

A Omar Turbi
Expert, U.S Libya Relations

U.S. Libya Relations Post the Lockerbie Trial
United States Policy : Options, Interests & Concerns

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At



In Cooperation with



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THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL
OF THE UNITED STATES

The tragic downing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland on December 21, 1988 generated more news and interests than any other air disaster. More than that of the Iranian Airbus carrying 290 passengers, shot down mistakenly by a U.S Navy ship over the Persian Gulf in 1988, or the Libyan Airliner with 80 people on board blown up deliberately by the Israelis over the Sinai in 1971. The 270 precious lives lost in the Pan Am explosion are important and deserve our attention. The question that must be posed here is - How do we balance the requirement for prudent and constructive foreign policy with considerations of an air disaster ?

The guilty verdict issued by the Scottish court on Wednesday January 31, 2001 implicates the Libyan government. The dilemma that presents itself here is - How will we formulate a new foreign policy toward Libya post the Lockerbie trial that serves our best interests? A policy that does not further alienate our Arab allies in the region.

For over twenty years, our foreign policy toward Libya, has been inconsistent. We have imposed unilateral sanctions since 1980. In 1985, to avenge a fatal explosion at a Berlin Disco frequented by American soldiers, President Reagan ordered the bombing of three Libyan towns killing scores of innocent people. We learned shortly thereafter, the Libyans had no hand in the Disco incident. Our foreign policy with Libya has been narrow minded, and less calculated. Our European allies on the other hand have followed a policy of constructive engagement, enabling them to secure oil, hydrocarbons and most of all lucrative construction contracts. Granted, our strategic business interests with Libya are significantly lower than those of our European friends.

Economic interests alone must not be the yardstick by which we measure our long-term foreign policy?

A policy based on enlightened self-interest is far superior to one driven by strictly economic or political interests. Let our foreign policy be consistent with American values and democratic ways.

The requirements of civil society, moral and human elements must supersede narrowly defined endeavors. For Example, when have we insisted on the Libyan regime to restore Human Rights for the Libyan people?

Late 1999, after, I shared my ideas with Congress, in a testimony before the House Foreign Relations Committee, an important member of the committee expressed willingness to visit Libya for humanitarian purposes. This member was ordered by the U.S Department of State not to do so. Congressman Chris Cox, currently the Chairman of the powerful Policy Committee, did not heed the same advice in 1993, Cox went to Lebanon against the wishes of the U.S Department of State, on a trip, I assisted in coordinating that turned out to be successful for our regional foreign policy. Cox's efforts later culminated to lifting the travel ban on Lebanon.

American foreign policy makers can conclude that ten years of UN sanctions & Air embargo against Libya were successful in caging the Libyan regime at times of chaos in the former Soviet block. The sanctions and air embargo curtailed Libya's movements in those countries, minimizing its ability from acquiring nuclear and other technologies.

Sanctions have reduced Libya's support for freedom, and liberation movements around the world. However, in Africa, as recent as last year large caches of weapons paid for by Libya made their way into Western African conflicts.

It is time to give direct dialogue a chance. American Libyan history reminds us of the positive outcome of constructive engagement. Our diplomacy history with Libya goes as far back as the year 1801. Our engagement in 1805 was so successful resulting in a new Libyan regime whose Prince Karamali, a new ally awarded Lieutenant Presely O'Bannon a very special sword. It is the "Mameluke sword" carried by all American Marine officers today.

It is regrettable to hear Ambassador Ronald Neuman outlining U.S foreign policy in July 1999 before the House Foreign Relations Committee echo the same old rhetoric of do or else. Constructive foreign policy is not total submission by the other party. By the way Neuman's testimony before Congress and later speech at the Middle East Institute had no reference to human rights violations by the Libyan regime of its own people.

Other remarks by Neuman made at the Middle East Institute, referring to Libya's new modified behavior, and I quote, "Libya has transferred its support from the Palestinian rejectionists to the Palestinian Authority All Palestinian groups resident in Libya have been informed that they are forbidden to conduct any political or propaganda activities from Libya..." Neuman is not referring here to militant activities by the Palestinians. One would hope that such references are not projecting a foreign policy that promotes suppression of a peoples' freedom of speech.

At a time when our Arab allies in the Arab world are struggling to contain their populations from reaching a boiling point with high unemployment and high resentment to American foreign policy of double standards. We continue to follow misguided policies that focus on Saddam Hussien, and Iraq, while Israel continues to violate the most basic UN resolutions. The U.S. treasury is about to shell out \$500 million of our taxes for 9 Apache Helicopters destined for Israel and designed specifically to track civilians and for demolition of homes. The people of the Middle East are not less at peace from Saddam Hussien's weapons of mass destruction than they are of Israel's constant threat by nuclear bombs. When an Israeli lukud party member recently said "If we have to, we could reach Tehran, Damascus, or Cairo", no American politician offered any opposition to such notion. Our politicians are blackmailed by AIPAC at the highest level.

Our regional foreign policy requires a new vibrant approach. A more assertive policy with respect to Palestinian rights. Fairness with the Iraqi people, and direct contact with the Libyan regime with regard to our vital interests in Africa.

Continuation of UN sanctions can become a political obstacle to improving U.S Libya relations. Preventing action at the Security Council can cause substantial costs for U.S global diplomacy. Our containment policy toward Libya has not delivered total success.

Libyans suffered under crippling UN sanctions, for over ten years, while oppressed by a brutal regime, which exhibits total disregard for human dignity. Our credibility as the guardian of human rights and the superpower is at stake. We must be consistent in our promotion of human rights and democracy around the world.

The prevailing notion that it is not in our interest to call for democracy in the region has no basis and is counter productive. It is a fallacy to assume that the Libyan regime is a safeguard against radical Muslim movements, in the area.

The Libyan regime jails religious and non-religious alike so long as they are perceived to be a threat to its existence.

The families of the Lockerbie victims are finally vindicated with civil remedies on the way. Great damages in the billions of dollars through ten years of sanctions have been inflicted on the Libyan economy and on the Libyan people. Constructive engagement with Libya at this time will without a doubt serve our best national interests in Africa and the Middle East.