

Libya:

Human Security Challenges

By Prof. Alan Hunter*

Human Security conceptualisation analyses the interface between security, development and intervention. Traditionally, 'security' mostly referred to the security of nation-states in the context of military conflicts with foreign powers. Traditional concepts of security, protection of national borders, are certainly still relevant and legally enforceable, but more sophisticated concepts are needed to respond to security dilemmas in today's globalised world. Global events and trends, particularly since the late 1980s, have to a great extent transformed the security agenda. One impetus was the changing

nature of violent conflict, with more evident militarized intra-state, ethnic and religious conflicts. In the past two decades it became increasingly apparent that communities are also threatened by environmental destruction – induced both by climate change and direct human impacts - forced migration, epidemics including HIV/AIDS, and other issues.

In the 1990s, institutions and researchers began to propose alternatives to the conventional security agenda. In 1994, the UNDP extended policy debate using the then new concept of Human Security. The report set out a broad definition of Human Security,

including seven core values: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security (freedom from fear of violence, crime and drugs), community security (freedom to participate in family life and cultural activities) and political security (freedom to exercise one's basic human rights) (United Nations Development Programme 1990-). The main benefit from the conceptualisation should be that by considering these various aspects in a coherent way, as interactive and synergistic, interventions would be more effective than dealing with security on an issue-by-issue basis. Hopefully new leaders in Libya will be able to address many of these security dimensions: this paper highlights some of the challenges they will face.

In the 2011 conflict in Libya, many security dilemmas were apparent: the protection of Libyan civilians, the security of the regime, whether and how the UN or NATO should intervene, how to protect or evacuate foreign citizens and refugees, how to protect food and medical supplies in the midst of armed conflict. This became one of those 'complex emergencies' which often raise legal, military and humanitarian issues simultaneously. International law and practice do not provide clear guidelines on such situations, and responses can be random, contingent on a variety of factors.

Political elites are faced with many challenges, but from the above brief discussion we can highlight

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three: threats to national existence, which most likely emanate from hostile foreign countries, typically neighbouring ones, who threaten invasion, occupation or annexation; threats to the regime (a change of government) or to the political system (for example a communist insurgency against a pluralist market economy); and threats to the well-being of the population especially vulnerable sectors. The emerging political apparatus in post-Gaddafi Libya will face all these challenges, and they are closely related to each other. The new Libya needs to survive in a 'tough neighbourhood' where there is always potential for cross-border military action; the new regime may face internal challenges for example from Islamists; and it needs to deliver welfare improvements to its population. Moreover, it needs to construct a new constitutional and human rights framework, and to rapidly expand the technical skills and knowledge base of its population. Evidently the various aspects of security are synergistic: a population which supports the political system and which has a relatively high level of education and health is better able to contribute to regime stability and national security.

Relations between Western powers and the Gaddafi regime were on a roller-coaster for decades. For many years Gaddafi was demonized and ostracised, mainly because of his alleged support for a wide range of terrorist networks including the IRA, ETA, and others including those responsible for famous Lockerbie incident. From 2004, however, British Prime Minister Blair started a process of rapprochement with the regime and facilitated oil investments and weapons sales, including Foreign Office approval for sale of armoured cars and water cannon, despite a ban on the sale of such weapons that could be used for internal repression.

From a human security perspective, Gaddafi's Libya was in fact a relatively successful state in many respects. In 2009, Libya enjoyed the third highest Gross National Income per capita and the highest human development index in Africa. In the UNDP Human Development Index it ranked in the 'High' category, alongside countries like Argentina and Malaysia (and interestingly close to another demonized country,



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Cuba); and far better than its neighbours Morocco and Algeria. This position was achieved, somewhat as Iraq under Saddam Hussein, by an extensive social welfare system and other public goods paid for by oil revenues. Partly no doubt as a consequence of the rapprochement, it was also experiencing a reasonable GDP growth rate of some 7%. It had also announced a plan to reform its higher education and scientific research systems through a US\$9 billion, five-year investment programme in collaboration with the UK and France.

Foreign investment did face some restrictions, but two new major players – China and Turkey – invested heavily in Libya, especially in the construction sector for large infrastructure projects. Libya looked very attractive for future resource acquisition, holding an estimated ninth highest oil reserves in the world and the second highest natural gas reserves in Africa. Only around 25% of the country’s surface area has been explored, meaning that huge potential for growth.

In short, the Human Security challenges facing the regime and the population were not those typical of desperate poverty. The state provided free health care and education, though quality was often low. Rather, the population was acutely aware of injusti-

ces, inequalities, corruption and tyranny: a human rights crisis perhaps, rather than a human security one.

A factor contributing to the complexity of governance and modernisation is the prevalence of clan loyalties, which are often stronger than civil society or state institutions. These may also overlap with the patron-client networks typical of the bureaucratic economy. One of the largest tribes, the Warfallah, dominate West Libya, while Gaddafi’s own tribe the Qaddahfa, although small, hold the high positions in security and military units. Much of southern Libya is controlled by Tuareg Berbers who until now have helped transfer mercenaries from Sub-Saharan Africa to protect the regime.

Yet another factor to consider is the confirmed presence in Libya of Islamist fundamentalists, apparently including many jihadis who fought against the Western military in Iraq and Afghanistan. There have in fact been allegations that the CIA funded Al-Qaeda to destabilise the Gaddafi regime, and that now there are significant numbers of jihadist groups who will be looking for space in the new order. We may presume they represent different points on the spectrum from those who want a global jihad; those who want sharia law in Libya; and those who want a democratic polity but one which explicitly recognises Islam as the national religion.

In terms of business, the market was completely dominated by state-owned enterprises, who were notorious for providing jobs for cronies, and out-sourcing major infrastructure work to foreign companies. There was little opportunity for Libyan private companies to get access to finance, contracts, or permits. Jobs usually went to foreign migrant workers: it was estimated that while the population of Libya was only around 6.5 million, the country was host to some 2.5 million foreign workers, of whom 1.5 million were from Sub-Saharan Africa. Meanwhile Libyan youth received some basic education but few professional skills, and were largely excluded from employment. They evidently formed a large body of frustrated talent with serious hostility towards the regime.

Libya needs to have credible, legitimate and responsible military capacity to deter adventures from potential aggressors; it needs to establish a political system that can cope with challenges from fundamentalist groups, i.e. one that can accommodate the religion of Islam as an asset for social harmony and well-being, without it becoming hijacked by extremist agendas; it needs to establish a credible anti-corruption regime; and perhaps most importantly needs to address the issues of youth and female unemployment.

Parallel issues were the lack of opportunities for women, and disregard for environmental protection. Most obviously, there was absolutely no space for political opposition, nor any prospect of reform under the Gaddafi family dictatorship.

In tandem with clan dominance and state-owned enterprise, corruption was a pervasive feature of life, with Libya ranking 130 in the global index for corruption compiled by Transparency International in 2009. This suggests that Libya was far worse than its peer countries in the Human Development Index, and closer to those which have chronic severe under-development.

Can Human Security conceptualisation contribute anything to understanding the issues to be faced by the new regime? As we have seen, unlike the vast majority of post-conflict countries, Libya has the natural resources and hence potential finance to construct a well-developed nation. However, it will need extremely careful management, dynamic and responsible leadership from the new regime. To

avoid the kind of chaos that devastated Iraq the urgent priorities are:

- ◆ Stabilization, transitional government and demilitarization
- ◆ Care for victims of conflict and refugees
- ◆ Implementation of a new constitution, including human and democratic rights
- ◆ Negotiation with religious interests
- ◆ Rebuilding an investment and trade apparatus

If these can be achieved somewhat successfully, it seems to me there will be four crucial longer-term human security priorities. Libya needs to have credible, legitimate and responsible military capacity to deter adventures from potential aggressors; it needs to establish a political system that can cope with challenges from fundamentalist groups, i.e. one that can accommodate the religion of Islam as an asset for social harmony and well-being, without it becoming hijacked by extremist agendas; it needs to establish a credible anti-corruption regime; and perhaps most importantly needs to address the issues of youth and female unemployment. Given its huge resources, and the enthusiasm of many foreign players – China, Turkey, EU, USA and others - for resource acquisition, all these are in theory affordable. Unless there are serious, unforeseeable geopolitical shifts in North Africa, they could also be politically achievable. So much seems to depend on a successful reconciliation in the aftermath of armed conflict, and the formation of a viable political system including a security regime. The Libyan Interim National Council's document: A Vision for a Democratic Libya in fact embodies the aspiration to address many of the issues raised above. Yet it is a huge challenge for a population that has never before enjoyed political or human rights. **PR**

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