

**Peter Jones**

## **The ripple effects of Gadhafi's death**

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Although the images of Moammar Gadhafi's body being dragged through the streets are disturbing, one can understand why his death is being deliriously welcomed in Libya. Often regarded as a clown in the West, Colonel Gadhafi was a brutal tyrant. His death removes the slim chance that he, or forces loyal to him, might have staged a counter coup. The country's Transitional National Council is still in a tenuous position, and this event signifies there's no going back. But what does the future hold?

Of all the countries whose rulers have been changed by the Arab Spring, only Libya has really experienced a fundamental transformation of government. In Egypt and Tunisia, the rulers may have been deposed, but the new ones are cut from the same elites, even as they try to argue that they're committed to another path. Only in Libya has a new ruling elite taken power, and they must try to forge the makings of a new country in the midst of a transition that's still far from complete. They're just now gaining full control over a historically tribal country, political parties are in their infancy, and the economy is just starting to recover – both from the fighting of the past few months and from Col. Gadhafi's years of mismanagement.

Col. Gadhafi's death means, of course, there'll be no trial, no opportunity for Libya and the international justice system to put him in the dock, either in Tripoli or The Hague. This is regrettable for all of those scarred by Col. Gadhafi's rule, including the relatives of those aboard Pan Am Flight 103 who won't have the chance to see justice done.

But others may be happy that things worked out this way. A trial would have given Col. Gadhafi a platform, and he has always made cunning use of any platform. He also exploited Libya's tribalism during his rule, and would certainly have done so in any trial, thereby exacerbating the new government's attempts to reconcile the country and set it on a new path.

The manner in which Col. Gadhafi was deposed and killed will have a dramatic impact across the region. There was no love lost for him in any Arab capital because of his erratic ways and his support for dangerous causes. But even as they bid good riddance to him, many Middle Eastern rulers must be looking in the mirror.

A more immediate impact will be felt in those countries where uprisings are under way. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, and those around them, now have something additional to think about. On the other hand, will what they've witnessed encourage the people in Syria and Yemen to fight on? Will they be less

likely to accept compromise that would allow their leaders to depart with their lives intact?

For the West, Col. Gadhafi's death is a delicate issue. He could not have been deposed without the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's intervention. But any overt claims of credit by NATO detracts from the legitimacy of the new Libyan government and its attempts to solidify its rule over the country. It would also detract from the significant sacrifices made by the Libyan people in this uprising.

There's also the delicate issue of whether NATO will intervene elsewhere. The geographic and military realities of other countries do not lend themselves to the kind of air-only campaign that was effective in Libya – and there's no stomach in any NATO capital to put “boots on the ground” in support of any Arab uprising. But pressures may rise if the Syrian and Yemeni regimes signal that they're determined to hold on and that the danger of a bloodbath grows in either country. NATO leaders will face the hard question of why Libyan lives and freedom are worth an intervention, while Syrian and Yemeni ones are not.

Col. Gadhafi's death is a dramatic moment, but it doesn't bring closure to any of these issues.

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