

RELEASE IN FULL

From: McHale, Judith A <McHaleJA@state.gov>
Sent: Monday, May 16, 2011 6:05 AM
To: H
Cc: Mills, Cheryl D; Sullivan, Jacob J
Subject: FW: Update --- African views on Libya

I wanted to give you a brief update on my trip to South Africa and Senegal last week, particularly with regard to public attitudes towards the mission in Libya.

The primary purpose of the trip was to continue our efforts to maintain an active dialogue with young African leaders. We met with a broad cross-section of individuals from across the continent and from all sectors of society --- business-people; academics; media executives and reporters; civil society activists and students.

As I have noted before, there is a demographic shift of seismic proportions taking place across Africa. Young Africans are increasingly focused on the need for them to take full control of their own future and the future of their countries. As we have seen in the Middle East and elsewhere, they are demanding greater accountability and transparency from their leaders and are seeking to aggressively move away from a what they perceive as "aid and assistance dependent" economies. They believe they have the knowledge and skills to develop African solutions to African problems and are increasingly resentful of what they see as foreign interference in their region. They are deeply skeptical of both the United States and other Western governments and of China and are seeking ways to avoid a repeat of what they describe as the colonial and imperialist trends of the past.

The people with whom we met view U.S. action in Libya with concern. Among criticisms we heard are:

- That the African Union was sidelined by the West in deliberations on what to do about Libya, and that NATO/US action precluded the African attempt to find a peaceful, consensual solution to the crisis.
- That the robust U.S. action in Libya is seen to contrast with the U.S. approach to Cote d'Ivoire and appears to indicate that the U.S. cares more about oil-rich MENA than about "Black Africa."
- That the U.S. and NATO have moved beyond the intent of UNSCR 1973 and have done so because what they really want is regime change.

Our response to these concerns focused on the humanitarian imperative. Reminding them of the horror of Rwanda in 1994 and our determination not to repeat that experience seemed to have had some positive effect. The comparison didn't satisfy everyone, but it did make most stop and think.

We had some success in arguing against the "oil imperative" assumption by pointing out that Libya is not an important source of oil, and that if those resources were our driving issue, we'd just buy oil from the despot. We also found some traction in highlighting the Arab League's demand for action and the fact that all three African SC members voted for UNSCR 1973.

Both Ambassadors Gips and Bernicat agree that the best way to make progress on all these issues is to continue to provide opportunities for open and candid discussions and our Missions are all focusing on how to make this happen more frequently.

jm