

Nov 04, 2016 by [Gordon Robison](#)

Careful Reconciliation ^[1]

Amman, Jordan

One of the more far-sighted things the first president Bush did was to refrain from gloating over the collapse of the Soviet Union's empire in 1989-90. I thought about this when word came this evening of the current President Bush's decision to lift most (but not all) US sanctions on Libya.

Contrary to popular belief most of the American sanctions go back to the mid-1980s, that is, several years before the downing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland. While Libya has few friends around the Arab world, Washington's seemingly endless list of grievances against Libya has long worked to Colonel Qaddafi's advantage. Many see it as yet another piece of evidence that the US wishes ill to the Muslim World, particularly to leaders who do not 'toe Washington's line' (whatever that might be).

At the International Atomic Energy Agency's meeting in Vienna Monday Libya's Deputy Prime Minister marked the lifting of sanctions by inviting the US Energy Secretary to visit Libya. A cabinet-level visit is an excellent way to continue this process of reconciliation. That has been going on between Washington and Tripoli for the better part of a year. Formal diplomatic relations would be another good step.

The lifting of an earlier group of sanctions in April made it possible for Libyan students to study in the United States, and made it legal for Americans to travel to Libya. The key now is to use this latest easing of tensions to move the bi-lateral relationship forward, while being careful all the while not to rub the Libyans noses in a US 'victory' over terror. The temptation is clearly there: Bush administration officials often cite Libya's renunciation of weapons of mass destruction as one of their more public successes in the war on terror. This is a point we need to resist making too often.

Why is it important that we not gloat (even at home for solely 'domestic' consumption – American politicians have a terrible habit of forgetting that people in other parts of the world do pay attention to what they say)? Because doing so will negate any good feeling the US might elicit in this part of the world by lifting the sanctions. And right now, our image in the region can use all the help it can get.
