

**The UN Security Council made absolutely sure that it ignored the continent's views on what had to be done to help Libya, writes Thabo Mbeki**

**The Star TUESDAY APRIL 5 2011**

THE POPULAR uprisings in North Africa affecting Tunisia, Egypt and Libya took Africa by surprise. Stunned by the events we watched unfolding on TV, and unable to quickly decide how we should respond, we, as Africans, instinctively resolved that we had no choice but to stand back and wait.

We hoped that the events in this part of our continent would evolve in a manner that would give us the chance to publicly pronounce ourselves correctly.

The stark choice we faced was whether we should side with the demonstrators or with the governments that the protesters demanded resign.

Our challenge was not made any easier by the political interventions of various Western countries, which offered unsolicited opinions and made unilateral interventions to influence the outcome of the uprisings.

Because of our history as Africans, we could not but ask ourselves the question: is it possible for Africa to share the same interests with the West in terms of the out- comes of the popular uprisings?

When has the West ever been truly concerned about encouraging genuine democracy in Africa, without being driven by self-interest?

These considerations suggested to us that there was something suspect about the attempts of the West to identify itself as an ally of the popular uprisings in North Africa, to the extent that these represented real democratic revolutions.

These considerations reinforced our feeling that we should tread carefully instead of rushing to intervene.

This attitude did not cause Africa any significant embarrassment with regard to Tunisia and Egypt.

In the end, all we needed to do was merely endorse the outcomes determined by the people of these two African countries.

However, what has happened and is happening in Libya has exposed many fault lines in the African project to determine its destiny.

The Libyan uprising began in Benghazi on February 15. Almost immediately, unlike in Tunisia and Egypt, this uprising also took the form of an armed insurrection, while the Gaddafi regime resorted to brute force to suppress the uprising and insurrection, claiming that it was inspired and led by al-Qaeda.

Eight days after the beginning of the uprising, on February 23, the intergovernmental African Union Peace and Security Council (AU PSC) spoke for all Africa when it condemned "the indiscriminate and excessive use of force and lethal weapons against peaceful protesters, in violation of human rights and international humanitarian law", and affirmed that "the aspirations of the people of Libya for

democracy, political reform, justice and socio-economic development are legitimate". It urged that they be respected.

At the same meeting, the AU PSC resolved to send "a mission of (the) council to Libya to assess the situation on the ground". Unfortunately, the AU failed to make even this limited intervention.

Because of Africa's weak capacity to communicate even with itself, many of us in Africa did not even hear of the February 23 decisions of the AU PSC until many days later.

In reality, the international media practically ignored the AU PSC's decisions. Rather, the world was exposed to the dramatic TV images of what was happening in Libya and the public communications of the actors in this drama, including those of Muammar Gaddafi and his son Saif al- Islam.

In other words, the AU and therefore African message withered on the vine, making no impact on African and world opinion of what might be done to resolve the conflict in Libya.

This is but one of the manifestations of the fault lines I have mentioned relating to Africa's determination to define its future.

Three weeks after its February 23 meeting, on March 10, the AU PSC decided to constitute a five-nation AU ad hoc high-level committee on Libya, made up of African heads of state and government mandated to intervene to resolve the Libyan conflict.

The committee was directed to "facilitate an inclusive dialogue among the Libyan parties on the appropriate reforms" that would lead to the peaceful resolution of the Libyan crisis.

The AU PSC also expressed its "rejection of any foreign military intervention, whatever its form".

But a week later, the UN Security Council adopted its Resolution 1973, which prescribed exactly the "foreign military intervention" that Africa had rejected.

The historical fact is that as should have been the case, the AU moved ahead of the UN in terms of prescribing what should be done to address the Libyan, and therefore African, crisis.

The reality, however, is that the UN Security Council made absolutely certain that it ignored Africa's views on what needed to be done to resolve a crisis in a member state of the AU.

This was later emphasised by the refusal of the UN to allow the AU ad hoc committee to visit Tripoli and Benghazi on March 18 and 19, to promote a peaceful resolution of the Libyan crisis, precisely to reduce the loss of human lives while promoting democratic rule in Libya.

This meant that the African peacemakers flying to Libya to carry out their mission were in danger of having their planes shot down!

The African leaders sought to visit Libya because the Gaddafi regime had accepted that it should engage its opposition, under the auspices of the AU, to achieve the immediate cessation of all hostilities; delivery of humanitarian assistance to the affected populations; the protection of foreign nationals; and the adoption and implementation of the necessary political reforms to eliminate the causes of the crisis.

This was based on the legitimate aspirations of the Libyan people for democracy, political reform, justice, peace and security, and socio-economic development.

The marginalisation of Africa, in terms of helping to determine the future of Libya, paid no regard to the fact that failure to end the Libyan crisis correctly will have a long-term impact on the continent, and especially the countries of North Africa and the Sahel, such as Sudan, Chad, Niger and Mali, with little effect on the Western countries.

The Western countries have also under-lined this marginalisation of Africa by insisting, to this day, that what is

important for them is the support of the League of Arab States, with absolutely no mention of the AU.

Nobody knows how many Libyans will be killed and injured as a result of the ongoing civil war in that country and the evolving military intervention of the West, which has unquestionably evolved into support for the armed insurrection in Libya to achieve the objective of regime change.

The reality is that the Libyan conflict will claim many casualties. Because the space has been closed for the Libyans to sit together to decide their future, it is almost guaranteed that for many years Libya will experience sustained and debilitating instability, whoever emerges “victorious” from the armed conflict.

Tragically, one of the other casualties will be Africa’s efforts, sustained since the 1990s, independently to determine its future as a continent of democracy, peace, stability and shared development and prosperity.

The countries of the West, acting through the UN Security Council, have used their preponderant power to communicate the message to Africa that they are as determined as ever to decide the future of Africa, regardless of the views of the Africans, much like what they did during the years of the colonial domination of our continent.

It should not come as a surprise if, over the years, the people of Africa lose confidence in the will of multilateral institutions, such as the UN, to help them change their condition for the better.

This will happen because we will have come to understand that powerful countries beyond the oceans reserve the right and have the capacity ultimately to decide the future of Africa, with no regard for our views and aspirations as Africans.

History will record that the moment of the reassertion of this deadly malaise was when the West, acting through the UN Security Council, dismissed the notion and practice of finding African solutions to African problems.

Denied the right to solve its own problems, Africa will inevitably fall victim to ever-continuing conflict and instability.

Will it be that, paradoxically, the occasion of the Libyan popular uprising, which portended welcome democratic transformation, will also mark the moment of the asphyxiation of the dream of an African renaissance?