

“Humanitarian Intervention” in Libya: The Revival of Imperialist Ideology

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Ironic, in the middle of a revolutionary upsurge in the Middle East, that an unholy alliance of [security experts](#), [politicos](#), [EU personnel](#), [ambassadors](#), and [house babblers](#) is once more bruited the shop-soiled commodity of ‘humanitarian intervention’. Forget the recent embarrassment over the loss of Tunisia, and Egypt, and the sweats over uprisings in Bahrain and Yemen. It’s all about Libya. And having spent the last few years arming Qadhafi, selling him to international audiences as a former madman who has seen the light, the US and EU are now simulating mortal affront over the use to which Qadhafi is putting those weapons. Having waited and watched, and made initially very equivocal statements, they’ve determined that Qadhafi’s regime is finished just in time to avoid any faux pas, such as Joe Biden or Tony Blair bigging up the man’s courage or denying his dictatorial proclivities. More, they’re ready to fight on the side of the Libyan revolution. [Neocons](#) are once more clamouring for the breach. Anne Marie Slaughter, the ‘Wilsonian’ former head of State Department policy planning, is also [tweeting for the intervention](#). [David Cameron](#) is raising alarm over the prospect of chemical weapons being used as justification for imposing a ‘no fly zone’.

That this should be so amid a revolution that is actually on the verge of deposing Qadhafi, possibly not the last of recently US backed dictators to crumble in the Middle East is interesting. For anyone following the news, Qadhafi is hanging on in a few enclaves of Libya, he’s lost most of the police and army and the ‘tribes’ that backed him, and the revolutionaries are advancing on his last strongholds even as I write. The regime [can’t re-take lost towns](#), which means it is militarily and politically finished. The massacres that Qadhafi’s thugs have perpetrated in defence of the regime are very real, and very grisly, and I can’t have much respect for the argument from some that Qadhafi’s regime was historically progressive and thus worth defending. But these massacres aren’t going to stop the regime from falling. Now, the [ideology of ‘humanitarian intervention’](#) is among other things a form of racist paternalism. It maintains, through its affirmations and exclusions, that people in the Third World cannot deliver themselves from dictatorship without the assistance of imperialist Euro-American states. Even if they do, the ideology in its present permutation maintains, they won’t be able to maintain a decent society by themselves. In fact, there’s a palpable fear of the Arab sans-culottes among Euro-American elites – even the express motives for ‘humanitarian intervention’ are not entirely altruistic. Bernard Lewis, [Niall Ferguson](#), those ambassadors security experts, all seem to worry about what will happen in the ‘vacuum’ (which, significantly, depicts Libyan people, the revolutionaries who are bravely undertaking this historic struggle, as a mere absence). Are Arabs ready for

democracy? Will the 'disorder' allow 'al-Qaeda' to 'reappear'? What will happen to oil prices? And this seems to be the point. It is precisely because they know that Qadhafi will not survive, and are desperately worried about what sort of independent political forces may follow (it has nothing to do with 'al-Qaeda'), that they are anxious to 'help'.

What I think is happening here is that the US, its EU allies, and its assorted experts, intellectuals and lackeys, have been looking desperately for a way to insinuate the US directly into that revolutionary turmoil, to justify the projection of military hardware in a situation where American interests are decidedly counter-revolutionary. The attempt to envelop this complex field of social and political struggles in the dilapidated ideological frame of 'humanitarian intervention' provides just the entry point that the US and its allies have been looking for. The call for 'humanitarian intervention' has nothing to do with rescuing Libyans, who are proving quite capable of rescuing themselves. It is the tip of a counter-revolutionary wedge.

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