

The Museveni and Gaddafi irony in Libya's comeback

Up in North Africa, along the Mediterranean Sea, in the damaged nation of a man who managed to be close to both the military dictator Idi Amin and his political enemy, President Yoweri Museveni, something remarkable is happening.

That man, eccentric and volatile Muammar Gaddafi, who was nevertheless quite pan-African, was killed in 2011 in the Libyan chapter of the Arab Spring popular protests that swept away other autocrats in the region, like Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Tunisia's Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

In the days when Libya and Gaddafi faced record sanctions from the West, Museveni was virtually the only leader who dared stick his head (joined later by South African statesman Nelson Mandela) out to advocate for the long-ruling dictator, who had been a key backer of the National Resistance Army/Movement in its bush war. However, under pressure, he too often spoke from both sides of his mouth about the man who styled himself King of Africa.

There is a popular video on African, pan-African and nationalist social media of Museveni decrying the arrogance of Nato during the uprising in Libya in 2011, which was sliding into a civil war when Nato intervened and heavily bombed Gaddafi's forces and regime installations. In the speech Museveni delivered to the Pan-African Parliament in Midrand, South Africa, he recounts an incident from March 2011 in which a high-level African Union (AU) delegation, including several African heads of state, was flying to Tripoli to mediate a ceasefire between Gaddafi and the rebels.

Museveni says that as the aircraft carrying the delegation approached Libyan airspace, Nato ordered it to turn back. His case is that to avoid such humiliation, Africa should be united, which is the only way it will be pow-

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erful enough not to be treated so dismissively. Second, he argues that the current instability in Libya and in the Sahel, fuelled by Gaddafi's fall, proves that the AU's rejected roadmap was the superior path.

Libya all but collapsed with the lynching of Gaddafi in 2011. Though the picture has improved considerably, it doesn't have a unified government. It has the Government of National Unity (GNU), based in Tripoli. Led by Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, it is the internationally recognised administration.

There is the parallel Government of National Stability (GNS) in Benghazi, in the East. The third main force is the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), led by the warlord Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar. Controlling Sirte, Gaddafi's home region, gives Haftar total leverage over the oil crescent, where the majority of Libya's oil terminals are located. Now, for those who think Libya is a shambles, this might come as a surprise. First, Libya holds the largest foreign reserves in Africa, at \$92.9 billion (including foreign currency and gold). To put this in perspective, this is significantly higher than Algeria (\$83 billion) and South Africa (\$65.4 billion). Secondly, Libya has the cheapest electricity in Africa (and arguably the world) at \$0.000

to \$0.008 per kWh for residential use. It is cheaper than bottled water.

However, on April 11, 2026, something truly remarkable happened. The rival eastern and western administrations agreed to a unified national budget for the first time in 13 years. There is a lot of speculation about how this "miracle" happened.

The answer is oil. Libya has reached its highest production in 12 years at 1.37 million barrels per day, generating roughly \$22 billion in annual revenue. This windfall will get bigger, and it is partly thanks to Nato – specifically its leading force, the USA, which wrecked Libya with bombs in 2011. While Nato's 2011 intervention led to over a decade of fragmentation, the 2026 global energy desperation, fuelled by America's attack on Iran and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, has made Libya's oil too valuable for factions to keep fighting over. By accident, those who broke Libya are fixing it.

There are two lessons for Uganda here. First, that the country that eats together stays together; secondly, all this (the reserves, energy policy, and all) is driven or managed by the Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) and the Central Bank, acting as a massive buffer that has allowed the country to survive years of civil war without total currency collapse. The fact that Libya leads in these categories despite having no unified government for 13 years suggests that the "administrative state" (the Central Bank and the National Oil Corporation) has been more resilient than the political state.

Gaddafi, the man who famously told Museveni in 2008 that "Revolutionaries do not retire", didn't think of the coda to that prophecy: that "the revolutionary will eventually perish, and the nation's survival instincts will eventually outlive his ghost".

Still, I imagine Museveni might justly chuckle at the irony that the US bombs and the crisis they brought to the Gulf are fueling a Libyan resurrection.

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