

Beyond Fascism

NEW LIBYA ACTUALIZED

BY AREF ALI NAYED



KALAM RESEARCH & MEDIA
KNOWLEDGE VILLAGE, DUBAI

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Kalam Research & Media

P.O. Box 502221, Knowledge Village, Dubai, UAE

Tel: +971 (0)434 2379

Tel: +971 (0)434 2378

www.kalamresearch.com

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Contents

Beyond Fascism	5
.....
<i>About the Author</i>	12
.....

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THE SHIFT FROM UTTER PRIDE AND JOY at Libya's costly liberation to a perplexing and painful anxiety is noticeable and clearly felt. Dark forces can be sensed lurking just below the very ground on which we stand. We have even seen them as they snatched fellow Libyans, and even some of our guests, from our midst. Physical and verbal sadistic abuses are committed daily in various arenas, ranging from dungeons to 'political' debates.

What are we doing? What is happening to us? Where are we? Where are we going? Who are we? Who do we want to be?—these are just a few of the questions that rise from this abyss of anxiety. Maybe this anxiety is nothing but the 'dizziness of freedom' that Søren Kierkegaard equated with anxiety itself.¹ Rather than dizziness, however, it actually feels more like that despair that Kierkegaard calls 'the sickness unto death!'²

It is actually death, or rather assassinations, that shock us into the realization that there is much to dread and to even despair about in Libya today. From the early assassination of General Abdul Fatah Yunis and his colleagues, to that of Ambassador Chris Stevens and his colleagues, to the recent assassinations in the East, West and South of Libya, the ultimate crime of murdering a fellow human being truly does fill one's very core with 'the sickness unto death'.

Life and living is about growing and flourishing, and Libya will not grow and flourish until it overcomes the despair of 'the sickness unto death'.

These notes are the reflections of one Libyan upon his own despair and anxiety. They are shared in a spirit of brokenness that knows it needs help, and that recognizes that help can only come through open sharing and dialogue of one's thoughts, experience, and even weaknesses and fears.

The jolt of the sight of some of the places I cherish the most in Libya being destroyed in full daylight by thugs, under the protection of the 'Supreme Security Committee' (or the SSC), was the precise moment when my joy at my country's liberation turned into anxiety and then dread.

At that moment, images of thuggish 'Black Shirts' and the Fascist 'Security Committees' that supported them dusted themselves off history books and old black-and-white footage and became a shocking living reality before my very eyes. I realized in a moment that my country was turning Fascist! Actually, I should say, I realized that Libya was 'returning', rather than 'turning' Fascist.

¹ See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Princeton University Press, 1981.

² See Søren Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death*, Princeton University Press, 1983.

Overall, Libya has a tragic history of over seventy years of Fascist rule. Just as Libya was struggling to remerge from the Italian Fascist oppression of Mussolini and Graziani, yet another vicious Fascist kidnapped it and pillaged it for over forty years: Gaddafi.

Gaddafi and his rule were nothing but deranged copies of Mussolini and his rule. Populism, corporatism, militarism, corruption, xenophobia, egomaniacs, thugs, intimidation, torture, and assassinations were important features of both the Mussolini and Gaddafi Fascist regimes.

The similarities in strategies and tactics are actually quite striking: from the indoctrination camps for children and youth, to the propaganda machinery, to the false syndicates and associations, to the militarization of all society, and even to the ‘Fascist Philosopher’ and ‘Fascist Intellectual’ archetypes and their cheering guilds.

Just as Mussolini insidiously consolidated his power using all institutions then available to him—from the Monarchy to Parliament—while emptying them from their content, and eventually destroying them, Gaddafi, also, consolidated his power to become the sole ‘Leader’ (*Il Duce*) within a few years of the 1969 conspiracy. Having ruled even longer than Mussolini, Gaddafi eventually summarized and summed up all remnants of all institutions into his very person!

Gaddafi could not have done it alone, and the creation of his own ‘Black Shirts’, the ‘Revolutionary Committees’, was essential. It was also essential for him to show that he was willing to go all the way, and murder, in cold-blood, all Libyans who would dare to even think of opposing his dark ways. The early clandestine assassinations, and then public humiliations and hangings of dissenters, became the very foundation on which he built his own local version of Fascism.

Old habits die hard. Today, and after a liberation uprising that cost hundreds of thousands of lives, limbs, injuries, and sufferings, Fascist tendencies are reappearing under new guises, colours, and flags. It seems that, having become painfully free, we may be somehow plunging our freedom into the dark abyss of Fascism. From political assassinations, to bullying, to intimidation, to gangster conduct, to totalitarian discourses and bodies, to self-righteous and vindictive political parties: the signs of the times are not good at all, and do not bode well for that luminance of freedom and civil liberties that guided us in our painful struggle for liberation.

Initially, it appeared that Fascist tendencies were the result of opportunistic ‘professional revolutionaries’, as Hannah Arendt calls them. However, eventually, the pervasiveness and depth of such tendencies began to clearly indicate that the problems are much deeper, and are actually lurking at the unconscious level of millions of individuals, and may actually be lurking at the Libyan ‘collective unconscious’, if we may invoke the Jungian term to mean a ‘communal unconscious’.

Reflecting on emergent Fascist tendencies, and sensing that their roots are actually quite deep, naturally led to the consideration of an old important book by Erich Fromm called *Escape from Freedom*.³ Here Fromm pointed out that as ‘individuals’ emerged from the communal contexts of medieval times, in which they lived hard, but ‘meaningful’ and well-referenced lives, achieving a ‘freedom from’ which was by no means comfortable. The emergence of individuals was also the emergence of a precarious lonely existence in which one felt one’s utter aloneness and powerlessness.

³ The U.S. edition was titled *Escape from Freedom* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1941), whilst outside the U.S. the edition was titled *The Fear of Freedom* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1942).

Fromm offers a helpful typology of ‘mechanisms of escape’ that fearful lonely and powerless individuals resorted to in order to reestablish and re-comfort themselves. He says that there are three basic such mechanisms: (1) **Automaton Conformity**; (2) **Authoritarianism**; and (3) **Destructiveness**.

In ‘**Automaton Conformity**’, one suppresses one’s authentic self, and instead molds himself into an ‘ideal self’ dictated by the society into which he strives to fit. Through self-imposed conformity to established normative patterns, one becomes an ‘automaton’ of a standard type.

In ‘**Authoritarianism**’, one readily submits one’s self to an authoritative figure who becomes his ‘magic helper’ out of powerlessness and confusion. Figures who are seemingly powerful and clear about who they are and where they are going become the accepted masters whose commands are simply and trustingly followed.

Finally, in ‘**Destructiveness**’, one invokes a drastic solution to one’s deep feelings of aloneness and powerlessness. The discomforts with the world and/or some of its contents, including other persons, are aggressively dealt with through sheer destruction. As Fromm puts it, ‘the destruction of the world is the last, almost desperate attempt to save myself from being crushed by it.’⁴

Reading Fromm, with Libya’s glory and agony in mind, one is struck by how helpful his typology of escape mechanisms is. Indeed, in today’s Libya we find all three mechanisms very much apparent. From young people who look almost identical thinking that they are properly implementing a normative pattern, to people who make prominent religious and political figures into heroes worthy of blind trust and obedience, to young angry armed men keen on destroying all that comes in their way, even if it is Libya itself, or more drastically, the world itself.

Fromm rightly pointed out that it is such mechanisms that have historically made Italians, Germans, and Spaniards readily espouse Fascism and cheer its diabolical aggressiveness toward the ‘weaker’ others. Today, in Libya, these mechanisms are clearly visible, and Fascism is yet again a strong temptation in this country that has suffered and languished under Fascisms, both foreign and local, for such long decades.

Key to preempting and preventing the rise of Fascism in Libya is a recognition of the mass temptation towards it that may follow any or all of Fromm’s escape mechanisms.

Another important key is to move from mere ‘freedom from’ or ‘negative freedom’ to ‘freedom to’ or ‘positive freedom’, a freedom of full personal, creative, and spontaneous, self-actualization.

As Fromm, and after him Isaiah Berlin point out there are two freedoms or liberties: Freedom from tyranny and oppression, and freedom to become fully human with dignity and self-actualization and expression.⁵

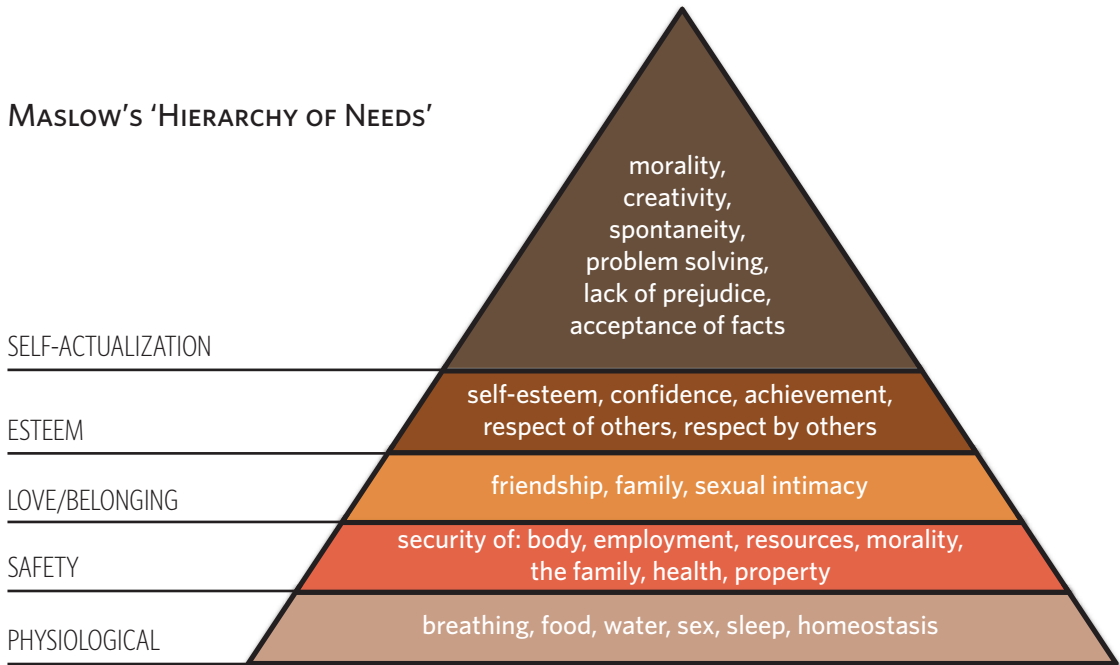
In Libya, freedom from Gaddafi and his regime was painfully achieved at a tremendous price, human and physical. Now, New Libya must be actualized through freedom to be creative, spontaneous, and constructive. How can New Libya be actualized?

There are individual and self-focused notions of actualization in several resources, from Fromm’s own positive advice, to Isaiah Berlin’s, to Karen Horney’s, and various other post-Freudian advisors and therapists.⁶

⁴ Eric Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, 1941. ⁵ Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1958.

⁶ See, for example, Karen Horney, *Neurosis and Human Growth: The Struggle Towards Self-Realization*, W. W. Norton and Company Inc., 1950.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and most helpful notion of such individual self-actualization is that of Abraham Maslow, who considered ‘self-actualization’ to be the very tip of the pyramid of his famous ‘Hierarchy of Needs’:⁷



Dennis Coon and John Mitterer helpfully summarized the typical characteristics of ‘self-actualizers’:⁸

- *Efficient perceptions of reality.* Self-actualizers are able to judge situations correctly and honestly. They are very sensitive to the fake and dishonest.
- *Comfortable acceptance of self, others, nature.* Self-actualizers accept their own human nature with all its flaws. The shortcomings of others and the contradictions of the human condition are accepted with humour and tolerance.
- *Spontaneity.* Maslow’s subjects extended their creativity into everyday activities. Actualizers tend to be unusually alive, engaged, and spontaneous.
- *Task centering.* Most of Maslow’s subjects had a mission to fulfill in life or some task or problem outside of themselves to pursue. Humanitarians such as Albert Schweitzer and Mother Teresa are considered to have possessed this quality.
- *Autonomy.* Self-actualizers are free from reliance on external authorities or other people. They tend to be resourceful and independent.
- *Continued freshness of appreciation.* The self-actualizer seems to constantly renew appreciation of life’s basic goods. A sunset or a flower will be experienced as intensely time after time as it was at first. There is an ‘innocence of vision’, like that of an artist or child.

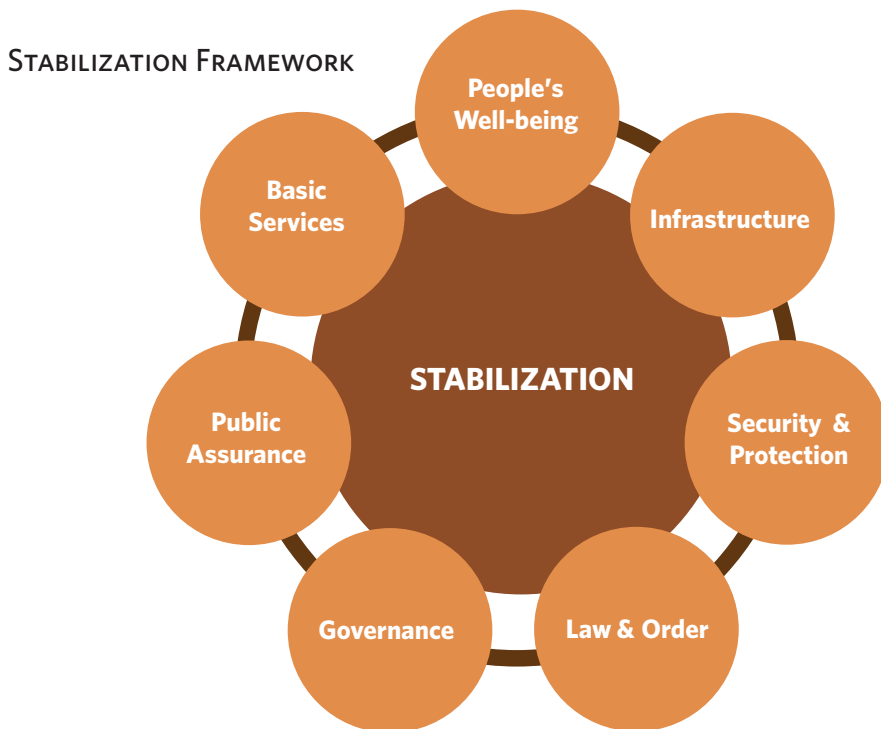
⁷ Abraham Maslow, ‘A Theory of Human Motivation’, originally published in *Psychological Review*, 50, pp.370–396, 1943. The study was later expanded into a book: *Motivation and Personality*, Harper, 1954.

⁸ Dennis Coon and John Mitterer, *An Introduction to Psychology: Gateways to Mind and Behavior*, 2007.

- *Fellowship with humanity.* Maslow’s subjects felt a deep identification with others and the human situation in general.
- *Profound interpersonal relationships.* The interpersonal relationships of self-actualizers are marked by deep loving bonds.
- *Comfort with solitude.* Despite their satisfying relationships with others, self-actualizing persons value solitude and are comfortable being alone.
- *Non-hostile sense of humour.* This refers to the wonderful capacity to laugh at oneself. It also describes the kind of humor a man like Abraham Lincoln had. Lincoln probably never made a joke that hurt anybody. His wry comments were gentle proddings of human shortcomings
- *Peak experiences.* All of Maslow's subjects reported the frequent occurrence of peak experiences (temporary moments of self-actualization). These occasions were marked by feelings of ecstasy, harmony, and deep meaning. Self-actualizers reported feeling at one with the universe, stronger and calmer than ever before, filled with light, beautiful and good, and so forth. In summary, self-actualizers feel safe, not anxious, accepted, loved, loving, and alive.

Indeed, judging by the youthful aspirations widely expressed on Libyan Facebook pages, the list of traits of self-actualizers above does seem like a comprehensive wish-list for many young Libyans.

Furthermore, the idea of a ‘hierarchy of needs’ that must have a base of physical well-being, security, and safety does make sense. As a matter of fact the very framework for the Libya Stabilization Team the operations, of which the author was involved with, does seem to directly address the very needs that Maslow’s pyramid insightfully points out and prioritizes. That stabilization framework was summarized in a flower-figure of co-dependent areas of needs and activities:



However, is the actualizing of the New Libya basically about encouraging the self-actualization of Libyan individuals?

While in California Maslow's individualistic self-actualization may seem straightforward and sensible, it may not be the case of family-rooted, community-centered Libyans.

It is true that the youthful 'Facebook crowd' may exhibit California-like individualist aspirations of self-actualization and fulfillment. However, one must be careful not to jump to conclusions even to the real-life situations and expectations of young Libyans today.

While the strictly tribal and family-centric views of Libyans may have been opened up towards individuality to a very large extent over the past half-century or so, Libya does remain a strongly community-oriented environment in which atomistic 'individuals' seldom truly exist.

Can there be a Libyan notion, or even multiple notions, of self-actualization that are also communally sensitive, and that see self-development as also community-development, and vice versa? This is an issue that must be discussed on a community level in multiple dialogues and workshops; however, it may be helpful to point out that Libya does have a deep and esteemed history of traditions of self-actualization that also work within, on, and with communities. This must be understood within the context that history is mixed, and some aspects of it may actually have involved 'escapes from freedom' of the nature discussed above in Fromm's typology of escape mechanisms.

Libya does have a history of spiritual paths or *turuq* that at times aimed at demolishing the very self of the adherent, rather than actualizing it. In such cases Fromm's mechanisms seem to have all been used in the frantic avoidance of true freedom. However, Libya does also have an interesting, if little-known, history of ways that did concretely achieve personal as well as communal growth and flourishing.

While the study of such historical ways of self/communal-actualization is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to point out that the study of movements such as the Sanusiyya may actually yield a much-needed retrieval and rehabilitation of actualization frameworks and approaches.

In the Grand Sanusi's approach, a distinct psychotherapeutically rich school of human flourishing was developed. From his typology of psychological and spiritual tendencies (for example, his typology of the *nufus* or the self), to his notion of the mimesis or emulation of the 'perfect man' (Muhammad, may the peace and blessings of God be upon him, as the collective archetype of human perfection)—the Grand Sanusi offers an important framework and tool-kit for self-actualization, but always in the context of community. His amazingly holistic development of ecologically and socially sensitive lodges (*zawiyas*), seems to point to a deep realization that healthy and happy individuals can only be actualized in healthy and happy actualized communities. Libyans have to re-visit their much-neglected, and largely destroyed, authentic traditions in search of balanced approaches to actualization that cater to the communal as well as the individual needs of young Libyans today.⁹

Perhaps a helpful approach is to see the palatable anxiety that one feels in Libya today as a result of a crisis of meaning, and that there is a need for the re-articulation of meaningful frameworks and discourses that can help heal hearts and settle minds, and thus heal the

⁹ For more on the Grand Sanusi and on the Sanusiyya, see E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*, Oxford University Press, 1949; and Knut S. Vikør, *Sufi and Scholar on the Desert Edge: Muhammad B. Ali al-Sanusi and his Brotherhood*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1995.

country. Perhaps we are witnessing a nationwide ‘search for meaning’, or even ‘ultimate meaning’, to put it in the illuminating terms of Viktor Frankl.¹⁰

Perhaps an approach of ‘logotherapy’¹¹ needs to be deployed in order to help the repair and healing process that can lead to a meaningful existence and life for ordinary Libyans. Perhaps such logotherapy can be a rearticulated discourse or *Kalam* that is compassion-centered and meaning-giving. Such a new *Kalam* as logotherapy may turn out to be the key to national healing, rehabilitation, rejuvenation, and renewal. Such a new *Kalam* may help grow true ‘ecologies of peace, compassion, and blessing’¹² in our New Libya.

Indeed, we must honestly and courageously identify tendencies towards Fascism in today’s Libya. We must invoke all known deep reflections on how Fascism and Totalitarianism arise. We must do our utmost to preempt and block the fulfillment of such dark and dangerous tendencies. The escape from freedom would result in Fascism, but the escape from Fascism cannot be achieved without fully actualizing all human possibilities in Libya—individual *and* communal. Such actualization must be discussed and diligently worked out, with our fellow Libyans of today, our fellow Libyans from the past, and in mindfulness of our fellow Libyans of the future! Such actualization may be approached through a healing re-articulation, a logotherapy, or a *kalam*-therapy that may create fresh abodes of peace.

And God knows best! ❀

¹⁰ Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, Perseus Book Publishing, New York, 1997.

¹¹ Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*, Beacon Press, Boston, 2006.

¹² See Aref Ali Nayef, *Growing Ecologies of Peace, Compassion and Blessing: A Muslim Response to ‘A Muscat Manifesto’*, Kalam Research & Media with The Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme, Dubai, UAE, 2010.



AREF ALI NAYED

Dr. Aref Ali Nayed is the Ambassador of Libya to the United Arab Emirates and is the Founder and Director of Kalam Research & Media (KRM). He also lectures on Islamic Theology, Logic, and Spirituality at the restored Uthman Pasha Madrasa in Tripoli, Libya and at the Fatih Sultan Mehmet University in Istanbul, Turkey. He is Senior Advisor to the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme; Fellow of the Royal Aal Al-Bayt Institute in Jordan; Adjunct Professor at Faith Sultan Mehmet University in Istanbul; and he was also recently appointed to the Board of Advisors of the Templeton Foundation. He was Professor at the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies (Rome), and the International Institute for Islamic Thought and Civilization (Malaysia). He has headed an Information Technology company. He received his B.Sc. in Engineering, M.A. in the Philosophy of Science, and a Ph.D. in Hermeneutics from the University of Guelph (Canada). He also studied at the University of Toronto and the Pontifical Gregorian University. He has been involved in various Inter-Faith initiatives since 1987, including the seminal 'A Common Word' process. His books include *Operational Hermeneutics: Interpretation as the Engagement of Operational Artifacts* (KRM, 2011); co-authored with Jeff Mitscherling and Tanya Ditommaso, *The Author's Intention* (Lexington Books, 2004); and his monograph, *Growing Ecologies of Peace, Compassion and Blessing: A Muslim Response to 'A Muscat Manifesto'* (Kalam Research & Media with The Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme, Dubai, UAE, 2010).



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P.O. Box 502221
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Dubai, UAE
Tel: +971 (0)434 2379
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