

Global Nato and the Recolonisation of Africa - Lessons From the Libyan Intervention

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If there was any uncertainty about the real mission of the United States, France, Britain and other members of NATO in Libya, these doubts were clarified with the nature of the military campaign against the people of Libya that had been orchestrated under the mandate of the United Nations Security Council. It was a new kind of war, using third party forces in order to silence the global peace forces who were opposed to further military intervention. A robust propaganda and disinformation campaign by the corporate media covered up the real content of what was happening.

The economic crisis inside the Eurozone was too deep, however, and some of the members of NATO were hesitant about this recolonisation of Africa. France was desperate to get in on the act of intensifying the exploitation of African resources. France had not been a big player in Libya (a former colony of Italy) which until recently was Africa's fourth-largest oil producer, and possessing one of the continent's largest oil reserves of some 44 billion barrels – more than Nigeria or Algeria. France was also aware that Libya sits on the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer, an immensely vast underground sea of fresh water. The government of Libya had invested US\$25 billion in the Great Man-made River Project, a complex 4,000km long water pipeline buried beneath the desert that could transport two million cubic metres of water a day

The energetic activities of Nicolas Sarkozy in guiding the military intervention took centre stage, while the US military could claim to 'lead from behind.' When France called a celebratory conference of ambassadors to rally them for the new imperial vision, Mr Sarkozy

said Libya proved 'a strong contrast' to past European weakness, and justified his decision to integrate France into NATO's military command in 2009. The nature of this war organised from the air with proxy armies and private military contractors showed the way for dictatorships like Qatar and Saudi Arabia to fight for 'democracy.'

This intervention clarified for many African military forces that their alliance with the United States and France will not spare them when it is in the interest of the NATO forces to dispense with former allies...

But the crux of the matter of the relationship between Africa and Libya can now be seen in the killing of Africans in Libya on the grounds that they were and are mercenaries. These racist actions by the so-called 'rebels' were reported from the start of this 'humanitarian' intervention but at the point when these hodge-podge forces entered Tripoli, there was fresh evidence of the wanton killings of black Africans.

Africans who escaped the pogroms reported the killings and this information had been in the public domain for months. Now it seems the world is paying attention after Amnesty International put out a report that Africans are being killed in racist attacks. So pronounced have been these racist killings that liberal organs such as the New York Times had to write an editorial on the killings. There has been no word from the United States or the information section of the AFRICOM. Though there have been with small stories in the British press, when British prime minister David Cameron, French president Nicolas Sarkozy and other NATO celebrants made their flying victory visit to Libya, they were silent on these racist attacks against black Africans as they shuttled between Tripoli and Benghazi trying to iron out how to cut French oil companies into the restructuring of the oil industry in Libya.

The African Union has condemned the racist attacks and maintained that political negotiations are still necessary. Jean Ping, chairperson of the Commission of the African Union, decried the attacks on black Africans and reiterated the reasons why the African Union wanted to see an inclusive government in Libya. Jean Ping declared, the 'Blacks are being killed. Blacks are having their throats slit. Blacks are accused of being mercenaries. Do you think it's normal in a country that's a third black that blacks are confused with mercenaries?'

Ping continued, 'There are mercenaries in Libya, many of them are black, but there are not only blacks and not all blacks there are mercenaries. Sometimes, when they are white, they call them "technical advisors".'

This reminder, that Libya is in Africa and that a third of the country is black is for those forces who are celebrating the success of a NATO mission to protect Africans which has ended up killing Africans. Africans do not consider the NATO mission a success. In fact, this has been a disaster for peace and reconstruction in Africa. The Russians and Chinese do not consider this operation a success but the leaders of Africa and the leaders of the BRICS societies have awoken too late to the new form of imperial intervention using Global NATO.

The one positive impact of this new imperial adventure is to send alarm bells among all of the military forces in Africa aligned to the West. The other impact is to alert the popular forces to the reality that governments with big armies are literally 'paper tigers.'...There is a new scramble for Africa and the progressive forces will have to learn the lessons from the new multilateral imperial interventions that are now being planned by Global NATO.

GLOBAL NATO AND THE INTERVENTION IN LIBYA

The history of NATO and the history of Libya are intertwined in many ways. It was two years after the formation of the North American Treaty Organization that Libya became independent in 1951. However, for the Europeans the strategic importance of Libya during the Second World War and the memory of the siege of Tobruk were too fresh in their minds for NATO to give up Libya entirely. The compromise was that NATO and the US would maintain a military presence.

The US established a base called Wheelus Air Base in Libya. This base was called a 'Little America' until the US was asked to leave after Gaddafi seized power in 1969. The US had been scheming to get back into Libya since then. For a short while Gaddafi was supported as an anti-communist stalwart, but later he became a useful nuisance shifting as friend and foe over the years. As the US fabricated the myth of al Qaeda in the Maghreb, cooperation was extended to this leader but Gaddafi was opposed to the establishment of US and French military bases in Africa. Now we are informed through the military gossip sheet Stars and Stripes that NATO is considering the establishment of an air squadron in Africa to assist African governments. This is how it was reported in 'Stars and Stripes' (29 August 2011).

'While not formally assigned to AFRICOM, the squadron has been formed to conduct missions primarily in Africa, with a focus on building the air mobility capacity of African militaries.'

The next question that was posed by peace activists was whether this was a prelude for the building of another AFRICOM and NATO facility in Africa.

NATO had been formed as an alliance ostensibly to defend Western Europe against the Soviet Union. Charles De Gaulle had pulled France out of this alliance in 1966 after it became clear that this military alliance was dominated by the USA and Britain (supporting their military industries). Usually, when an alliance is formed for a specific purpose such as halting the spread of communism, that alliance is folded when the mission is complete. Hence, after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, it was expected that the mission of NATO would be scaled down.

Instead, NATO has expanded, seeking to encircle Russia by expanding its membership to include former members of the Warsaw Pact countries. For over 79 days NATO bombed Kosovo in 1999 as it gave itself a new mission to expand US military power right up to the doorstep of Moscow. Gingerly, NATO expanded under President Clinton from 12 members to 16, then to 19, then to 26 by 2004, and by 2009 to 28 members. Despite vocal opposition from Russia, the discussion of expanding NATO proceeded to develop the idea of Global NATO.

After Charles De Gaulle had left NATO in 1966, Nicolas Sarkozy rejoined in 2009. France had been working within Europe to challenge the dollar and the US on a global scale but after the reactions about 'freedom fries' during the Iraq war, French military planners retreated and decided to throw their lot in with the crusaders in Washington. This new posture towards the crusaders and neoconservatives in the USA was also a nod to the growing strength of the Jean-Marie Le Pen and the National Front-type organisations in France and Europe.

Using the War on Terror and the wars in Afghanistan as the justification, the rationale of the militarists for a global role of NATO began to take shape and the idea of NATO was debated in military journals. One of the writers on this concept was Ivo Daalder, the US ambassador to NATO. This was an ambassador who had understood the long history of financial and military cooperation between the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States. In an era when capital was truly transnational, and the hedge fund managers and oil companies had no loyalty to a particular country, international capitalists wanted a new military force, mobile and well equipped for the new scramble for African resources.

In one such musing by the new defence specialists is the thinking that, 'The concept of a Global NATO is used above all in connection with two leitmotifs – on the one hand the idea of the alliance becoming a global strategic actor (functional globalization) and on the other the notion of a NATO whose membership is in principle global (institutional globalization). The two dimensions can, however, scarcely be separated from one another but instead are intertwined.'

This discussion under the idea of the 'institutional globalization of NATO' maintained that the security threats to capitalism were global and that NATO should consider itself as a 'concert of democracies' keeping order internationally. Within these journals the idea was floated that NATO should be expanded to include Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea and possibly Brazil.

After encircling Russia the clear posture was for the encirclement of China.

The rationale was simply that the 'operational level of NATO is the entire globe.' In 2002, NATO had declared, 'to carry out the full range of its missions, NATO must be able to field forces that can move quickly to wherever they are needed, sustain operations over distance and time, and achieve their objectives.'

Despite these lofty positions of the strategic planners, NATO was bogged down in Afghanistan. The prolonged crisis of capitalism inside the Western world meant that citizens had no appetite for an expanded imperial role, until Gaddafi gave NATO the excuse to seek to operationalise the idea of Global NATO by promising to kill the citizens of Benghazi who he called rats and vermin.

ENTER SARKOZY – THE NEW SAVIOUR OF NATO

After the embarrassment of the support for the genocidaires in Rwanda in 1994, the French military establishment had taken a low profile and sought to gain respectability for its military interventions in Africa by seeking international mandates. For over forty years France had intervened militarily in Africa, because Africa was central to its entire military strategy. Without the wealth of Africa, France would be a minor power with as much influence as Austria. French imperialism was particularly aggressive in Africa. When the United States decided to compete with France by establishing the Africa Crisis Response Initiative (a precursor to the US Africa Command), France objected. Soon, the French understood the hegemonic intentions of Rumsfeld and Cheney so the French cooperated in operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, all the while seething that Rwanda had left the umbrella of francophonie. By the time of the establishment of the US Africa Command, France was cooperating fully with the United States while stepping up its cultural and commercial presence in Africa.

One golden opportunity for France...came in Cote D 'Ivorie when France sought a UN mandate to maintain its military forces in that country, a force that had occupied that African country for 40 years...Sarkozy eagerly went in to 'restore democracy.'

...The Libyan intervention served many purposes, gaining more unlimited access to oil and water in Libya while standing poised to stab the Egyptian revolution in the back.

For decades, France had mooted the idea of a Mediterranean Union to extend the power of France in North Africa. France had worked closely with the monarchy in Morocco to block the independence of Western Sahara and coveted the wealth of the region. More importantly, French oil companies had been left behind after Gaddafi opened up the petroleum sector of Libya for western firms. Italian, British and US oil majors were competing with Russian, Chinese, Indian and Turkish interests. German industrial and financial power was stronger in Libya than French. Sarkozy wanted to change all of that when faced with the most serious banking crisis in France.

When the February 17 uprisings erupted in Libya, French intelligence was alert and Sarkozy mobilised the British and later the US Africa Command to intervene using the UN formulation of Responsibility to Protect, under the cover of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973. China, Russia and Brazil acted irresponsibly, by either abstaining in the vote or sanctioning the vote with their silence. South Africa and Nigeria (under heavy pressure from the Obama White House) voted for the resolution to establish a no-fly zone. South Africa later backtracked opposing the bombing of Libya claiming that the NATO forces had gone beyond the mandate of the UN Security Council Resolution. Better late than never, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Africa maintained a principled position and led the position that the roadmap of the African Union was the only way forward for a resolution of the internal political problems in Libya. But France and Britain were salivating over a re-division of the oil resources of Libya.

This intervention was under the umbrella of the UN and so this was another foray of Global NATO. Yet, most NATO members understood the reasons for Sarkozy's energy. Of the 28 members of NATO, the majority refused to participate in this attack. The Prime Minister of Poland declared that the attack on Libya was for oil. There were only eight members (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, Spain, UK and the United States) that participated in this operation (called United Protector). The members could not even agree on a command structure so the US put up the Africa Command as the Front and called their operation, Operation Odyssey Dawn. The French called their action, Opération Harmattan. The British called their involvement Operation Ellamy while the Canadians termed theirs Operation Mobile.

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Space does not allow for a full examination of the thousands of sorties of NATO in Libya after seven months. The full day-to-day roster of their military and naval operations to oust Gaddafi is in the public domain on the internet. African popular leaders can read the day-to-day strategic operations to see the full weakness of NATO. The Chinese have written on the dysfunction of NATO and one writer An Huihou wrote that the operation in Libya was 'Not a real success for NATO.' This Chinese writer called for negotiations but the Chinese political leadership publicly support the roadmap of the African Union. More importantly, while the Chinese pulled their citizens out of Libya, there was not even a word of protest from China over the killing of Africans in Africa when the imperial forces were using a UN mandate

called Responsibility to Protect. In order to pacify the Chinese leadership, the energetic Sarkozy had a flying visit to Beijing, promising that Chinese contracts would be honoured.

We will have to revisit this aspect of the war at another moment, but for this submission it is important to understand the new forms of intervention.

A NEW KIND OF IMPERIAL INTERVENTION

It must be stated that the mobilisation of the international peace forces against NATO has always been a consideration for the planning of Operation Unified Protector. It is now time to place the opposition to militarism with clear focus on the private military corporations who act outside of the law. Inside the United States, the then Defense Secretary, Robert Gates told West Point cadets in March that, 'In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should have his head examined'. The Pentagon was afraid of being bogged down and although the peace movement had the Obama administration on the defensive, some sections of this movement did not distance itself from Gaddafi while they condemned the killing of innocent civilians by NATO jets.

European workers, faced with the double dip recession where the banks were calling on the governments to impose austerity measures, were lukewarm toward the Libyan operation, so the invaders had to find a novel way for intervening. This intervention then took the form of bombings by NATO, on the ground special forces from the French and British commandos with air and ground support from Qatar.

On 4 September 2011, the New York Times reported the coordination in this way, 'The United States provided intelligence, refueling and more precision bombing than Paris or London want to acknowledge. Inevitably, then, NATO air power and technology, combined with British, French and Qatari "trainers" working "secretly" with the rebels on the ground, have defeated the forces of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi.' Other newspaper accounts reported that 'former soldiers from an elite British commando unit, the Special Air Service, and other private contractors from Western countries were on the ground in the Libyan city of Misrata.'

The Guardian in England said contractors were helping NATO identify possible targets in the heavily contested city and passing this information, as well as information about the movements of Gaddafi's forces, to a NATO command centre in Naples, Italy. The newspaper reported that 'a group of six armed Westerners had been filmed by the Al Jazeera TV network talking to rebels in Misrata; the men fled after realizing they were being filmed.'

Initially, the United States Africa Command took credit for the NATO operations in Libya, but when it seemed as if the entire operation was bogged down, there were efforts to bring in Special Forces and private security personnel using Qatar as the front and paymaster. Indeed, the use of fronts such as the Emir of Qatar pointed to a new form of global militarism. Blackwater, (now called Xe) the US private military firm for hire, had moved to establish its headquarters in the Emirates, specifically Abu Dhabi. In a detailed article in the New York Times entitled, 'Blackwater World Wide', we were given one window into the various front companies of Blackwater and the integrated nature of the CIA/Blackwater operations. We were then told that Blackwater did not want to recruit Muslims because Muslims would be reluctant to kill other Muslims. When the rebels entered Tripoli, the same

talking heads in Washington that were opposed to the intervention were now praising this new kind of cooperation between the US military and Global NATO

Future researchers on the 'special operators on the ground' in Libya will be able to list the names of the Private Military Contractors who were involved in this war. When the leaders of the National Transitional Council needed money to pay the private contractors and to bribe regional leaders, the Global Nato diplomats promptly called for the unfreezing of the assets of Libya, even while the African Union was protesting the killing of black Africans.

LESSONS FOR PROGRESSIVE AFRICANS

In less than three weeks, the General Assembly of the United Nations will meet and the leaders of Global NATO will seek to silence the members of the African Union. The African Union has been lobbying the Group of 77 as they seek to bring to the attention of the world the reality that the UN Security Council mandate of responsibility to protect did not extend to black Africans.

Even at this late moment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in South Africa is correct to stick to the call for the African Union roadmap. Experience elsewhere in Burundi and Uganda after wars of intervention showed that it is only the long-term and pedantic work for peace that can end the fighting.

There must be negotiations with an international peacekeeping force that excludes the eight NATO countries that violated the mandate of the Security Council. The National Transitional Council is deeply divided and negotiations will be needed so that they do not kill each other as they already started to do when they killed Abdel-Fattah Younis, the general who had defected from Gaddafi to the Benghazi side. It is only a matter of time before it becomes clear how Abdelhakim Belhadj (sometimes written Belhaj) of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), graduated from detention at Guantanamo Bay to be one of the 'rebel' leaders and leader of the Tripoli Military Council. Anyone who followed the US destabilisation of Somalia can understand how those who are one day called the worst terrorists are the next day the best allies of the USA.

Ultimately, it is not in the interests of Global NATO for the fighting to end in Libya insofar as the lack of clarity on the future of the Egyptian revolution will require imperial forces to stab the revolution in the back. This is where Qatar and Saudi Arabia have proven their use for the western 'concert of democracies.' Qatar in Libya and Saudi Arabia in Bahrain have shown the world that the intervention of the West was not for humanitarian reasons.

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In another offering it will be necessary to fully examine the lessons of the NATO intervention for the African freedom struggle. It will be necessary, then, to sum up the Gaddafi role in Africa and the African Union. Until that time, it is sufficient to say that the operations of Global NATO has awakened many leaders to the reality of the ways in which third parties and private military forces will be used to invade Africa. Even the former president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo has had to speak out forcefully against NATO in Libya. While these leaders are speaking, the rank and file in Africa are paying attention to the fact that France, Britain and the USA will go to all lengths to invade Africa in the new scramble for resources. General Carter Ham of AFRICOM has already travelled to Nigeria to enact the drama on the stage that had been set up by former US ambassador to Nigeria, John

Campbell who predicted that Nigeria will break up within 16 years.

General Carter Ham urged partnership between the government of Nigeria and AFRICOM knowing full well that such a partnership would be to fulfil the wishes of those who do not want to see the unity and peace of Nigeria and Africa.

China, Russia, Brazil and India will have to make a choice. They will either be integrated into the spoils of the current scramble for land, oil water and seeds or will join with the people of Africa to democratise the United Nations and support the forces of peace and reconstruction. China has sent one signal by becoming the principal paymaster for Europe becoming the stopgap for the crisis in the Eurozone.

Africans may believe in Ubuntu but they will never forget. The day will arise when the idea of Responsibility to Protect will be used by a democratised United Nations.

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