**Modernisation of Libya**

The Libyan political systems, before and after 1969, were not able to deal with the problems raised by the process of modernisation, especially in respect to political participation, nation building and legitimacy, which resulted in the radicalisation of politics in Libya.

**Definitions**

Modernisation: profound change in social, economic and political relations among the members of a society as a consequence of an historical phenomenon with universal relevance to displace traditional society.

Social mobilisation: According to Deutsch is a process by which ‘major clusters of old social, economic and psychological commitments are eroded or broken and people become available for new patterns of socialisation and behaviour.

**Modernisation and political participation**

As a natural consequence of the social mobilisation process, the groups and individuals affected by this process will desire and may demand participation in the political process. Usually the wants and expectations of newly mobilised people rise faster than the capacity of existing institutions to absorb them, resulting in political instability.

**The effects of social change and modernisation in Libya**

As a result of the oil boom in the mid 1960’s, the dynamics of change accelerated in almost every aspect of life, including economic structures, education, health services, mass communication, transportation, urban population and the value system. Changes came from different directions: ‘nationalism, which overcame the tribal identification; the oil boom, which introduced new concepts concerning the efficiency of human action; increased social mobility, which in turn resulted in increased individualism. All these factors have contributed to changes not only in the urban way of life but also in the Bedouin way of life.’

According the Huntington, the economic growth associated with the discovery of oil was accompanied by drastic changes in the social fabric in Libya. The monarchical regime was unwilling and unable to deal with newly mobilised groups and individuals. Vast and rapid expansion in education also impacted on modernisation and social change in Libya. After independence Libya had to rely on Egypt for school books and as a consequence, Libyans were introduced to the idea of Arab unity and Arab struggle against imperialism as opposed to a Libyan identity.

**Revolutionary Libya**

In order to assess the legitimacy of different structures and policies in Libya there are three factors to be considered.

1. Freedom of association
2. Freedom of expression and access to information
3. Modalities of conflict resolution

**Libya under Gaddafi**

In 1969, when King Idris was in Turkey on holiday, the twenty-seven-year-old Gaddafi seized power in a coup and declared Libya a republic. Libyans, fed up with a corrupt monarchy, welcomed the change of regime. Gaddafi pursued progressive socio-economic development policies in the 1970s, but as he consolidated his power in the 1980s and afterwards, he adopted repressive and reactionary measures. To modernise Libya’s social, cultural, and economic infrastructures he nationalised the oil industry and private banks, built roads, schools and hospitals, and enacted laws that improved public welfare, reduced rents, provided more housing, and raised literacy and life expectancy. A desert land, Libya has small and salty lakes and wells. Gaddafi initiated a major agricultural project that became known as the “Great Man-Made River”.

Gaddafi was intent on controlling every aspect of life in the country. He banned opposition parties, outlawed trade and labour unions, muzzled the media and ruthlessly eliminated those who dared to criticise him. He projected his image as a staunch pan-Arab nationalist and supported the Palestinian struggle for a free Palestine. Skilful and effective exploitation of Arab nationalism, championship of the Palestinian cause and advocacy of social equality fuelled the first decade of Gaddafi’s radical politics, causing many to view him as the voice of the Arab people.

In 1977, Gaddafi changed the country’s name from the “Libyan Arab Republic” to the “Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya [State of the Masses]”. Although Gaddafi held no official title in the government, he was the de facto ruler of the country. He elevated his status to that of “Philosopher of the Libyan Revolution” and his collected writings, known as the Green Book, were touted as a Qur’an of sorts, intended to guide the community on moral, social, political and economic issues; Libyans were encouraged to have copies of the book and abide by the principles it articulated.

Gaddafi was not interested in thoroughgoing social, political and economic reform; he implemented selected reforms and liberalised some aspects of society to suit his political interests, while keeping the oppressive system of state power intact. Gaddafi viewed western Europe as a potential market for Libyan oil exports and as a supplier of arms and munitions. With his oil revenues he modernised the standing army and security forces, not only to suppress resistance to his rule but also to project Libya’s influence in the Middle East and Africa.

**Gaddafi’s Foreign Policy**

Gaddafi denounced Britain and the United States as imperial powers, and soon after becoming leader he closed down the British and American military bases in Libya, nationalised foreign interests, and shut cultural and educational institutions operated by foreign countries. He strengthened relations with the Soviet Union, which was increasingly challenging US hegemony in the Middle East and Africa, competing for spheres of influence and supporting client regimes and political groups. Gaddafi purchased arms and military equipment from the Soviet Union and expanded commerce and trade with East Bloc countries. The Soviet navy was granted access to Libyan ports and Soviet aeroplanes flew from Libyan bases to monitor Western naval activities.

Gaddafi strengthened ties with African countries, proposed a United States of Africa, and funded development projects in the continent. He depicted himself as the “Che Guevara of the Time” and provided financial and military support to political groups opposing US domination of their countries, particularly Chad, Sierra Leone, Sudan and Liberia. During the apartheid era in South Africa, he expressed support for the jailed African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela.

**Gaddafi Changes Course**

The United States was determined to punish Gaddafi and in 1988 it accused Libya of organising the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 which exploded over the Scottish town of Lockerbie. Nearly three hundred people died in the atrocity. The international community and the United States accused Gaddafi of terrorism and imposed even tougher sanctions on Libya. International pressure and internal discontent grew and eventually compelled Gaddafi to try to improve relations with the West. He handed over two Libyans in 1999 for trial in The Hague over the Lockerbie bombing.

Another factor that prompted Gaddafi to seek rapprochement with the West was the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. The Soviet Union had provided Libya with military equipment but successor state Russia could no longer do so, forcing Gaddafi to adjust to the realities of a changing world.

When the United States launched its military offensive against Iraq in 2003 to overthrow Saddam Hussein on the accusation of developing weapons of mass destruction, Gaddafi feared that he might be the next target. Consequently, he agreed to US nuclear disarmament demands and renounced terrorism.

The collapse of the Soviet imperial power provided the United States with greater leverage to dominate the Arab world. Bereft of support from the Russians, Gaddafi had no option but to abandon his anti-imperialist rhetoric. To convince the West that he was a changed man, Gaddafi agreed to pay $2.7 billion in compensation to the families of the victims of the Lockerbie bombing (without explicitly accepting Libya’s responsibility for the atrocity). Gaddafi’s policy-changes and renunciation of his biological and chemical weapons programmes also convinced the United Nations to lift sanctions against Libya, which included a ban on arms sales and flights in and out of the country.

A major development in US–Libyan relations came after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C. Gaddafi sought to gain favour by supporting the US war on terrorism, agreed to share intelligence information with the CIA on al-Qaeda and other radical Islamist groups, and endorsed the US rendition policy, accepting al-Qaeda fighters for interrogation in Libya. Gaddafi became such a valuable friend that the United States removed Libya from its list of countries supporting terrorism. US oil companies rushed to do business with Libya as Gaddafi privatised some sectors of the economy.

**Days of Rage: February 2011**

The liberal economic policies adopted by Gaddafi led to the emergence of a commercial class intent on maximising its gains to the exclusion of ordinary Libyan citizens. Popular disenchantment with this trend of development, the government’s inability to provide jobs, and repressive state policies in dealing with dissidents and curbing civil liberties generated further public dismay. The seeds of an anti-regime rebellion were planted.

On 16 February 2011, anti-Gaddafi protests erupted in Benghazi. The demonstrations were sparked by the murder of a human-rights activist the previous day. People in Benghazi rose up against Gaddafi and demanded change. After opposition groups took control of Benghazi, anti-Gaddafi protests spread to other parts of Libya. Gaddafi condemned the protesters, saying that the people loved him and warning that Libya would regress into tribal wars if the unrest continued.

On 26 February, the opposition formed quasi-administrative bodies: the National Transitional Council (NTC), a Crisis Team, and a Military Council. The neo-colonial elites appealed for Western air strikes on Gaddafi’s military, the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya’s airspace, a no-drive zone to protect them from Gaddafi’s tanks and armoured vehicles, and for weapons to topple the regime.

**Washington Backs the Rebels**

Western foreign policy in the Arab world and elsewhere is not based on ethical and moral principles but is primarily determined by national interests.

The United States funded and supported the Libyan rebels, condemned Gaddafi for violating human rights, and denounced him as a dictator who had lost his legitimacy to rule. On 27 June the International Court of Justice in the Netherlands issued an indictment against Gaddafi on charges of crimes against humanity in his campaign to crush the anti-regime uprising.

The United States was intent on regime change in Libya. The United States recognised the NTC as the legitimate governing authority in Libya, and on 18 August allowed the Libyan ambassador, Ali Oujali, who had defected in February and represented the rebels, to reopen the embassy in Washington on behalf of the NTC. The United States had ordered the closure of the embassy in March. In late September, the United States reopened its embassy in Tripoli.

**Collapse of the Regime**

Gaddafi’s forty-two years of despotic rule in effect ended when the rebels, supported by US and NATO air strikes, swept into the capital, Tripoli, on 21 August and swiftly seized control of most of the city. The rebels were welcomed as heroes by disgruntled citizens who had suffered under Gaddafi. As Gaddafi fled the city, ebullient rebels celebrated the victory. Shouting “Allahu Akbar” (God is great), they stamped on Gaddafi’s posters, smashed every symbol associated with the regime, and renamed Green Square—where Gaddafi used to address public rallies—“Martyrs’ Square”.

Gaddafi remained at large and defiant, urging his supporters to fight and clear Libya of traitors, infidels, crusaders and devils. To capture Gaddafi dead or alive, a bounty of $1.7 million was offered to anyone, including those in Gaddafi’s inner circle, who captured or killed him. The United States and Britain sent special agents to assist the rebels in their hunt for Gaddafi. The International Criminal Court asked Interpol to arrest Gaddafi, his son Saif al‑Islam and his intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi. The head of the NTC’s military council in Tripoli, Abdel Hakim Belhaj, the former al-Qaeda fighter, led the assault on Gaddafi’s compound, Bab al-Aziziya, in the south of the capital. After rebels seized the compound, the symbol of Gaddafi’s power, they vandalised and looted it, regarding their booty as war trophies.

The battle for Libya continued, the rebels trying to seize control of areas still loyal to Gaddafi and urging his remaining supporters to surrender.

As rebels closed in on Bani Walid, Sirte and Sabha—Gaddafi’s remaining strongholds—the United States and NATO continued their air strikes on Gaddafi’s forces, inflicting a heavy toll on residents of the towns. When Secretary of State Clinton visited Tripoli on 18 October, she said the United States wanted to see Gaddafi either captured or killed swiftly. Two days later rebels seized control of Sirte, Gaddafi’s hometown, forcing him to flee the city. He was wounded when his convoy of cars was hit by US and NATO air strikes. Earlier, in a televised address to the nation, Gaddafi said, “I am not going to leave this land. I will die as a martyr at the end ... I shall remain, defiant. Muammar is leader of the revolution until the end of time.” However, when the dictator’s time came, his bravado evaporated: he ran and hid with a golden pistol and a rifle in his possession. He was found cowering in a drainage pipe, bleeding from his head and chest, and begged rebels not to kill him. But they stripped him and shot him to death. His captors toyed with his body, banging his head up and down and waving the V for victory sign. They paraded their other prisoners in the streets, shouting Allahu Akbar, God is great.

**‘Leading from Behind’**

The United States and its NATO allies hailed the downfall of Gaddafi as a people’s victory and a triumph of democracy over repression and tyranny. They also urged the people of Libya to put aside their differences and avoid revenge killing.

Sustainable change and development do not come about as a result of removing one dictator and replacing him with another who simply relabels himself as a democrat and promises to reform the bureaucracy. Comprehensive reform and change occur when a people’s uprising leads to the complete dismantling and reconfiguration of the oppressive state machinery; to the establishment of a political system of governance that abides by the will of majority while assuring and protecting the rights of minorities; to laws that guarantee the social, political and economic equality of citizens regardless of their ethnic and tribal background; and to the grassroots participation of the people in decision-making and the implementation of policies that directly affect their lives. The US and NATO support for the opposition groups coalesced around the NTC is not altruistic; the West will do business with anyone in charge, as it did with Gaddafi, and support a “democracy” that serves its vested interests—particularly the interests of Western oil companies, which are already rushing in to exploit Libya’s rich oil resources, the largest in Africa.