symbol of Libyan nationalism. However, although the idea of 'Libyanism' seemed quite attractive for a country with a small population and huge oil revenues, al-Bakkush's efforts were too little and too late to change the orientation of the younger generation. Idris was not a personality to be glorified. His oratorical style, his unease in direct contact with the public, and his weakness before others' influence, especially that of the Shalhi brothers, one of whom was the special adviser of the King and the other the Chief of Staff in the Libyan Army, all indicated his inability to stand as a symbol for a strong Libyan national identity. A more cramping impediment to any attempt to establish a strong sense of Libyan nationalism was his close links with Britain and the USA.

In short, in the post-oil era, Idris was unable to provide an ideology compatible with the aspirations of the young, highly politicized new generation, or to create a sense of Libyan nationalism around his person. Instead, he and his close aides resorted to the old practices of injecting more liquidity into the economy in the hope that money would cure all diseases. But neither materialistic welfare nor the glorification of Idris was enough to foster a strong and durable sense of Libyanism or even a political ideology of Idrisism.

*9.2.1 The impact of Idris's beliefs on foreign policy*

The foreign policy of Libya during the monarchical period was a reflection of Idris's perception of Libya and the world around her, which was shaped by his conservative social background and his experience during and between the two World Wars. That experience made it difficult for Idris to rid himself of the British alliance (despite its more than implicit elements of domination). He was grateful to Britain for her support during and after the Second World War and therefore felt strongly committed to a pro-British and pro-Western policy. Indeed, Idris continued to the last day of his reign to regard the West, and the British in particular, as a source of security for his person and for his dominion. His insistence on the continued presence of the British and American military bases is a case in point. He adamantly insisted on retaining the bases and stood firm against any attempt to revise the treaties even when Britain and the USA showed some flexibility on the issue. As has been mentioned in earlier chapters, in the aftermath of the Suez invasion, Ben Halim approached the King about the evacuation of the British and American bases, but the King rejected his overtures. Later, in 1963, Fkeni tried his luck and proposed again the liquidation of the foreign bases, but to no avail. In 1964, in response to Nasser's call for the termination of British and American military bases in Libya, Prime Minister al-Muntasir declared that Libya had 'no intention of renewing or extending' the military agreement with Britain and the USA, which Libya had been 'compelled to conclude because of special circumstances.'[8] But the reaction of Idris was typical: he pleaded ill health, retreated to his palace in Tobruq, and threatened to abdicate the throne—all in an effort to demonstrate his displeasure at his Prime Minister's statement. He only withdrew his projected abdication after the tribal leaders of Barqa showed their loyalty to the person of Idris in a demonstration of support, organized by the government, outside the royal palace. These incidents clearly proved that Idris and his leading ministers firmly believed in the alliance with Britain and the USA, and wanted to preserve the presence of the foreign military bases. Their belief that Libya had earned her independence through the goodwill of Western powers made them hesitant to construct an

independent foreign policy which, they claimed, would expose Libya to dangers. As a result, Libya's foreign policy during the monarchical period was marked by a strong attachment to Britain and the USA on the one hand and by a cautious, elusive, non-involvement in wider Arab politics on the other.

*9.3 Al-Qathafi's ideology*

The principal sources to be examined for knowledge of a leader's ideology are his speeches and public addresses. In the case of al-Qathafi, such sources are readily available. Unlike Idris, al-Qathafi has been a frequent and expansive speaker. He rarely misses an opportunity to make his point in public declamation. Since his accession to power in 1969 and until 1984, his collection of speeches, *al-Sijill al-Qawmi* (the National Register) came to fill 15 volumes, each of 700 to 1,300 pages. More important is the *Green Book*, which contains al-Qathafi's proposed solutions for the world's political, economic, and social problems.

It has been generally agreed among specialists on Libyan politics that the main values in al-Qathafi's belief system are anti-imperialism, support for Arab unity, hostility to Israel, support for Islam, and opposition to communism.[9] The impact of these values can be measured by their priority in the ideology of al-Qathafi: the higher the priority, the stronger its impact on directing the country's foreign policy. In other words, al-Qathafi would be consistently anti-imperialist. He would also espouse pro-Arab unity priorities under all conditions, unless these conflicted with an anti-imperialist stand, and would follow an anti-Israeli policy unless in conflict with anti-imperialism or Arab unity. The same measure can be applied for the rest of the scale of values.[10]

However, the presence of a higher-ranked value does not mean that the lower-ranked ones are completely ignored. Any two or more values could be operating at the

same level in the same case.[11] In these circumstances, al-Qathafi could slide from one ideological formula to another without suffering from any evident contradiction.[12]

The above-mentioned values, however, were collected, elaborated, and developed in written form in the *Green Book*, which was published in three volumes between 1976 and 1979. The third volume in particular enunciates the principal ideas underlying the whole work, which came to be called the 'Third Universal Theory'. It is predicated on the belief that the two dominant socio-political-economic theories of capitalism and communism have been proved invalid. Capitalism has placed the good of a few individuals ahead of that of the whole community, whereas communism has emphasized the community at the expense of the individual's freedom and personal development.[13]

Central to the Third Universal Theory are the concepts of nationalism and religion. Al-Qathafi believes that nationalism and religion have been the two paramount forces of history, without which history cannot in fact be understood or explained. He argues that the basis for the movement of history is the social bond, which binds together each human group from the family to the tribe and eventually to the nation. The *Green Book* states, 'The social factor i.e. national factor is the driving force of human history. The social bond which binds together each human group, from the family through the tribe to the nation, is the basis for the movement of history.'[14]

In al-Qathafi's view, the nation is the individual's national political 'umbrella'. It is a wider social structure than the family or the tribe, both of which are limited in their membership.[15] He contends that the nation is composed of families and tribes, often born of a common origin, and grows with a shared destiny through affiliation. For al-Qathafi, then, society is based on a natural model. Individuals without family are mere *sa'alik* (vagabonds).

Although al-Qathafi believes that common origin is the basis of nations, he admits that a nation is not defined only by common origin. In addition to that, he concedes,

> a nation is formed by human accumulations through the course of history which induce a group of people to live in one area of land, make a common history, form one heritage and face the same destiny. Finally, the nation, regardless of blood bond, is the sense of belonging and a common destiny.[16]

Al-Qathafi draws a line between the nation and the state because he believes that the state is an artificial political, economic, and sometimes military system 'with which mankind has no relationship and has nothing to do.'[17] In this regard he is a great advocator of the nation state, where political form is consistent with the national social structure. He believes that the national state is the only political form which is consistent with the natural social structure. Its existence, he argues, 'lasts, unless it becomes subject to the tyranny of another stronger nationalism, or unless its political structure, as a state, is affected by its social structure in the form of tribes, clans and families.'[18]

Al-Qathafi argues that the reason behind the changes in the world map from one age to another is the inconsistency between the political structure and the social structure. He contends,

> When it is consistent in a nation, it lasts and does not change. If the change is forced by external colonialism or internal collapse, it reappears under the emblem of national struggle, national revival or national unity. When the political structure embraces more than one nation, its map will be torn up by each nation gaining independence under the emblem of nationalism. Thus, the maps of the empires which the world has witnessed have been torn up because they were made up of a number of nations.[19]

Thus al-Qathafi has suggested that in most parts of the world, the problems that exist within society are usually due to some form of suppressed nationalism or religion.

In this regard, he predicted the break-up of the Soviet Union and strongly supported the reunification of Germany as a natural situation for a divided nation as early as 1975.

If nationalism is the first pillar of al-Qathafi's political creed, religion is the second. Al-Qathafi believes that religion is the basis of everything in life. It is the main determinant of men's actions and reactions with their fellow men. Al-Qathafi thinks that there is no rival to nationalism in its power to unite a group of people except the religious factor. He argues that the role of religion appears when the religious spirit emerges stronger than the spirit of nationalism. Consequently, the various nationalisms are united under the banner of religion until the national role appears once again. When that happens and conflict flares up between different nationalisms which were brought together by one religion, for example Arab and Turkish nations under the Ottoman Empire, each nation becomes independent and recovers its social structure, and the empire then disappears.[20]

In short, al-Qathafi argues that every nation should have its own religion and that as far as the Arab nation is concerned, that religion should be Islam. In an address dedicated to Arab unity and delivered in the Algerian capital, al-Qathafi said that 'Arab nationalism and Islam are two sides of the same coin.'[21] With this conviction, he has actually described Christian Arabs as not genuine Arabs.[22] His thoughts as expressed in various public utterances and seminars have focused on the centrality of Islam to religion, of the Qur'an to Islam, and of Islam to Arab nationalism. Although he did not mention Islam by name in promulgating the Third Universal Theory, his thesis, particularly where it concerns national law, corresponds with the Qur'anic proposition that God created the heavens and set in place the constellation of human relations.[23] The main reason for his making no mention of Islam in the *Green Book* was that he never intended to limit the application of the Third Universal Theory to Muslim states alone, since he believes that the theory is applicable anywhere because it provides solutions to man's problems everywhere. Al-Qathafi justified his making no specific mention of Islam

by saying, 'We do not present Islam as a religion in the Third Theory. For if we do so, we will be excluding from the Third Theory all the non-Muslims, something which we evidently do not want.'[24]

Yet al-Qathafi contends that there is a need to study the Qur'an because it is addressed to all humanity and, unlike the other divinely-inspired books, it has not been distorted by anyone.[25] His recommendation to study the Qur'an stems from his strong conviction that 'all the guidance a man needs in running a state is to be found exclusively in the Qur'an.'[26] He even advised a correspondent for *Le Monde* newspaper to read the Qur'an and suggested that if he had already done so, he should re-read it:

> Read the Qur'an or re-read it, you'll find the answers to all your questions. Arab unity, socialism, inheritance rights, the place of women in society, the inevitable fall of the Roman Empire, the destruction of our planet following the invention of the atom bomb. It's all there for anyone willing to read it.[27]

This enthusiasm for Islam should not be taken to suggest that al-Qathafi wants to impose Islam on non-Muslim people. He is, in fact, rather tolerant of other religions, believing that every person should have a religion since, without it, they would know no source of ethical obligations.[28] Without religion, al-Qathafi argues, morality would be eroded and social order would break down, which would lead to chaotic conditions that law alone cannot handle.[29]

In al-Qathafi's view, religion can cement national unity when both religion and nation coincide. As far as the Arab nation is concerned, a return to Islam would lead to a cultural and political awakening of Pan-Arabism since both have a common heritage and destiny. For al-Qathafi, there is no conflict between Arabism and Islam. He believes that a reinvigorated Islam is the key to Arab rebirth.[30] In other words, he recognizes Arab nationalism without denying its Islamic heritage, maintaining that Islam and Arabism are

inseparable and indivisible. Thus, it can be said that al-Qathafi's main contribution to the Arab nationalist movement has been his revival of Islam as the key component of Arab nationalism.

Yet al-Qathafi's views of Islam are not necessarily compatible with those held by the conservative Muslim ulema. He sees Islam as a revolutionary force and not as the mere practising of several rituals. According to al-Qathafi, Islam is a permanent revolution and he believes that revolution, not reform, should be the central concern.[31] Islam, he maintains, is a progressive force that long preceded other social systems in laying down the principles of a free, prosperous, self-sufficient community. On the 10th November 1978, al-Qathafi ridiculed those who entertain a feeling of guilt whenever they stage a revolution just because they are Muslims: 'The truth is that Islam is a great revolution, nay, it is a world revolution,' he declared.[32] A few months after the Iranian Revolution, he said, 'What should be expected from [the Iranian] popular revolution is that it will rely on a new modern progressive and revolutionary Islam.'[33] The revolution that al-Qathafi advocates is to be carried out within Islam and not against it. In an interview in *al-Kifah al-'Arabi* magazine, al-Qathafi confirmed that he did not support Marx, who had launched a revolution against religion, but, on the contrary, he was calling for a revolution within Islam to rectify deviations and to eliminate hypocrites and those who exploited religion.[34] In other words, al-Qathafi was indeed frustrated with some sheikhs with highly conservative convictions who went so far as to castigate scientific discoveries and progress as sins. In short, although al-Qathafi gives Islam a paramount place in his ideology, his interpretation of Islam is new and not always compatible with that of the conservative Arab leaders such as the Saudis or even Idris al-Sanusi before him. His vision of Islam is primarily one in which it functions as a militant, anti-imperialist force.

*9.3.1 Ideology's impact on foreign policy*

It has been generally agreed that al-Qathafi's combination of Arab nationalism and Islam is the principal axis around which Libyan foreign policy has tended to revolve. From the early days of the Revolution, Libya's foreign policy was conceived and constructed principally in nationalistic and religious terms. As far as Libya's foreign policy regarding Britain was concerned, the role of ideology was particularly evident. In fact, it played the principal role in formulating and conducting that policy. As soon as al-Qathafi and his fellow-officers took over the reigns of government, they wasted no time in ending the presence of the foreign military bases in Libya. Driven by their ideological conviction of Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism, and non-alignment and positive neutrality, they regarded the presence of foreign military bases as deplorable and were quick to put an end to it. For them, the expulsion of the bases not only restored Libya's sovereignty and dignity, but also eliminated any threat that could come from the bases to Egypt in her struggle against the Zionist state of Israel and her struggle to liberate the Arab lands and unite the Arab nation.[35]

The Libyan government's policy of nationalizing the branches of foreign banks, insurance companies, and oil companies was also motivated by the ideology of the revolutionary leaders. That does not exclude any concomitant economic justification for the government's decisions, but rather indicates that Libya was not merely concerned for her own economic benefits regardless of effects that policies to achieve them might have on what were viewed as more important national concerns. The clearest example of an ideologically motivated decision was the nationalization of the BP and the American Bunker Hunt oil companies. The action was selective and aimed at punishing the British and American governments for what was seen by the Libyan regime as their hostile attitude and unfair stand towards the Arab nation. The political motivation for the nationalization of BP was endorsed by the judgment of the International Court, which

stated that the decision was taken 'for purely extraneous political reasons, and was arbitrary and discriminatory in character.'[36]

Motivated by their nationalist conviction, the revolutionary leaders also raised the slogan of 'Arab oil for the Arabs' and tried to use oil as a nationalist weapon. In the October War, despite his disapproval of the direction and objectives of the military operations, al-Qathafi's enthusiasm led him to impose an export embargo against countries which stood behind Israel, including the USA and Britain.

Similarly, the leader's ideology was the principal motivation for Libya's foreign policy in the Mediterranean basin. Al-Qathafi's ideology of Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism, anti-communism, and positive neutrality was the principal motivation for Libya's support for the island of Malta's efforts to rid herself of British and NATO dominance. Nevertheless, al-Qathafi's belief in positive neutrality and non-alignment cannot be understood without taking into account his broader belief in Arab nationalism. For him, positive neutrality meant the pursuit of an independent policy in accord with Arab national interests and, since the West was the major opponent of Arab national interests, the essence of neutrality became anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism in the first place.[37] Therefore, as an Arab nationalist, al-Qathafi saw positive neutrality as a challenge to Western colonialism wherever it was found and al-Qathafi found it just 300 km to the north of Tripoli, in Malta.

Moreover, just as ideology has been a helpful point of reference in analysing and understanding the Libyan policy of evacuation of the British and American military bases, nationalization of BP, Libyanization of foreign banks and insurance companies, withdrawal from the sterling area, and support for Malta's expulsion of British and NATO military facilities, ideology is also the primary factor to be considered when attempting to understand Libya's support for the IRA and other national liberation movements.

Driven by his anti-imperialism and revolutionary zeal, al-Qathafi saw the IRA as a national movement seeking the liberation of Northern Ireland from British occupation and believed that it was motivated by nationalism and religion.[38] Viewed from this perspective, al-Qathafi clearly understood the violence in Northern Ireland in terms of a collision between two nationalities and two religions: British against Irish and Protestant against Catholic. This analysis is consistent with al-Qathafi's ideology containing the belief that nationalism should be compatible with religion in order for a community to achieve harmony and stability. Therefore, al-Qathafi reached the conclusion that the proper solution for the Northern Ireland problem would be for the British troops to evacuate the territory and for the north and south to unite. The assumption is based on the view that nationalism would ultimately win over religion. Al-Qathafi argues that when both the national and religious factors come into conflict, the former will win. He writes,

> There is no rival to the social factor in influencing the unity of one group except the religious factor, which may divide the national group or unite groups with different nationalism. However, the social factor will eventually gain sway... The essential factor is the social factor. It is the permanent factor, namely nationalism.[39]

Al-Qathafi's emotional support for unity of nations divided by colonialism can also be understood as a reaction to the artificial division imposed on the Arab nation by the British and the French. Indeed, al-Qathafi's concept of Arab nationalism and Arab unity is relevant to his opposition to the legacy of European imperialism and the global *status quo* where nations such as the Arabs and the Irish have been divided, against their will, by Western colonial powers. His tactical solution to this unfair global *status quo* is world revolution. As Lisa Anderson has observed, 'Al-Qathafi has come to see his revolution at home and his opposition to the *status quo* abroad as inseparable. He has repeatedly emphasised that the Libyan revolution was based on an international ideology, not a

national movement.'[40] Therefore, he committed himself to fight against colonialism and neo-colonialism by all means and throughout the world.

Libya's support for liberation movements has not been restricted to the IRA alone, but has been extended to many other movements across the world. Al-Qathafi told a correspondent for *Le Figaro*, 'We have not aided only them [the IRA], but other peoples as well, who, in our opinion, have a just cause. We are for the triumph of liberty and the rights of men in every country in the world, in Ireland just as everywhere else.'[41] This, of course, does not rule out the desire to pay Britain back, for the harm she has done to the Arab and Muslim nations during her colonial past, as a motive for Libya's support for the IRA in particular. Al-Qathafi also claimed that religion had also motivated Libya's general stand on the problem of Northern Ireland. He pointed out that

> the true Islam advocates the protection of all the weak, even if they are not Muslims. Whenever they ask for help they must be given help. Should we limit our protection to Muslims only, we would prove ourselves both fanatics and egoists. Islam is for the protection of everyone...[42]

The most visible example of the centrality of ideology to Libya's foreign policy, however, has been the support shown for the Palestinian cause. This has been a focal point of Libya's foreign policy since 1969. In fact, Libya's bilateral and multilateral relations have been largely defined in terms of how other states have approached the Palestinian issue.[43]

This centrality of the Palestinian cause stemmed from the revolutionary leaders' ideological commitment to Arab nationalism, pro-Islamism, anti-imperialism, and anti-Zionism. In the view of al-Qathafi and his fellow-officers, the Arab nation has been subjected to one of the most cynical colonial conspiracies in history, which had succeeded in inserting the Zionist state in the heart of the Arab nation. The conspiracy, they believe, was motivated by the greed of the imperialist powers and their hatred for Islam and the

Arabs, and aimed to divide the Arab nation, exploit its resources, and deny its identity and cultural and historical specificity.[44] Furthermore, they saw Israel as a threat in itself with no limits to its expansionist mentality. Al-Qathafi believes that Israel has not only violated and offended Arabism, but Islam also. In his view, the occupation of Jerusalem is a violation of the integrity of Islam and an insult to the whole Muslim world. Therefore, al-Qathafi believes, Arabs and Muslims should fight to eliminate the Zionist state. He saw *jihad* (holy war) as the active element of Arab nationalism and the only way to liberate Palestine and defeat imperialism. As he emphasized in 1973, 'Any contribution to liberate the world from imperialism should be considered an integral part of *jihad*.'[45] In accord with this policy, he has rejected any attempt to negotiate, directly or indirectly, with Israel. He strongly opposed the Camp David Accords and, until now, he is still one of the few Arab leaders who has refused to recognize Israel. This uncompromising stance on Israel is a clear reflection of his nationalist convictions, which not only dictate his understanding of the Arab struggle against Israel, but also dictate his perception of the correct solution to the problem. Al-Qathafi argues that the prerequisite for solving the Palestinian issue is the return of more than five million Palestinians to their homes. Thereafter, the problem, he believes, could be solved on the South African model by creating a democratic state of both Arabs and Jews.

As far as Libya's foreign policy respecting Britain has been concerned, the Palestinian cause has been a major point of disagreement between the two countries. In al-Qathafi's view, it was Britain that was to blame for the creation of the Zionist state by issuing the Balfour Declaration in May 1917. It was also Britain that was to blame for her backing of Israel at the expense of the Arabs. Therefore, he believed, it was up to the British government to rectify its stance on the Palestinian cause if it wanted to re-establish a friendly relationship with Libya.[46]

Thus, it is safe to conclude that during the period under study Libya's foreign policy in respect of Britain has been formulated and conducted on the basis of constant principles as outlined above. During this period, and indeed until now, Libya's foreign policy has remained intact and largely unchanged. That, of course, has not ruled out the use of tactics appropriate to changing circumstances, but the ultimate policy objective has remained constant. The distinction between tactics and strategy is very important because it leads to a better understanding of the real objectives of any state. For example, Libya used the tactic of supporting African states in a systematic attempt to isolate Israel politically and economically. In this way, Libyan help to Idi Amin or Bokassa was an example of the primacy of anti-imperialism, anti-Zionism, and pro-Palestinianism in al-Qathafi's policy. In an interview with the Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci in 1979, al-Qathafi made it clear that he was not interested in Amin's internal policies; what he was interested in was 'Amin's position in the field of international relations.'[47] Al-Qathafi admitted that Amin's own personality might not be to his personal liking and that he might disagree with particular policies, but what he disliked even more was the interference of France, Tanzania, and other foreign powers in the internal affairs of Uganda.[48]

Failure to distinguish between tactics and strategy has been one of the main causes of some writers' having misunderstood Libya's foreign policy. Mary-Jane Deeb, for example, has expressed her opinion that the primacy of Libya's national interests supersedes ideology as the prime mover of Libyan policies. Although she admits that there was no doubt that during his early years in power al-Qathafi was motivated by strong ideological considerations, she believes that by the mid 1970s, al-Qathafi's behaviour seemed less ideologically motivated. She asks,

> How could an Arab nationalist justify his support for non-Arab countries when in conflict with Arab states, for instance? Yet after 1978, Libya supported Ethiopia against Sudan and Iran in its war against Iraq. How could an Islamic reformer support non-Muslims against Muslims? Yet Libya withdrew its support from Muslim Eritrea to support non-Muslim Haile Mengistu; it also supported Christians and animists in southern

> Sudan against the Muslim Arab northerners. How could a self-proclaimed revolutionary and socialist ally himself to a pro-Western traditional monarch? Yet, in 1984, Libya and Morocco signed a treaty of unity.[49]

In reply, it may be suggested that the main issue here should not be whether national interests supersede ideology or *vice versa*, but which of them shapes the other. In the case of Libya, ideology has defined what Libya's national interests should be. Al-Qathafi has never seen Libya's national interests as separate from his conception of the overall Arab national interests. He has never spoken of Libya as a nation or worked for her interests at the expense of the Arab national interests. His ideology of Arab nationalism dictates his perception of Libya as only one integral part of the Arab nation and his always giving priority to Arab national interests. In this regard, Hinnebusch has commented,

> For Qaddafi, thus, the focus of national identity is not Libya, but the Arab world: Libya is merely the base—and a poor one at that—from which he has sought to project his vision and leadership to the rest of the Arab world... Qaddafi's desire to merge Libya into the Arab world represents, in a sense, a struggle against what might be called the 'Kuwaitization' of Libya, the perhaps inevitable tendency of Libyans to look inward and lose their Pan-Arab identity in the enjoyment of the country's oil wealth. From Qaddafi's point of view, this can only be a moral degeneration... From his Pan-Arab point of view, even a concentration on the modernization of Libya, Algerian style, can lead to a dangerous confusion of priorities.[50]

To turn to the specific analysis of Libyan foreign policies mentioned by Deeb (al-Qathafi's support for Ethiopia against Sudan, for Iran against Iraq, for Ethiopia under Mengistu against Eritrea, and for southern Sudan against Numeiry), it will be argued that they were ideologically motivated, contrary to the apparent view of Deeb. The support for the southern Sudanese was, in fact, a tactical alliance and, as René Lemarchand has put it, 'had more to do with his visceral distaste for Numeiry's pro-American leaning than with any particular conception of the Libyan national interests.'[51] The relationship between Libya and Sudan was very strong when, with Egypt, these countries signed what became known as the Tripoli Charter in December 1969. Then, when Numeiry was

toppled in 1971, Libya, driven by her ideology of pro-Arab unity and anti-communism, not only gave military aid and material support to Numeiry's loyalists, but also arrested the two leaders of the coup and handed them over to Numeiry. This all changed when Sudan backed Egypt's talks with Israel and her alliance with the USA. Libya became critical of the Numeiry regime and supported his opponents. He was regarded as a traitor and an American agent who was no longer working for Arab unity and against the domination of foreign powers in the Arab world. In these circumstances anti-imperialism was the guiding principle. The Libyan government changed its hostile stand towards Sudan in 1985 when the new regime ended its alliance with and dependence on the USA, and stopped Libyan opposition activities in Sudan.[52] Thus, it is clear that the support for the Sudanese southerners was a tactical ploy to bring down the regime then viewed as an American surrogate.

Similar remarks may be made concerning Libya's support for Ethiopia against the Eritrean insurgency. Ethiopia under Haile Selassie was perceived by Libya as 'an anti-Arab and anti-Muslim state operating as a Western base on the African continent.'[53] Consequently, Libya extended her full support to the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Driven by her anti-Zionist policy, Libya also requested the removal of the OAU headquarters from Ethiopia to Egypt because of the Ethiopia's ties with Israel. When the Military Council, which had toppled Haile Selassie, made some conciliatory gestures such as meeting with some Eritrean leaders, recognizing Islamic holy days, and making efforts to improve relations with the Arab countries, Libya changed her stance but without giving up her support for the Eritrean people. Since the USA had entered the scene in 1973 and allowed Ethiopia to obtain about $100 million in the form of American military equipment, Libya became critical of the Military Council and accused Ethiopia of preparing to launch attacks on both Eritrea and Sudan.[54] Thus, the Libyan government supported the Eritrean guerrillas when Ethiopia was an ally of the West and allowed Israeli penetration of neighbouring countries, but it reversed its stand when Ethiopia changed her

international alignment as a result of Mengistu Haile Mariam's coup. Libya appeared to understand that the new regime in Ethiopia was no longer denying Eritrea her own identity within the Ethiopian state.[55] In short, the guiding motive in Libya's shifting foreign policy regarding Ethiopia was obviously her concern for the Arab nation and Islam.

As far as the Iran-Iraq War was concerned, Libya's leaning towards Iran was, again, motivated by ideology rather than by anything else. A *communiqué* delivered by the Permanent Secretary of the Congress of the Arab People in December 1980 concerning the Iran-Iraq War stated,

> The outbreak of this war has no acceptable motivation and it is in full contradiction with our national interests... The military forces of the two countries, the economies of the two peoples, their petrol resources are destroyed in a mad and tremendous way. The Arab nation has lost a part of the potential which was necessary to the struggle for its liberation, its progress, and its welfare. Moreover the Arab nation has lost one of its most important allies, the Islamic revolution of Iran...[56]

Libya had, in fact, been one of the first states to have strongly opposed the Shah of Iran and to have supported the popular Islamic Revolution, through her political and financial support for Imam al-Khomeini and other opposition groups. It was therefore unacceptable for al-Qathafi to see the Revolution which he had supported being destroyed by an Arab and Muslim power. What made al-Qathafi lean more towards Iran for most of the time was his belief that Iraq was implementing an American conspiracy against Iran as the latter became a threat to Israel. Simons pointed out that al-Qathafi believed with some justification that Washington was supporting Iraq against Iran and therefore he urged members of the Arab League to defend Iran against Western imperialism. He quoted al-Qathafi as saying, 'Islamic duty dictates that we ally ourselves with the Muslims in Iran in this crusade instead of fighting them on behalf of America.'[57] The same may be said about Libya's stand against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Thus, the apparent

ambivalence and uncertainty of Libyan behaviour was caused by the conflict between the three main values of Pan-Arabism on the one side, and anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism on the other. But always among these values it was anti-imperialism that had the upper hand. Al-Qathafi appears to have been anti-imperialist at all times without exception, and pro-Arabist unless that would contradict his anti-imperialism, and anti-Israel unless anti-imperialist and anti-Israeli values are involved.

In contrast to Deeb's argument, Fouad Ajami did not deny the primacy of ideology in motivating Libya's foreign policy, but he blamed al-Qathafi for pursuing an exhausted, if not extinct, idea. Thus, he commented on al-Qathafi's belief in Pan-Arabism,

> Neither the fire and passion of the Libyan revolution nor its money could turn history around and revive an exhausted idea. Here and there, a few writers and publicists—not to mention some troublemakers—prospered on Libyan money, repeating Qaddafi's slogans about his Third Theory or carrying out Qaddafi's wishes in Beirut and Cairo. But this was not to be Qaddafi's era... Qaddafi's arena is now Libya; his pan-Arab dreams have aborted. Qaddafi's conviction that the Arabs are one nation is no longer shared by a critical segment of Arabs—the students and the youth—who once gave pan-Arabism power in Arab life.[58]

While a full discussion of Ajami's claims is beyond the scope of the present study, it is vital here to emphasize two things. First, the study on which Ajami based his claims in no way substantiates the claimed death of Pan-Arabism because (a) that study does not represent the total Arab population; and (b) there is no previous study with which to compare the results, which would be necessary in order to determine a change in attitudes. Second, the ideology of Arab nationalism and Islamism has widespread support among the Libyan populace and therefore al-Qathafi was in fact representing the wishes of a large majority of the population by his calling for Pan-Arabism and Pan-Islamism. In this regard, Ronald Bruce St. John has pointed out,

> The revolution's ideology, especially its emphasis on Arab nationalism, was accorded widespread support by the Libyan populace because there was a

> high degree of consonance between that ideology and fundamental values of Libyan political culture. Based on linguistic, cultural and religious criteria, observers have long concluded that Libya is among the most Arab of the Arab states.[59]

Pan-Arab and Islamic identity has its deep roots in Libyan history. It has even superseded the development of a national identity. Jacques Roumani contended,

> Islamic and pan-Arab identity were merged in the Tripolitanians' consciousness at the end of World War 1 when they saw the emerging Arab nation as the natural bearer of the Islamic message after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Since then, Islam and Arabism have become inseparable in Libyan ideology and have superseded the development of a national identity.[60]

Indeed, belief in Pan-Arabism and Islamism never died in Libya or anywhere else in the Arab world. The Pan-Arabist movement may have lost some of its momentum or its capacity for practical effects, but it has never completely died. When it happened that the ideal lost some of its momentum, the people expressed their orientation in the form of Islamic revivalism. Evidence for this is the Islamic revival in the Arab world since the seventies and until now. Claims of the death of Pan-Arabism are made in times of crisis as a reaction to frustration and disappointment. Indeed, the death of ideology and of Pan-Arabism in particular has been announced many times before, and Ajami was not the first and will not be the last to claim it. The death of pan-Arabism was claimed during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, after the break-up of the Egyptian-Syrian union, repeated again after the defeat in the 1967 War, after the death of Nasser, during Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, and recently after the invasion of Kuwait. Nevertheless, evidence of the continuing popularity of Pan-Arabism has been assembled in the recent meticulous study by an eminent Egyptian sociologist in which he makes clear that Pan-Arabism is a popular reality and that unionist steps have never proved lunacceptable to Arab public opinion despite the official crises and quarrels between Arab states.[61]

*9.4 Conclusion*

A close look at Libya's foreign policy from independence to the present time reveals that the change in the country's leadership in 1969 was indeed the main cause behind the fundamental reorientation of aims and guiding principles it has experienced. The military take-over in September 1969 was no mere change of faces or government, but was essentially the embracing of a definite ideology and outlook. Prior to 1969, the monarchical regime had neither a clear ideology for itself nor was prepared to tolerate the young population's association with established popular ideologies. Idris tried to build his legitimacy on his status as a religious leader, but, at the same time, he was unable or unwilling to present Islam as an ideology for the country. Instead, he pursued secular policies, but even while doing so he appeared to have no clear vision of what track Libya should follow. The lack of clear ideology was combined with his own weak personality. He was neither an ideologist nor a charismatic leader able to create a strong sense of Libyan nationalism. When he came to power, he was an elderly man with a traditional background. He was more suited to the role of tribal sheikh than that of the leader of a modern state. He was also out of touch with the new circumstances inside and surrounding Libya. In fact, he remained the captive of his own mentality, which was heavily influenced by the events of the two World Wars and the British role in driving the Italians out of Libya. That experience seems to have made it difficult for Idris to rid himself of the British influence and domination. As a result, he became strongly committed to pro-British and pro-Western policies and, since Idris was the main architect of his country's policy, Libya's foreign policy was reduced to a shadowing of that of Britain and the country took no active part in Arab affairs.

This all changed after the emergence of al-Qathafi. He was a man determined to reverse Libya's passive role in Arab affairs and bring her out of the orbit of the Western powers. Al-Qathafi had what Idris lacked: a strong personality and a clear ideology based on the twin pillars of nationalism and religion. From his belief in Arab nationalism and

Islam spring al-Qathafi's values of anti-imperialism, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism, anti-Zionism, anti-communism, and positive neutrality and non-alignment. This set of beliefs led the revolutionary government to pursue an aggressive and unconventional foreign policy. In doing so, Libya has faced many difficulties in conducting her relations with other nations, especially Britain and the USA. These Western powers resented that any developing country should dare to challenge the international order that had been set by themselves to serve their own interests.

Al-Qathafi has adamantly refused to abandon his principles and values despite the changing realities of the world around him. He has firmly held on to his values and, although adopting tactical flexibility, he has never compromised his principles in response to domestic or international pressure. He believes that change should take place in the global *status quo*, not in his principles and values. He argues that there is a fundamental inequity in the international system, which needs to be revised to the benefit of the Third World countries and the oppressed, the deprived, and the grief-stricken in the world.

Yet, belief in a certain ideology, especially in politics, need not entail divorce from pragmatism. On the contrary, sometimes a political leader with a sense of mission, like al-Qathafi, has had to find a way to survive for the sake of the survival of the ideal itself. The important thing, however, is that this tactical flexibility should not lead to a change in the ultimate goals. When an opportunity presents itself, he should act, but when the opposition is too strong, he should withdraw and await a more propitious opportunity. Otherwise, he will be either killed or overthrown in a very short time without achieving any of his goals. This tactical flexibility seems to have been adopted by al-Qathafi and, as a result, he is still in power, without having had to abandon his principles, after more than twenty-six years, despite attempts by the USA and other Western powers to bring an end to his regime.

**NOTES**

1. Korany & Dessouqi (Dessouki), *The foreign policy of the Arab states*, 28.

2. The Kashmir and Cyprus problems were good examples of Libya's reluctance to support her Muslim sister countries. See Shembesh, *The analysis of Libya's foreign policy*, 186.

3. Villard, *Libya: the new Arab kingdom*, 42.

4. See Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, 9 f.

5. Shembesh, *The analysis of Libya's foreign policy*, 189.

6. Sury, "Political development", 131.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Quoted in Shembesh, *The analysis of Libya's foreign policy*, 191.

9. In their attempt to explore the belief system of the revolutionary leaders, El-Fathaly and Palmer were able to identify several important values that crystallized during the early years of the Revolution. In addition to the preservation and consolidation of the Revolution, the two authors delineated the following values: anti-imperialism, Arab leadership, modernization, populism, religiosity, and militarism. A more systematic study by Muhammad 'Arab identified a similar set of values; these were anti-imperialism, pro-Arab unity, anti-Israel, pro-Islam, and anti-communism. See El-Fathaly & Palmer, *Political development*, 49-52; 'Arab, *The effect of the leader's belief system*, 144.

10. See 'Arab, *The effect of the leader's belief system*, 154.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Bleuchot, "The Green Book", 161.

13. For more details, see *The Green Book*, part one.

14. *Green Book*, 73.

15. *Ibid.*, 85.

16. *Ibid.*, 87.

17. *Ibid.*, 79.

18. *Ibid.*, 89.

19. *Ibid.*, 88.

20. *Ibid.*, 77 f.

21. *The Arab World*, 22 Jan. 1982, 10.

22. See al-Qathafi's interview with the Beirut newspaper *al-Safir* in *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, XII (1980-1) 29-55.

23. Bearman, *Qadhafi's Libya*, 160.

24. Quoted in El-Khawas, *Qaddafi*, 89.

25. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 738-744.

26. First, *Libya*, 24.

27. Quoted in *ibid.*, 135.

28. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 741.

29. *Ibid.*, 742.

30. In this regard, al-Qathafi differs from the Muslim Brotherhood and many other Islamic movements which reject Arabism as an obstacle to Pan-Islamism. See Hinnebusch, "Libya: personalistic leadership", 182.

31. Bleuchot, "The Green Book", 158.

32. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, X, 138-150.

33. *Ibid.*, 319-324.

34. *Al-Kifah al-'Arabi*, 7.2.1979.

35. See al-Qathafi's speeches in Tobruq, Derna, al-Baidha, Tripoli, and Benghazi in *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, I, 189-283.

36. Waddams, *The Libyan oil industry*, 253.

37. St. John, *Qaddafi's world design*, 72.

38. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, III, 434 f.

39. *The Green Book*, 77, 90.

40. Anderson, "Assessing Libya's Qaddafi", 200.

41. *Al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 524. See also *The Times*, 2nd April 1973.

42. Bianco, *Gadafi*, 155.

43. St. John, *Qaddafi's world design*, 48.

44. Amoretti, "Libyan loneliness", 63.

45. *Aspects*, 5-9.

46. See al-Qathafi's speech on the 7th October 1972 in *al-Sijill al-Qawmi*, IV, 52.

47. The interview was reported in the *New York Times*, 16 Dec. 1979. See also Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 264 f.

48. *New York Times*, 16 Dec. 1979.

49. Deeb, *Libya's foreign policy*, 8.

50. Hinnebusch, "Libya: personalistic leadership", 181 f.

51. Lemarchand, *The Green and the black*, 8.

52. For more details, see 'Arab, *The effect of the leader's belief system*, 181 f.

53. *Ibid.*, 171.

54. *Ibid.*, 173.

55. Amoretti, "Domestic and international impact", 199.

56. Quoted in Amoretti, "Libyan loneliness", 57.

57. Simons, *Libya: the struggle for survival*, 16.

58. Ajami, *Arab predicament*, 126.

59. St. John, "Determinants", 98.

60. Roumani, "From Republic to Jamahiriya", 167.

61. Nafa'a, "Arab nationalism", 133-151.

# CONCLUSION

Since obtaining independence in 1951, Libya has pursued two different foreign policies towards Britain and the world in general. These two forms of foreign policy have in fact differed to the point of being antithetical. Under the monarchical regime, Libya had no genuinely independent foreign policy from that of Britain and the USA, but this subordinate status in policy completely changed after the Revolution of September 1969. The present study has examined how Libya's foreign policy in respect of Britain has been formulated and executed, and why it began to take a different course after September 1969.

The study maintains that the Libyan monarchy, which endured for some eighteen years under the leadership of Idris al-Sanusi, was basically a creature of the West and of Britain in particular. In addition to the goodwill of Idris, Britain used her military administration in Libya to forge the political process in a form that would serve her own interests, and her power in the United Nations to shape the future of Libya. She stipulated that if there was to be an independent Libyan state, it would be federal and headed by her friend, Idris. Britain appears to have been wary of a unitary state which might be dominated by nationalist figures, especially from Tripolitania, where anti-Western sentiment was at its most severe. This is the likely explanation of Britain's insistence on federalizing a country of less than one million inhabitants. In other words, Britain's plan must have been that if the federation did not work, it would not be difficult for her to split the country up and retire to Barqa where Idris could be relied upon to secure her interests. The inevitable outcome was a semi-independent state strongly tied to the British sphere of influence.

The study argues that economic necessity was not the principal factor accounting for the monarchy's subordinated foreign policy with regard to Britain. Although the argument that the Libyan government had to follow the donor state's policies in order to secure foreign aid seems sound in logic, the continuation of the same pro-British policies after the inflow of wealth as a result of the discovery and exploitation of oil, which should have been enough to guarantee freedom to the Libyan government to follow an independent foreign policy, makes it clear that the true reason for the pro-British stance was the desire of both parties (the British government and Idris and his close aides) to continue the same patron-client relationship that had prevailed between them since their early contacts. Idris appears not to have seen Britain's interests as inconsistent with those of his own country and Britain was more than happy to profit from such a relationship. As a result, the foreign policy of the monarchy shadowed that of Britain and the West in general, so that during the whole of the monarchical era, the Libyan government was very vulnerable to the effects of decisions taken in London and Washington.

The monarchy's subordination to Britain became symbolized in the signing in 1953 of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance, which was designed to serve the interests of Britain. A collective defence agreement with a strong power such as Britain was not of great benefit to Libya since the possibility of Libyan engagement in war was remote. Britain was the party more likely to do so since she was a member of a military organization which obliged its members to come to the help of any member from Norway to New Zealand in case of war. This does not imply that the desire to conclude such a treaty was one-sided; to the contrary, Idris's desire was as strong as that of the British. Long years of co-operation with the British and almost complete reliance on Britain's help appear to have made Idris believe that Libya's independence and his personal position were threatened by neighbouring Arab countries and the possible return of the Italians, and that an alliance with a strong power such as Britain was the only guarantee against such threats.

The study concludes that while the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance did bring Libya some financial and defence benefits, on balance, the political disadvantages and limitations placed on Libya clearly exceeded any economic and defence benefits. Political, economic, and military superiority enabled Britain to impose her will on Libya and to exploit the situation in her favour. As a result, it was Libya who had to modify her foreign policy in order to make it compatible with that of Britain. An illustration of this was the Libyan government's support for the 'Eisenhower Doctrine', which was aimed at countering the communist threat. To most Libyans, a threat from the Soviet Union has always been inconceivable. A perception of threat from Italy, France, Britain, or Israel would have been more comprehensible.

Libya's subordination to Britain was particularly demonstrated during the Suez crisis, as the Libyan government could not respond to the public call for a firm stand behind Egypt and the evacuation of the British military bases in Libya. Instead, it tried desperately to satisfy Britain, to avoid antagonizing Egypt, and, at the same time, to contain domestic public opposition. All this, however, proved too much for the government to combine. Despite statements of support by the Libyan government for the nationalization of the Suez Canal Company and, later, condemnations of the tripartite aggression against Egypt, it neither satisfied the Libyan public nor President Nasser, but instead only antagonized the British. Thus, the Suez crisis was not confined to those parties directly involved, but proved also to be a crisis for the Libyan government. It highlighted the dilemma that the monarchical regime faced: a pro-Western foreign policy embraced by the government, contrasted with strong public orientation towards Arab nationalist issues.

The crisis also demonstrated that the Libyan-British alliance was an unequal one between unequal parties. The study clearly reveals that although the British government had assured its Libyan counterpart that it would not use its troops in Libya against Egypt,

it appears to have seriously contemplated the option of attacking Egypt from Libya using its troops there. Libyan sovereignty and the clauses of the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance appeared to be held in little respect, particularly among the British military planners. Indeed, had Britain adopted the idea of using her troops in Libya, she could easily have overridden the Libyan government since the latter could have done little to prevent the former from taking such action.

The sudden end of the Suez crisis did not end the Libyan government's crisis. Successive governments failed to pursue an independent foreign policy and continued to host the British and American military bases. This provoked the public, especially the younger generation, to demonstrate their frustration and anger, so that violent demonstrators attacked British and American military installations as well as other, civilian targets. For example, demonstrations grew in intensity in 1967 when rumours circulated that Egypt had been attacked by British planes from bases in Libya. In the face of this public resentment, the monarchical regime was unable to respond to the people's demands. To the contrary, the Libyan government relied more and more on the British and Americans for its survival. In addition to its unpopular foreign policy, the monarchy was further plagued by corruption, favouritism, and many other ills. A combination of both made the country ripe for change by 1969. Though economic and social factors played their part in bringing the days of the monarchy to an end, issues of foreign policy, especially the presence of foreign bases, played the main part.

The present study maintains that the major turning-point in Libya's foreign policy towards Britain and the world in general came as a result of the Revolution in September 1969. From the outset, the new revolutionary regime was determined to reverse the monarchy's traditional ties with Britain and the USA, which had placed Libya in the Western orbit and hampered her ability to act independently on regional and international problems. To win that freedom, it was an urgent priority of al-Qathafi to liberate Libya

from Western domination and control. Therefore, less than two months after the Revolution took place, he ordered the evacuation of the British and American military bases, which were seen by the majority of the Libyan people as occupying forces and violators of Libyan sovereignty.

Although Britain would have liked to carry on using her bases in Libya, the uncompromising attitude of the revolutionary government left her with no alternative but to comply with its demand. Britain appeared to be in no position to enter into new post-colonial adventures and did not want to jeopardize her growing economic interests in Libya. Britain was, in fact, keen to take advantage of al-Qathafi's anti-communist bias to confront any Soviet penetration in the region and to maintain the traditional close ties between Libya and the West. In this policy Britain appears to have been influenced by the American view that the strong Islamic convictions of the new leaders could be used to her own benefit.

At the time, Britain's readiness to withdraw was seen by the Libyan government as a good start for clearing the atmosphere for a good relationship based on mutual respect and reciprocal treatment, but good intentions alone proved not to be enough. The two countries appeared to hold diametrically opposed views on world issues in general and on the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular. As a result, diplomatic relations between the two countries were never good at any time after 1969. In contrast to the monarchical period, since that date, diplomatic relations between Libya and Britain only went from bad to worse, until they reached the point of breakdown in April 1984. The present study argues that the collapse of Libyan-British relations was caused by several factors. First, the outbreak of the Revolution in a country where Britain used to have complete domination was regarded by the latter as a blow to her interests and naturally was not accepted with any degree of satisfaction. Second, the new Libyan government was critical of Britain's policies towards Libya and the new leadership's conception of the Arab nation, and even

accused her of dividing the Arab nation and of the loss of Palestine. Third, and more specifically, the disagreement over the defence system deal and Britain's refusal to deliver the Chieftain tanks or return the first payment for them strengthened the anti-Western powers feeling of al-Qathafi and his colleagues on account of the former's double standard in dealing with the Arabs and the Israelis. Fourth, there were the nationalization of British interests in Libya, especially in the oil industry, and the withdrawal from the sterling area. The nationalization of BP in particular in retaliation against Britain for her collusion with the Shah of Iran in the Arabian Gulf reflected the wide gap between the two countries in their views on many issues. Fifth, there was Libya's explicit support for Malta in ending the British military bases on the island and in the whole of the Mediterranean basin. Sixth, was Libya's support for the IRA. Seventh, the most outstanding issue that has been troubling the relations between Libya and Britain since 1969, was the Palestinian question. The two countries have conflicting views on the issue. Al-Qathafi consistently and persistently blamed Britain for originating the Zionist state and causing the dispossession of the Palestinian people. He called for the complete liberation of Palestine and opposed all attempts to make the existence of Israel legitimate. Such a position infuriated Britain and the USA, which started to work in an effort to overthrow al-Qathafi.

Domestic politics also affected Libyan foreign policy. In terms of its formulation and execution, the implementation of the political system of direct democracy had a great impact. According to this new system, the People's Congresses drew up the policies and the Popular Committees implemented them according to their speciality. The General Popular Committee of the People's Bureau for Foreign Affairs was entrusted to implement the resolutions and recommendations relating to foreign affairs after they took their final shape in the General People's Congress. Despite all these changes, in practice al-Qathafi remained firmly at the top of the Libyan political system as the principal decision-maker at all levels, especially in foreign affairs. Although he appeared genuinely to want the

people to seize power and govern themselves through the system of People's Congresses, he seemed nevertheless determined to intervene when the outcome departed from what he saw as the general will of the people.

This new political system not only affected the way in which foreign policies were formulated and executed inside Libya, but also across the world. Libyan embassies were transformed to reflect the changes that had taken place inside Libya, as in 1979 al-Qathafi called for Libyan nationals abroad to take over the Libyan embassies and transform them into People's Bureaux. Across Europe, Libyan embassies were taken over by students and a People's Committee of five members was formed in each People's Bureau, but many European countries, especially Britain, were reluctant to recognize the change.

The study concludes that although relations were strained most of the time as a result of disagreement on the above issues, Libya and Britain were keen to maintain normal relations. The two countries were bound by a web of common economic interests that both were reluctant to forgo. With her North Sea oilfields not yet developed, Britain was importing about 15 per cent of her oil requirements from Libya. Moreover, in addition to the huge investment by her oil company in Libya, Britain was engaged in extensive engineering and defence projects, and the expectations were high for further deals since Libya became able to afford to buy the most sophisticated weapons in the world. On the other hand, Libya was importing British goods and technology, and sending her citizens to Britain for study, medical treatment, and tourism.

However the decisive blow in the breakdown of Libyan-British relations came as a result of Britain's harbouring and aiding members of the Libyan opposition abroad. Al-Qathafi viewed Britain's action as hostile and as an extension of American policy, which was explicitly aimed at overthrowing the revolutionary regime. The American tactics manifested themselves in the use of al-Qathafi's opponents to infiltrate Libya in order to

create disturbances which would give the Americans an opportunity to intervene directly. Such a scenario was alarming for al-Qathafi and so he decided to silence his opponents wherever they were found. The liquidation of several opponents and the explosions in London and Manchester brought further deterioration to relations, but matters came to a climax on the 17th April when a British policewoman was shot dead in front of the Libyan People's Bureau. Britain blamed Libya, but the latter denied any involvement. As a result, diplomatic relations were severed, ending a relationship of more than thirty years.

Having examined how the Libyan foreign policy towards Britain was formulated and conducted, and how, as a result, the Libyan-British relationship went from one extreme to the other, the pressing question now is why that happened in the way it did. Looking for an answer, one must ascertain what actually changed in Libya during the period under study. The present study maintains that the two major changes were the discovery of oil in 1959 and the change of leadership in 1969. It has therefore examined both issues in the attempt to assess the impact of each on Libya's foreign policy in general and towards Britain in particular.

The discovery of oil in vast commercially exportable quantities gave many observers the impression that the Libyan monarchy would escape from the British and American domination, and would become free to pursue an independent foreign policy. Contrary, however, to this optimistic view, the monarchical government could only replace its dependence on foreign aid by dependence on oil revenues, the flow of which was dominated by the mighty British and American oil companies. The monarchical regime appeared unable or unwilling to end the British and American domination of its foreign and domestic policies. This can be referred to several factors. First, the Libyan government neither possessed nor was willing to obtain the technology needed for its oil industry from sources other than the West, the result of which was that Libya was continually at the mercy of the oil companies and their home governments. Second, as

Libya became richer, Idris and his inner circle started to be concerned about the possibility of hostility from Libya's Arab neighbours, especially Egypt. Since Libya did not have the power to defend her new wealth, she threw herself even more into the arms of Britain and the USA for protection. Third, internal unrest, as result of expansion in education, urbanization, and mass communications forced the Libyan government to rely on foreign powers not only to defend her against any conceivable foreign threat but also to protect her against any domestic unrest. Fourth, the discovery of oil in huge quantities and of good quality augmented the motivation of Britain and the USA to sustain their grip on the country's foreign and domestic affairs. Thus, the inflow of oil revenues, instead of inspiring the monarchical regime to rid the country of the foreign domination, enhanced the patron-client relationship. This was exemplified in the monarchy's unwillingness to compel evacuation of the foreign military bases which had been established basically on claims of economic necessity. Libya's foreign policy was, in fact, determined by the British and American pressure rather than by continuing economic growth.

Since examination of the oil factor proves that the unprecedented inflow of oil wealth did not inspire Libya's leaders to take a new policy toward Britain, there must have been other factors which did. The present study has examined the other changes that occurred during the period under study and has arrived at the conclusion that the emergence of al-Qathafi was indeed responsible for the dramatic change in Libya's foreign policy. Therefore, an attempt has been made to examine al-Qathafi's social background and ideology, and the impact of those on Libya's foreign policy in comparison with similar influences on his predecessor.

During contemporary history, Libya's foreign and domestic policies have been shaped by the two leaders. Each leader has perceived Libya and her role in the world differently and, as a result, each of them pursued a different foreign policy. However,

since perception is a reflection of various elements, the most important of which is the social background in the sense of ideology and beliefs, the present study has examined each source in order to evaluate their impact on the country's foreign policy. It reveals that because of the different socio-educational backgrounds, life experiences, belief systems, and ideologies of Idris and al-Qathafi, each leader held different perceptions of his country and the outside world, and, consequently, they pursued two different foreign policies. This being so, the study concludes that whereas al-Qathafi put his values and belief system into a clearly written ideological manifesto, Idris failed to do so.

The study also concludes that Idris's traditional upbringing and Islamic education shaped his early mental image and perception of Libya and of the whole world around him. That image and perception appear to have been reinforced by his own personal experience, especially in dealings with the British. For Idris, Britain had not only saved the Sanusi in southern Libya back in 1909, but had also helped himself in exile, recognizing him as Amir and backing him as King. Consequently, Idris felt gratitude toward the British and remained faithful to them. From the beginning, he saw the future of Barqa and, later, of the whole of Libya as anchored in the British alliance and, to the last, he continued to view Britain as a source of security for himself and his regime. This belief manifested itself in his insistence on keeping the British military bases, even when their presence became more and more out of line with Libyan national interests, and stirred significant popular opposition.

Idris's traditional social background and his personal experience also motivated him to recruit his prime ministers, advisers, and other top officials from among those who shared with him the same background. This made the monarchical regime incapable of adapting to the new circumstances that occurred as a result of the advent of oil and the spread of Arab nationalism and anti-colonial feelings. Instead, it continued its pro-Western foreign policy until it was brought down in 1969.

By contrast, al-Qathafi's, and most of his colleagues', socio-educational background was different from that of Idris and his aides. They represented a new generation shaped by the eventful years of the fifties and sixties which had witnessed many crucial regional changes. The study argues that it was al-Qathafi's bedouin background, his early Qur'anic education, his upbringing in the desert, and his personal experience during the fifties and sixties that shaped his personality and moulded his understanding of Libya and its relations with the outside world. These he gathered and organized, and put in a clearly formulated ideology. The implications of this for Libya's foreign policy became evident in the early evacuation of the foreign military bases, the expulsion of the remaining Italians, the nationalization of oil companies, the call for Arab unity and the liberation of Palestine, the support given to national liberation movements, and many other revolutionary policies.

Although Idris had had a belief system, he had enunciated no clear ideology. The study argues that although Idris had, for example, based his legitimacy on Islam, Islam had little or no impact on the monarchy's foreign policy. It was relegated to a secondary position and was allowed to deal only with spiritual affairs rather than political matters. In other words, Idris did not present Islam as an ideology that could act as a framework for formulating and executing the country's foreign policy. Not only was Islam relegated to a secondary position but, also, Arab nationalism was not tolerated. Thus, the monarchical regime failed to adopt one or both of the ideological currents that had greatest salience at popular level. The study also argues that Idris not only failed to develop a clear ideology, but was also unable to foster a sense of strong Libyan identity against a stronger Pan-Arab ideology from further east. Meanwhile, all the efforts that were made to glorify his person and present him as the symbol of Libyan identity failed. Idris was by no means the sort of personality to attract glorification. In short, he was unable to provide a workable political system or anything like a political ideology compatible with the aspirations of the young and highly politicized population, or to create

a sense of Libyan nationalism around his own person. The implications of this lack of clear ideology for Libya's foreign policy manifested themselves in the monarchy's strong attachment to Britain and the USA on the one hand and in the non-involvement in Arab politics on the other.

After the 1st September 1969, both Islam and Arab nationalism took a new place in Libya's politics. They became the basis of al-Qathafi's ideology of anti-imperialism, Pan-Arabism, Pan-Islamism, anti-Zionism, anti-communism, and positive neutrality and non-alignment. This ideology led the revolutionary government to follow an aggressive and unconventional foreign policy. As far as Libya's foreign policy towards Britain was concerned, the role of ideology was more evident. Driven by his ideological mind-frame, al-Qathafi acted promptly and systematically to erode British influence in Libya and the whole Arab nation. He decided to evacuate the foreign military bases, to nationalize the oil companies and other foreign interests, to use oil as a political weapon, to support Malta and other Mediterranean countries in the expulsion of foreign bases from their soil, to support the IRA and many other liberation movements, and, pre-eminently, to support the Palestinian cause. This systematic campaign to end British dominance of Libya put the country on a collision course with Western interests, especially those of Britain and the USA, which led to a gradual deterioration of relations.

Thus, it may be said that, while the foreign policy of the monarchy had been unpopular and issues of foreign policy had stimulated the strongest opposition to the regime and led to its eventual downfall, the revolutionary regime's stand in domestic, regional, and international foreign policy issues was compatible with the majority of the Libyan people's aspirations and gave the revolutionary regime legitimacy and consolidation. Indeed, the Libyan government's aggressive foreign policy after the Revolution struck a responsive chord among the majority of the Libyan people, especially in its encounter with the imperialist powers, its hard-line stance in negotiations with the

Western oil companies, its non-alignment policies, its symbolic and substantive policies to demonstrate Libya's firm commitment to Arab nationalism and Pan-Islam. In short, it might be possible to find those in Libya who would disagree with al-Qathafi on many domestic issues such as the banning of private trade or the prohibiting of ownership of more than one house per person, but it would be difficult to find a significant number of people who would dispute, for example, Libya's encounter with the American Sixth Fleet on the Libyan coastline.

It was oil which provided the necessary means for the revolutionary regime to pursue an ambitious and sometimes aggressive foreign policy. After the Revolution, Libya began to pursue a two-pronged oil policy involving the control of production to conserve reserves and a price escalation to maximize revenue. This proved extremely successful in the sense that it generated considerable surplus income, which enabled the Libyan government to spend generously on development, armaments, and an ambitious foreign policy. Driven by their ideology, the revolutionary leaders used oil as an effective political tool for the first time. Contrary to the monarchy, which had used oil revenues to reduce or ward off political agitation by neighbouring countries, the revolutionary regime disbursed oil revenues to support friends, attack enemies, and reward or punish countries in between for their stance on Libya and the rest of the Arab nation. However, while oil revenues provided the revolutionary regime with the means to reorient the country's foreign policy, it did not dictate the content of that policy. Oil has always been an instrument and nothing more.

In sum, during the revolutionary period, Libya's foreign policy towards Britain was formulated and conducted on the basis of a core of consistently held principles as outlined in the text of this study. During the period of the revolutionary era we have studied, and even until now, Libya's foreign policy has remained intact and largely unchanged. This consistency nullifies the stereotypical image of al-Qathafi's unpredicta-

bility and sometimes eccentricity since he has adamantly refused to abandon his principles and values despite the changing realities of the world around him. He has firmly held onto his values and, although using tactical flexibility, he has never compromised his principles in response to domestic or international pressure. He believes that the really necessary change should be in the world *status quo* in order that the fundamental inequity of the international system may be revised to the benefit of the Third World countries. This stand appears to have had no appeal to Britain or other big powers. Thus, although the breakdown of relations between Libya and Britain can be attributed in part to al-Qathafi's opposition to the world *status quo*, it may equally be attributed to the resentment of Britain and her Western allies that any small country should dare to challenge the international order - even at regional level - which was set up by the strong powers to serve their own interests.

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