

Libya and the Imperial Re-Division of Africa

The Imperialist Powers' Odyssey of "Return" into Africa

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PART I

Plans to attack Libya have been longstanding. The imperial war machine of the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and their NATO allies is involved in a new military adventure that parallels the events that led to the wars against Yugoslavia and Iraq. The war machine has been mobilized under the cover of "humanitarian intervention."

In fact what the Pentagon and NATO have done is breach international law by intervening on the side of one of the combating parties in Libya in a civil war that they themselves have encouraged and fuelled. They have not protected civilians, but have launched a war against the Libyan regime in Tripoli and actively assisted the Benghazi-based Transitional Council in fighting the Libyan military.

Before the rapprochement with Colonel Qaddafi, for years the U.S., Britain, France, and their allies worked to destabilize Libya. Confirmed by U.S. government sources, Washington attempted regime change in Tripoli several times.[1] According to General Wesley Clark, former NATO commander, the Pentagon had active plans for launching a war against Libya.

The U.S. and its NATO allies are now embroiled in a new war which has the patented characteristics of the wars and invasions of Iraq and the former Yugoslavia.

A large naval armada off the shores of Libya has been bombing Libya for weeks with the declared objective of ousting the Libyan regime. At the same time, Libyan internal divisions are being fuelled.

Misinformation is systematically being spewed. Like Saddam Hussein before him, the U.S. and the E.U. have armed and helped Colonel Qaddafi. It is, therefore, important to hold the U.S. and the E.U. accountable for these weapon sales and the training of Libyan forces.

Also, like in Iraq, another Arab dictator was befriended by the U.S., only to be subsequently betrayed.

Prior to Iraq's rapprochement with the U.S., at the outset of the Iraq-Iran War, Saddam Hussein was a Soviet ally and considered an enemy by Washington.

The case of Colonel Qaddafi is in many regards similar. Ironically, Qaddafi had warned Arab leaders in 2008 at a meeting in Damascus under the auspices of the Arab League about

regime change. He pointed to the U.S. government's "bad habit" of betraying its Arab dictator friends:

Why won't the [U.N.] Security Council investigate the hanging of Saddam Hussein? How could the leader of an Arab League state be hanged? I am not talking about Saddam Hussein's policies or our [meaning the other Arab leaders] animosity towards him. We all had our disagreements with him. We all disagree with one another. Nothing unites us except this hall. Why is there not an investigation about Saddam Hussein's execution?

An entire Arab government is killed and hung on the gallows - Why?! In the future it is going to be your turns too! [The rest of the Arab officials gathered start laughing] Indeed!

America fought alongside Saddam Hussein against Khomeini [in the Iraq-Iran War]. He was their friend. Cheney was a friend of Saddam Hussein. Rumsfeld, the [U.S.] defence secretary during the bombing of Iraq [in 2003], was a close friend of Saddam Hussein.

At the end they sold him out. They hung him. Even you [the Arab leaders] who are the friends of America - no I will say we - we, the friends of America, America may approve of our hanging one day. [2]

At the end of the 1991 Gulf War, the U.S. deliberately encouraged open revolt against Saddam Hussein's regime, but stood back and watched as Saddam Hussein put down the Iraqi revolts by force.

In 2011, they have done the same thing against Qaddafi and his regime in Libya. Not only was the revolt in Libya instigated by Washington and its allies, the rebels have been supplied with weapons and military advisers.

When the U.S. and its allies triggered the anti-Saddam revolts in Baghdad in the wake of the Gulf War, "no-fly zones" over Iraq were established by the U.S., Britain, and France under the pretext of protecting "the Iraqi people from Saddam." For years Iraq was systematically attacked. The Iraqi Republic was bombed and its capabilities to defend itself were eroded.

Today, the U.S. and its allies have imposed a no-fly zone over Libya with the pretext of protecting "the Libyan people from Qaddafi." If they wanted to protect the Libyan people from Qaddafi, why did they arm Qaddafi in the first place? Why did they enter into business transactions in the wake of the 2006 and 2008 anti-government riots in Libya? There is much more to this narrative, which is part of a broader march to war.

A New Imperial Re-Division of Africa: The London Conference

The London Conference on Libya reveals the true colours of the coalition formed against Libya. In a clear breach of international law, the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, and their allies are making decisions about the future of Libya ahead of any changes on the ground. [4] Democracy is a bottom-up process and Libyan governance is an internal matter to be decided upon by the Libyans themselves. These decisions can not be made by foreign powers that have been the staunch supporters of some of the worst dictatorships.

The nations gathered at the conference table in London have no right whatsoever to decide

on whether Qaddafi must stay or go. This is a sovereignty right that only Libyans alone have. Their involvement in the civil war is a breach of international law, as is their siding with one of the camps in the civil war.

The London Conference on Libya can be likened to the Berlin Conference of 1884. Unlike 1884, this conference is aimed at dividing the spoils of war in Libya, instead of the direct carving up of an entire continent. Also, Washington, instead of staying away like in 1884, is the leading power in this new conference involving the affairs of the African continent.

The position of the U.S. and its Western European allies is very clear:

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and British Foreign Secretary William Hague led the crisis talks in London between 40 countries and institutions, all seeking an endgame aimed at halting Gadhafi's bloody onslaught against Libya's people.

Although the NATO-led airstrikes on Gadhafi's forces that began March 19 aren't aimed at toppling him, dozens of nations agreed in the talks that Libya's future does not include the dictator at the helm.

"Gadhafi has lost the legitimacy to lead, so we believe he must go. We're working with the international community to try to achieve that outcome," Clinton told reporters.

As she spoke, U.S. officials announced that American ships and submarines in the Mediterranean had unleashed a barrage of cruise missiles at Libyan missile storage facilities in the Tripoli area late Monday and early Tuesday — the heaviest attack in days.

German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle echoed Clinton's point.

"One thing is quite clear and has to be made very clear to Gadhafi: His time is over. He must go," Westerwelle said. "We must destroy his illusion that there is a way back to business as usual if he manages to cling to power." [4]

The London Conference on Libya, however, not only deals solely with Libya, but holds the blue prints to a new imperialist re-division of the entire Africa continent. Libya, which became a holdout when Qaddafi changed his mind, will be used to complete the "Union of the Mediterranean" and as a new bridgehead into Africa. This is the start of major steps that will be taken by the U.S. and the E.U. to purge the growing Chinese presence from Africa.

A New Imperial Re-Division of Africa: "Operation Odyssey Dawn"

The name "Operation Odyssey Dawn" is very revealing. It identifies the strategic intent and direction of the war against Libya.

The Odyssey is an ancient Greek epic by the poet Homer which recounts the voyage and trails of the hero Odysseus of Ithaca on his way home. The main theme here is the "return home."

The U.S. and the imperialist powers are on their own odyssey of "return" into Africa.

This project is also intimately related to the broader military agenda in Southwest Asia and the drive into Eurasia, which ultimately targets Russia, China, and Central Asia.

Washington's military agenda pertains to the African and the Eurasian landmass, namely a supercontinent known as the "World-Island." It is control of the World-Island that is the object of U.S. strategies.

The U.S. and NATO have triggered a civil war in Libya, as their pretext for longstanding plans of military aggression. A systematic media disinformation campaign, similar to the one used against Iraq from 1991 to 2003, has been launched.

In fact, the media has led the way for the war in Libya as it did in the former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, and Iraq. The U.S. and its cohorts have also used the atmosphere of popular revolt in the Arab World as a cloud to insert and support their own agenda in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

The Libyan Prize of the Mediterranean

There is an old Libyan proverb that says "if your pocket becomes empty, your faults will be many." In this context, Libyan internal tensions are not dominated by breadbasket issues. This sets Libya apart from Arab countries like Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, and Jordan. [5] In Libya, the lack of freedom as well as rampant corruption has created opposition to the regime, which has been used by the U.S. and its allies as a pretext to justify foreign intervention.

Libya has come a long way since 1951 when it became an independent country. In 1975, the political scientist Henri Habib described these conditions:

When Libya was granted its independence by the United Nations on December 24, 1951, it was described as one of the poorest and most backward nations of the world. The population at the time was not more than 1.5 million, was over 90% illiterate, and had no political experience or knowhow. There were no universities, and only a limited number of high schools which had been established seven years before independence. [6]

According to Habib the state of poverty in Libya was the result of the yoke of Ottoman domination followed by an era of European imperialism in Libya. [7] Habib explains: "Every effort was made to keep the Arab inhabitants [of Libya] in a servile position rendering them unable to make any progress for themselves or their nation." [8] He also explains:

The climax of this oppression came during the Italian administration (1911 - 1943) when the Libyans were not only oppressed by the [foreign] authorities, but were also subjected to the loss and deprivation of their most fertile land which went to colonists brought in from Italy. The British and French who replaced the Italians in 1943 attempted to entrench themselves in [Libya] by various divisive ways, ultimately to fail through a combination of political events and circumstances beyond the control of any one nation. [9]

Despite political mismanagement and corruption, Libya's oil reserves (discovered in 1959) were used to improve the standard of living for its population. Libya has the highest standards of living in Africa.

In addition to its energy reserves, the Libyan state played an important role. Libyan energy

reserves were nationalized after the 1969 coup against the Libyan monarchy. It should be noted that these Libyan energy reserves are a source of wealth in Libya that if fully privatized would be a lucrative spoil of war.

To a certain extent, the isolation of Libya in the past as a pariah state has also played a role in insulating Libya. As most of the world has become globalized from an economic standpoint, Libyan integration into the global economy has in a sense been delayed.

Despite having vast sums of money stolen and squandered by Qaddafi's family and their officials, social services and benefits, such as government housing, are also available in Libya. It has to be cautioned too that none of this means that neo-liberal restructuring and poverty are not afoot in Libya, because they very much are.

Until the conflict in 2011 ignited, there was a huge foreign work force in Libya. Thousands of foreign workers from every corner of the globe went to Libya for employment. This included nationals from Turkey, China, sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the European Union, Russia, Ukraine, and the Arab World.

Neo-Liberalism and the New Libya: Saif Al-Islam Qaddafi and Rapprochement

From 2001 to 2003, a process of rapprochement began between Libya and the U.S. and its E.U. partners. What changed? Colonel Qaddafi did not stop being a dictator or change his behaviour. Rapprochement brought an end to Tripoli's defiance to its former colonial masters. Libya had bowed to U.S. and E.U. pressures and a modus vivandi came into effect.

Qaddafi's credentials as a democrat or a dictator were never an issue. Nor was the use of brute force. Subservience was the real issue.

The force used against the riots in 2006 and 2008 did not even faze the E.U. and Washington, which continued their "business as usual" with Tripoli. Even U.S. government sources implied that economic interests should not be jeopardized by issues of international law or justice; for example, BP pressured the British government in 2007 to move forward with a prisoner exchange with Libya so that a Libyan oil contract could be protected. [10]

Almost overnight, Libya became a new business bonanza for U.S. and E.U. corporations, especially in the energy sectors. These lucrative contracts also included military contracts of the order of \$482 million (U.S.) in military hardware, training, and software from E.U. members (including chemical and biological agents). [11]

Yet, two more things were demanded by Washington, namely the imposition of an imperial tribute as well as the opening up of the Libyan military and intelligence apparatus to U.S. influence. As a result Libya ended all support for the Palestinians and handed the U.S. government its dossiers on resistance groups opposed to Washington, London, Tel Aviv and their allies. This turned Libya into a so-called "partner" in the "Global War on Terrorism." Washington would get involved in all aspects of Libyan state security:

Although U.S. sanctions on Libya were lifted in 2004 and terrorism-related restrictions on foreign assistance were rescinded in 2006, Congress acted to limit the Bush Administration's ability to provide foreign assistance to Libya as a means of pressuring the Administration and the Libyan government to resolve outstanding terrorism claims. The Bush Administration's October 2008 certification [...] ended standing restrictions on the provision of U.S. foreign

assistance contained in appropriations legislation for FY2008 and FY2009. Assistance requests submitted by the Bush and Obama Administrations for FY2009 and FY2010 included funding for programs to reengage with Libyan security forces after “a 35-year break in contact” with their U.S. counterparts and to support Libyan efforts to improve security capabilities in areas of common concern, such as border control, counterterrorism, and export/import monitoring. [12]

Libya has also become active in global banking and finance. The U.S. Federal Reserve Bank of New York even made 73 loans to the Arab Banking Corporation (ABC), which is a bank mostly owned by the Central Bank of Libya, totalling an amount of \$35 billion (U.S.). [13] According to Senator Bernard Sanders of Vermont in a complaint to U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman Benjamin Bernanke, the mostly Libyan-owned bank received over \$26 billion (U.S.) in near zero interest rate loans from the U.S. Federal Reserve that it has been lending back to the U.S. Treasury at a higher interest rate. [14] The Arab Banking Corporation is currently exempted from sanctions on Libya and may serve in creating a fiscal link between Wall Street and Benghazi.

Saif Al-Islam Qaddafi was vital in this process of opening up Libya to trade with Washington and the European Union. In 2000 Saif Al-Islam graduated from a university in Austria and became heavily tied to foreign associates who became his policy advisors and friends.

Prince Andrew of Britain reportedly became a close friend of Saif Al-Islam: so close that Chris Bryant, a senior Labour Party politician, demanded in the British House of Commons that Prince Andrew be removed from his position as special trade envoy at the start of the conflict with Libya. [15]

Western advisors to Tripoli played an important role in shaping Libyan policy. A “New Libya” started to emerge under Saif Al-Islam, who pushed for the adoption of IMF-style neo-liberal economic reforms.

Starting in 2005-2006, significant social and income disparities started to emerge in Libya. The Libyan Revolutionary Committees Movement was in large part disbanded by Saif Al-Islam. Had the Committees Movement remained, they would most probably have sought to prevent the present conflict from escalating.

Moreover, Saif Al-Islam went to London and established ties in Britain with Noman Benotman, a former leader of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). [16] He became friends with Benotman.

Supported by Saif Al-Islam, Benotman and Ali Al-Sallabi, a Libyan citizen based in Qatar (who was on Tripoli’s terrorist list), negotiated a truce between the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and the Libyan government.

It is also worth noting that all the ministers and ambassadors who defected or left Libya were chosen by Saif Al-Islam.

As in the case of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the neo-liberal reforms applied in Libya created social and income disparities which in turn contributed to political instability.



Rapprochement with Tripoli and Imperial Extortion

In late-2008, the U.S. government got Tripoli to pay what was tantamount to an “imperial

tribute.” Libya capitulated and agreed to an uneven reparation agreement with Washington. The agreement is called the “Claims Settlement Agreement between the United States of America and the Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab.” Under the agreement Libya would concede \$1.3 billion U.S. dollars to Washington, while Washington would give the Libyans \$300 million U.S. dollars. Article 4 of the agreement’s annex states:

Once contributions to the Fund Account reach the amount of U.S. \$1.8 billion (one billion eight hundred million U.S. dollars), the amount of U.S. \$1.5 billion (one billion five hundred million U.S. dollars) shall be deposited into Account A [the U.S. account] and the amount of U.S. \$300 million (three hundred million U.S. dollars) shall be deposited into Account B [Libya’s account], which in both cases shall constitute the receipt of resources under Article III (2) of the Agreement. [17]

Despite all this, Libya has remained a relatively wealthy country. In 2010, Tripoli even made an offer to buy a portion of British Petroleum (BP), one of the world’s largest corporations. [18] The National Oil Company of Libya also remains one of the largest oil companies in the world.

Even with the lucrative business deals that resulted from the rapprochement, the U.S. and the E.U. have always had an objective of furthering their gains and control. The E.U. powers and Washington merely waited for the right opportunity. Plans for taking over and controlling Libya and the Libyan energy sector were never abandoned. Nor could Washington and Western Europe accept anything less than a full-fledged puppet government in Libya.

Upheaval and Qaddafi’s Response

Even with the rapprochement with Tripoli, the U.S. and its E.U. partners continued to cultivated ties to so-called “opposition” figures and organizations with a view to implementing regime change at some future date. This is why the National Salvation Front of Libya has been mostly active in Washington. In the words of a timely Congressional Research Service (CRS) report (February 18, 2011):

The National Conference for the Libyan Opposition (an umbrella organization of opposition groups headed by the National Libyan Salvation Front (NLSF) [...]) and Internet-based organizers called for a “day of rage” to take place on February 17. Similar events had been organized by anti-government groups in many other countries in the Middle East and North Africa over the previous month. On February 17, [2011] hundreds of protestors took to the streets in Benghazi and in other cities in its vicinity. [19]

Colonel Qaddafi has ruled Libya under a harsh dictatorship that has systematically used violence and fear. Yet, the level of violence that has put Libya in a state of upheaval has been distorted. [20] Many of the initial reports coming out of Libya in early-2011 were also unverified and in many cases misleading. These reports have to be studied very carefully. According to the same CRS report prepared for the U.S. Congress, initial reports all came from “local [Libyan] media accounts, amateur video footage and anecdotes, and reports from human rights organizations and opposition groups in exile.” [21]

Qaddafi’s objectives are to preserve his regime and not to undo it. After Qaddafi became

aware of the growing foreign threat directed towards his regime, the use of force was on the whole restrained. The regime in Tripoli did not want to give further excuses to the U.S., the E.U., and NATO for military intervention in Libya.

Qaddafi had exercised restraint for the sake of preserving his dictatorship. The Libyan regime knew very well that a bloody civil war would be used as a justification for intervention under a humanitarian pretext. That is why Qaddafi opted to try to negotiate where he could instead of using force. The use of violence is not to the favour of the Libyan regime or Libya, but rather works in the favour of the U.S. and the E.U. states.

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NOTES

1 Christopher M. Blanchard and James Zanotti, "Libya: Background and U.S. Relations," Congressional Research Service, February 18, 2011, p.12; the source quoted are as follows: Joseph T. Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War with Qaddafi*, (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003); Bernard Gwertzman, "Shultz Advocates U.S. Covert Programs to Depose Qaddafi," *The New York Times*, April 28, 1986; and Clifford Krauss, "Failed Anti-Qaddafi Effort Leaves U.S. Picking Up the Pieces," *The New York Times*, March 12, 1991.

2 Muammar Qaddafi, Speech at the Twentieth Arab League Summit in Damascus (Address, Twentieth Arab League Summit, Damascus, Syria: March 29, 2008).

3 David Stringer, "Top envoys agree Libya's Moammar Gadhafi must step down but don't discuss arming rebels," *Associated Press* (AP), March 29, 2011.

4 *Ibid.*

5 This does not mean that the issues in these Arab countries are exclusively breadbasket issues, because personal freedom and corrupt rule are also major motivations for public anger in the respective Arab societies of the mentioned states. What this means is that the issue of economic livelihood is an important factor in these other protests. Also, the 2008 Libyan protests were reported to be also be tied to unemployment, but economic issues are not the driving force in the events taking place in Libya.

6 Henri Pierre Habib, *Politics and Government of Revolutionary Libya* (Montmagny, Québec: Le Cercle de Livre de France Ltée, 1975) p.1.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 Blanchard and Zanotti, "Libya: Background and U.S.," *Op. cit.*, pp.12-13.

11 European Union, "Twelfth Annual Report According to Article 8(2) of Council Common Position 2008/944/CFSP Defining Common Rules Governing Control of Exports of Military Technology and Equipment," *Official Journal of the European Union*, vol. 24 (C9) (February 13, 2011): pp.160-162; This is about 344 million euros. The conversation rate used to present the value of these contracts is 1 euro equals 1.40279 U.S. dollars (based on the exchange rate on March 8, 2011).

12 Blanchard and Zanotti, "Libya: Background and U.S.," *Op. cit.*, pp.13-14.

13 Donal Griffin and Robert Ivry, "Libya-Owned Arab Banking Corp. Drew at Least \$5 Billion From Fed in Crisis," *Bloomberg*, April 1, 2011.

14 Bernard Sanders, *Letter to Ben S. Bernanke, Timothy Geithner, and John Walsh*, March 31, 2011: <http://sanders.senate.gov/graphics/libya_letter.pdf>.

15 *British Broadcasting Corporation* (BBC) *News*, "Duke of York must lose trade job, says Labour MP," February 29, 2011.

16 It would be Noman Benotman who would arrange for Musa Al-Kusa's defection to Britain.

17 *Claims Settlement Agreement between the United States of America and the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya*, August 14, 2008, p.4; the CRS report being cited herein also mentions this, but makes a mistake about the amount being given to Libyan and asserts that it is "\$300 billion."

18 Andrew England and Simeon Kerr, "Libya hints at taking stake in BP," *Financial Times*, July 5, 2010.

19 Blanchard and Zanotti, "Libya: Background and U.S.," *Op. cit.*, p.5; it is worthy to note that the two researchers quote the Saudi-owned *Asharq Al-Awsat* (the specific article cited is as follows: Khaled Mahmoud, "Gaddafi ready for Libya's 'Day of Rage,'" *Asharq Al-Awsat*, February 9, 2011) which interestingly enough makes a link between previous Libyan protests on February 17, 2006 about the offensive cartoons published in Denmark about the Prophet Mohammed that transformed into anti-Qaddafi protests.

20 This fact in no way justifies any of the state violence in Libya, but has to be examined. The context of the violence in Libya has to also be looked over too.

21 Blanchard and Zanotti, "Libya: Background and U.S.," *Op. cit.*, p.5.

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