



## **GADDAFI'S DEATH –**

### **BAD NEWS FOR LIBYAN REVOLUTION?**

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Washington (20 Oct 2011) – The killing today of former Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, may be bad news for supporters of Libya's revolution, especially the international coalition led by US President Barack Obama, British Prime Minister David Cameron, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

It is impossible, personally, not to cheer the final demise of Colonel Gaddafi, the dictatorial head of a monstrous regime, sought by the International Criminal Court for committing atrocities against his own people. Nevertheless, in a few years we may look back upon the next few days of joyous celebration as the zenith – at least from a Western perspective – of the Libyan revolution.

For the past nine months, the only thing uniting the disparate pro-revolutionary forces has been their intense opposition to the Gaddafi regime, and to Gaddafi, himself. Agreement began – and it will now end – on that point. The domestic anti-Gaddafi coalition is, to put it diplomatically, an eclectic group, which consists of tribal leaders and their followers,

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nationalists, Islamic fundamentalists, social media-savvy youth, many poor Libyans, and a smattering of secular liberals.

Neither the courage nor the tenacity of this dog's breakfast of a coalition can be questioned. What can, should, and must be questioned, however, is the anti-Gaddafi coalition's collective commitment to liberal democracy and to the economic reforms that are necessary if resource-rich Libya is to progress from a political dictatorship and moribund socialist economy to a prosperous country that, in socio-economic and cultural terms, can support and sustain some form of true parliamentary democracy. The anti-Gaddafi coalition's individual components hold a variety of deep grievances against the former regime, possess very different political and economic agendas and, critically, possess varying degrees of interest in (and, in some cases, outright hostility to) liberal democracy.

To date, the revolutionary National Transitional Council has made all of the right noises regarding its enthusiasm for elections and its intention to stand aside once the democratic will of the Libyan people has been established. Among many cautionary notes on this front, two are most obvious.

First, the Libyan 'revolution' has been less a popular national uprising than a very bloody civil war between Libya's 41 tribes and assorted social, economic, and political groups – some cossetted and subsidised by the Gaddafi regime; others violently suppressed and oppressed by Tripoli. It appears that the most popular (and, hopefully, the better) side has won, but it did so not as a result of overwhelming domestic support but as a result of external military and economic intervention. History informs us that the military victors in this civil war are unlikely to step aside should their own political fortunes wane between now and those elections.

Second, neighbouring Egypt should be serving as an ominous warning to naïve foreign policymakers in the White House, Downing Street, and the Élysée Palace. Both in Cairo and

beyond, all that is known with any certainty today is that February's Egyptian 'revolution' was more akin to a military coup than a populist takeover; hence, the 'temporary' military leadership's recent disavowal of its earlier promise to step down as soon as elections are held next month.

Today, ordinary Libyans celebrate the death of a dictator. Tomorrow, the worry for foreign governments who invested so heavily in creating a New Libya is that the time and energy spent ousting the Gaddafi regime and finally killing the dictator, himself, was the easy part. The final outcome of this latest in a decade-long series of Middle Eastern interventions is made no less unpredictable, costly, or dangerous through Gaddafi's death.