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## Gaddafi's speech: Decoding a tyrant's words



Muammar Gaddafi delivers the nationwide address at his former Bab al-Aziziya residence, which was bombed in 1986 by U.S. aircraft. The left the damaged building standing, without repair, as a sign of defiance.

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**By Adam McDowell and Adrian Humphreys**

At a rambling 75 minutes long, with threats of violent reprisals against “greasy rats” and vague promises of a new constitution he ignores anyway, Muammar Gaddafi's attempt to save himself through his dubious performance looked like “vintage Gaddafi” to some observers.

“Who in their right mind wouldn't be glued to that charade? That's Gaddafi's style, you expect it from Muammar Daoud, publisher of the Massachusetts-based North Africa Journal.

“The non sequiturs, the paranoid conspiracy theories, the anger — if it weren't so tragic, we could have made a director of the program on Arab politics at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

But Nasser Weddady, civil rights outreach director for the American Islamic Congress, warned: “Gaddafi is a buffoon who is acting on impulses and whims. There's some truth to that.

“But through the years,” continued the former resident of Libya, “Gaddafi has been a master of political buffoonery ... to get media attention, which he craves. And a lot of his talking points, which he has designed to appeal to his support base, [to portray him as] the guy who's confronting the big powers.

Below, how a few elements made the speech equal parts absurd and menacing, especially to Libyans.

### **Choice of Location**

The former presidential residence was bombed by the U.S. Air Force in 1986. Col. Gaddafi escaped and he deliberately left the damaged building standing, without repair, as a visual sign of defiance. “The building reminds Libyans of the dangers of foreign intervention and his strength,” said Jeffrey Byrne, assistant professor of history at the University of British Columbia. “But it is also inside a military base, so it might be seen as a challenge to the world.”

### **Body language**

Col. Gaddafi's body language suggested he feels stressed, angry and rattled by events, said Mark Hershkov, a communications coach and body-language specialist who has trained with world leaders. Col. Gaddafi's posture during his speech is associated with anger. His hand motions, such as his repeated drumming on the table, suggests passion — not an ecstatic passion or a truthful passion, but an angry passion. “He is shaking his head. He is seen rearranging his clothes and coming up off his toes, slightly unbalanced, suggesting he is not in control. Col. Gaddafi's fumbling gestures also suggest he was ill-prepared and the speech was largely unscripted.”

**“Muammar Gaddafi is the leader of the revolution, I am not a president to step down from.”**

Col. Gaddafi indeed holds no official title except Leader and Guide of the Revolution, perpetually elected and governed by the masses through community councils. “That country is akin to a mining town in which the country is run by a mining company with a militia,” Mr. Daoud said.

**“I have not yet ordered the use of force, not yet ordered one bullet to be fired ... while I am still here.”**

Observers agree it is well within Col. Gaddafi's ability and psychological makeup to conduct a repressive regime. Given that he controls much of the security apparatus through his sons and close cousins, this is not surprising to Libyans. “What he says, he means,” Mr. Daoud said.

**“Come out of your homes, those who love Muammar Gaddafi. Women, men, girls, Muammar Gaddafi and the revolution.... As from tomorrow, no, as from tonight, and towns ... chase [the protesters], arrest them, hand them over to the security [f**

This line draws comparison to Mao's Cultural Revolution in China, in that Col. Gaddafi is trying his own purpose. But only a small and dwindling number love him still. “I think he was talking to the North Africa Journal. “The few followers are very dangerous and very powerful. They're essentially some well-bribed tribal leaders — and fewer of them than when he took power in 1969 with some of the tribes are siding against him. It's unclear whether his own tribe is revolting. The fact that Tripoli is his tribe, then it says that even his tribe is against him,” Mr. Daoud said.

**“No sound person has taken part in these actions, they are all children.... Take you drugging your children. They are making your children drunk and they're sending them to die.”**

“He recognizes that young people are playing an important role in this and are less likely to listen to their parents in a menacing tone,” said UBC's Prof. Byrne.

**“I will not leave the country and will die as a martyr.”**

“I believe him,” said Prof. Byrne. “It is hard to imagine him going into retirement someplace. I see him fighting.” To Mr. Schenker, the speech was reminiscent of past doomed autocrats. “This is the face of a man in a bunker. It reminds me very much of Saddam [Hussein]'s last days.”

*National Post, with files from Reuters*

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