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Solving the Libyan Quagmire: Exile Option for Gaddafi?

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Synopsis

The current crisis in Libya requires quick resolution. Otherwise it may have a serious impact at a global level. The least costly and quickest solution is to allow Libya's Muammar Gaddafi to live in exile as has happened to many other world dictators before.

Commentary

AS NEW reports emerge daily about deadly clashes between Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's forces and anti-government protesters, Gaddafi has already pledged to fight a rebellion to martyrdom. As more Libyan citizens are being attacked and terrorised by the regime, the revolution continues to escalate amidst the killings and suffering. Foreign powers look on cautiously as they evaluate the best solution for the Libyan crisis.

Impact of sanctions against Libya

Sanctions are seen as a low-risk, easy alternative. Even "targeted" sanctions are a blunt instrument liable to cause unintended consequences. Some of them are potentially as grave and as unpredictable as those of military action; the world has never taken military action with so little forethought (hence all the reservations about a no-fly zone at present). The financial sanctions against Gaddafi and his cohorts might achieve something, but only if they succeed. If the sanctions fail, they will get into precisely the worrying scenario -- and the hitch is the international community cannot very well withdraw the sanctions without looking foolish.

The stakes are higher than policymakers realise. The balance of risks is this: sanctions may tip the balance against Gaddafi, but if he manages to hang on, he will almost certainly make things worse. History has also shown that sanctions can work only if implemented correctly; and there are sanctions that did not come close to bringing down a government such as the one imposed on Iraq during Saddam Hussein's rule.

Military intervention

Military intervention will be costly financially and politically. Even if this is welcomed by certain sections of the Libyan opposition, military intervention will be seen by Muslims at large as another attack on a Muslim country by western powers. Libya can potentially be another messy battleground for foreign forces. The Arab League has already warned against Western military intervention in Libya, adding that an intervention could fuel extremism further. Also, there is no guarantee of success, as demonstrated by military intervention in Somalia. Gaddafi says that "the revolution is a disguise for foreign involvement". If Western powers do intervene, it will

make it look like Gaddafi is right, and that may be a disastrous turn of events for the Libyan people who are trying to overthrow him.

The mess that has been made in Afghanistan and Iraq should not be visited on any more countries in the Middle East. Furthermore, this will be an additional burden -- a third battle front for the United States and its allies and will potentially become another rallying cry for jihadists.

Nevertheless, a prolonged crisis in Libya poses serious problems to the world. It will affect the global economy due to the decreased supply of oil which will raise oil prices. Libya is a significant source of oil for many European countries still plagued with debt crises. The Libyan crisis can also turn it into another Somalia. Thus, a quick solution to the crisis is vital.

Exile Option for Gaddafi?

The international community should seriously consider persuading Gaddafi to leave, and not rush into unwise and counter-productive military action. The threat of civil war has been talked up by both Gaddafi and his son Saif al-Islam. The latter's threat to fight to the "last man and last woman", and his father's rallying of loyal tribes to attack demonstrators, indicate how the regime expects to fight if forced into a corner.

It appears that the quickest and least costly solution is to persuade and facilitate Gaddafi to leave the country and live in exile -- as had happened to many dictators before him such as Ferdinand Marcos, the former president of the Philippines who fled to Hawaii; Uganda's Idi Amin, who lived his final days in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; and Iran's Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who was earlier welcomed by Panama but later moved to Egypt.

The United Nations Security Council has approved a resolution that seeks to impose a travel ban, asset freeze and arms embargo on Gaddafi's regime. A no-fly zone is currently under consideration. There are signs that the sanctions will be further tightened. These initiatives, however, must be treated with utmost care and pragmatism in view of the grave consequences as observed from historical precedents.

To achieve this objective, the appropriate exile place needs to be identified. This would mean allowing a country to receive Gaddafi and his family. This will also require a re-consideration of prosecuting Gaddafi and his family at the International Court of Justice; it is unlikely that Gaddafi will accept the offer of exile without some assurances of safe passage and even protection. Admittedly, there is a morality issue involved which will anger many Libyans by allowing all the allegations against Gaddafi to go without redress. However, it may still be in the best interest of the Libyan people to pay such a price in order to oust Gaddafi and have a democratic government constituted by the people.

If Gaddafi is cornered without any option for safe exit, this may drive him to fight to the death like Saddam and his family. The result will be further bloodshed. Sun Tzu in the Art of War warned against conducting a siege on a city without allowing the defenders an exit route because this will only harden them to fight for survival.

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