

Libya: NATO Provides the Bombs; The French “Left” Provides the Ideology

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Last April, former *Le Monde diplomatique* director Ignacio Ramonet published (in [Mémoire des Luites](#)) a text entitled [“Libya, the Just and the Unjust.”](#) The war had been started a few weeks earlier, inaugurated by French aircraft which had the honor of dropping the first bombs on Tripoli. On March 19, “a wave of pride swept through the Elysée palace,” [Le Monde](#) reported. At the time, experts and commentators had no doubt that within a few days or a few weeks at the very most the country would be rid of the “tyrant,” thanks to the anticipated popular uprising, facilitated by the aerial nudge from the coalition, aglow in the sage aura of Bernard-Henri Lévy.

To be sure, in his text Ignacio Ramonet took his distance from NATO. He nevertheless stated from the very outset: “The Libyan insurgents deserve the help of all democrats.”

God be praised, certain democrats were not stingy with their help: in five months, more than 15,000 airstrikes delivered several thousand tons of bombs, not to mention the latest generation of missiles, special forces on the ground in the form of instructors — a gift prohibited in principle, but love is blind. Only the result counted: Total victory.

The pun is easy but unavoidable, especially since [Libération](#) published the letter in which the National Transitional Council (NTC) promised to grant 35% of concessions to the French petroleum giant Total “in exchange” (the term used) for French military engagement (a document which naturally triggered a hasty denial from the Quai d’Orsay). The fight for freedom is such a noble cause. The author nevertheless concluded his article by taking note of “the strong odor of petroleum hanging over the whole business.”

Indeed. But nevertheless, his approach was no different from that of all the Western leaders and media. In particular, he accepted the analysis of the Libyan uprising as an active part of the “Arab spring.” Lumping events together in that way disregards the reality of each separate nation. And in this case it is even the opposite of the truth.

In Tunisia and then in Egypt, popular movements, which certainly were not identical, did share some important points in common. In terms of domestic policy, the mobilization saw the convergence of the working classes with what are called the “middle classes” in a movement whose social demands were inseparable from democratic objectives; in each of those two countries, the workers’ struggles and strikes of recent years — harshly repressed — constituted an essential background for the development of the movement, all in a context of mass poverty.

In terms of foreign policy, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak were unquestionably

puppets of the West, of which they were always an integral part, geopolitically, economically, and ideologically.

The Libyan situation was altogether different. In social terms, to start with, the country was by far the most advanced in Africa according to the [Human Development Index](#) (HDI). In that regard it is striking to consult the statistics provided by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), whether concerning life expectancy (74.5 years — before the war, that is), the eradication of illiteracy, the status of women, or access to health care and to education. The standard of living and social protection were very substantially subsidized. There is no need to belong to the Moammer Kadhafi fan club to recall these facts.

Moreover, by his history, Kadhafi can scarcely be put in the same category as his two former neighbors. Indeed, Ignacio Ramonet correctly observes that around 2000 he did spur a gradual rapprochement with Western leaders, who ended up rolling out the red carpet for him, business being business. However, they never considered him “one of the family”; he was always too unpredictable, and above all he never abandoned the “Third Worldist” tone of his discourse, particularly within the African Union in which he played a very special role.

Still, the privatizations and liberalizations undertaken in recent years did not fail to impact on class relations. A certain category of the population got rich, sometimes very much so, while adopting liberal ideology. Precisely some of those to whom the “Guide” entrusted the “modernization” of the country and privileged contacts with international high finance (and its university connections, notably in the United States) came around to the idea that, in this context, the historic leader was more of an obstacle than an asset for the completion of the process. Part of the middle classes and well-to-do youth, especially in Benghazi for historic reasons, therefore constituted a social base for the rebellion — a rebellion which was armed from the start, not made up of peaceful crowds.

The countless reports and interviews with the “anti-Kadhafi” youth are enlightening. [Le Monde](#) cited those well-to-do young women who shouted “no milk for our children, but arms for our brothers.” A slogan which would probably have astonished the Egyptian demonstrators . . . and which in any case illustrates the absurdity of lumping these events together.

In short, the absence of social demands and even the presence of a demand for “more economic freedom”; (not systematic but nevertheless frequent and now louder) calls for a stricter application of “Islamic law”; NTC leaders closely linked to the Western business world or even trained there; and a movement which was only able to win thanks to NATO bombing — all that is not exactly what is known as a revolution. Symbolically, the “new” Libyan flag is the old banner of King Idris the First, overthrown in 1969. At this point the term that comes to mind would rather be a counter-revolution.

On that hypothesis — if only as a proposal for debate — then things look a bit different. Of course that doesn’t mean that the insurgents who want to liquidate Moammer Kadhafi are all Western agents; many are surely sincere. But so were many Chouans during the Vendée wars. Many of them were massacred nonetheless — sometimes blindly but necessarily in order to save the young revolution.

And when it comes to “massacres,” the protégés of the Allied Powers don’t seem to need many lessons, to say the least. That applies in particular to the veritable pogroms that took

place — and may still be going on — against civilians with black skin. Presented as “regrettable errors” by Western media when they couldn’t be totally ignored, they seem to have been much more widespread than what we have been shown. Above all, they indicate a class racism, since, whether Libyans or immigrants, blacks make up the main ranks of what could be called in broad terms the working class, not exactly in the good graces of the insurgents, least of all in Cyrenaica.

In any case, the “protection of civilians” is not only a high point of hypocrisy on the part of Western leaders. Above all it constitutes the pretext for intervention, absolutely contrary to the founding principle of the United Nations Charter: the sovereignty and equality before the law of each State.

It is this eminently progressive principle that Cuban, Venezuelan, and many other Latin American leaders rightly defend, to the chagrin of Ramonet. The latter thus denounces their “huge historic error” in refusing to take the side of the rebels. On the contrary, by adopting that position, they are making the greatest contribution imaginable to the social and political emancipation of peoples. It is true that, when it comes to the idea of intervention, those Latin American leaders have been inoculated against it by the historic solicitude of the Yankees for their southern neighbors.

Caracas, Havana, and others are accused by Ramonet of practicing a Realpolitik by which States act according to their interests. Thank goodness! For the interest of Venezuela, Cuba, and other Latin American States (most particularly the progressive ones) is indeed to defend themselves against the “legalization” of intervention whose only aim is to justify imperialist powers minding other people’s business.

Ignacio Ramonet praises [UN Resolution 1973](#) which authorized the use of force against Tripoli. He sees an extra dose of legitimacy for that text in the prior approval by the Arab League. Strange way of looking at things: that organization, whose submission to Western leaders is no secret, had not up to then made a name for itself by its active devotion to the freedom of peoples (and of the Palestinian people in particular). Dominated by big players as progressive as Saudi Arabia, it is an indisputable point of reference when it comes to promoting democracy. . .

Ramonet adds that “the Muslim powers that were hesitant at first, such as Turkey, came around to taking part in the operation.” Are we to understand that a Muslim power has a special legitimacy to bless the flight of Rafale and Mirage fighter-bombers? That should make the Kurds happy.

Finally, to finish telling off Chavez, Castro, or Correa, Ramonet recalls that “many Latin American leaders had rightly denounced the passivity or complicity of the great Western democracies regarding the violations committed against civilian populations between 1970 and 1990 by military dictatorships in Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay.”

Let us recall what the author knows as well as anyone else: as for “passivity” or “complicity” of the “Western democracies,” in reality it was at their direct instigation, and with their active cooperation, that the bloody coups were carried out. But even so, nobody ever heard that at the time the democrats of those countries called for air raids on Santiago or commando raids on Buenos Aires. It is by themselves — and never from the outside — that peoples gain their freedom.

Beyond the case of Libya, that is the point, the most essential, which deserves to be discussed among all those who adhere to the right of peoples to decide their own destiny — what used to be called anti-imperialism.

Used to be? In fact, it was so up until the fall of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact opened the way to the reconquest of the entire planet by capitalism, its dominations and its imperial rivalries. And that left no other choice to countries except to align themselves with the canons of “human rights,” the “rule of law,” and the “market economy” — three terms which have become synonymous — or else find themselves under fire from the cannons of the planetary policemen shamelessly calling themselves the “international community.”

By the way, an interesting scene took place in Brussels on the occasion of the European summit last March 24 and 25. It was nearly one o'clock in the morning. The French president rolled into the pressroom. Questioned as to the bombing raids begun five days before, he rejoiced: “It’s a historic moment (. . .) what is happening in Libya is creating jurisprudence (. . .) it is a major turning point in the foreign policy of France, Europe, and the world.”

In reality, Nicolas Sarkozy revealed there what is probably the least visible but the most significant objective of this war. That very morning, the special advisor of the UN Secretary General also described as “historic” the resolution putting into practice the “responsibility to protect” for the first time since the adoption of that fearsome principle in 2005. [Edward Luck](#) added: “Perhaps our attack against Kadhafi (sic!) is a warning to other regimes.”

Granted, when it comes to armed intervention against a sovereign State, the so-called “international community” is no beginner. But it is the first time that the UN Security Council explicitly gave the green light, and that its secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, played an active role in unleashing hostilities. The full implications of such a situation need to be weighed: the brutal challenge to the sovereignty of States has been legalized — even if not legitimized. The dominant planetary oligarchies, whose final horizon is “world governance” without borders, have thereby scored a major point: interventionism (“preventive” at that, according to Mr. Luck) can henceforth be the rule.

This conception, which explicitly contradicts the United Nations Charter, is a time bomb: it undermines the very foundations on which it was written and could mean a veritable return to barbarism in international relations.

For the uncompromising defense of the principle of non-intervention does not stem from some narrow, archaic, fundamentalist cult, but primarily from a basic principle: it is up to each people alone to make the choices that condition its future. Otherwise, the very notion of politics loses its meaning — whatever dramatic paths it must sometimes face.

It is the exactly the same with intervention as with torture. In principle, civilized people are against its use — but someone can always be found to insist that “in extreme cases” one should be able to make an exception (“to avoid murderous attacks” was what they said during the Algerian “events”; to “avoid the massacre of civilians” is the justification today at the Elysée and elsewhere). Now, evidence shows that, once one exception is granted, soon ten, then a hundred, will be allowed, for the sordid debate has been accepted that weighs the suffering inflicted on a tortured person against what may be gained from it, always presented in humanistic terms. It is the same thing with respect for sovereignty: a single exception leads to eradication of the rule. There is no — not any! — circumstance that

justifies intervention. Suppose that Nicolas Sarkozy pursued a policy totally contrary to the interests of his country and his people (absurd hypothesis, of course) — that would in no way justify Libyan — or Bengali, or Ghanaian — aircraft dive-bombing the Champs Élysées.

And what is one to make of the statement that “The European Union has a specific responsibility. Not only military. It must think of the next stage of consolidation of the new democracies which emerge from such a nearby region”? One can’t help noticing that Ramonet echoes word for word the ambitions displayed by Brussels. Leave aside the “not only military” which indicates, if words mean anything, that the EU would have grounds to intervene militarily as well. But this “specific responsibility” which European leaders constantly claim to possess, who gave it to them? A “benevolence” naturally attributed to a great power and its neighborhood? Such is precisely the description of an empire, albeit in gestation.

It is hard to avoid thinking of the speech given in Strasbourg by the current president of the Republic in January 2007, when he was, while campaigning, seeking to confirm his commitment as a “convinced European.” On that occasion, he glorified “the shattered dream of Charlemagne and of the Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades, the great schism between Eastern and Western Christianity, the fallen glory of Louis XIV and Napoleon. . .” Thereupon continued Nicolas Sarkozy: “Europe is today the only force capable of carrying forward a project of civilization.” He went on to conclude: “I want to be the president of a France which will bring the Mediterranean into the process of its reunification (sic!) after twelve centuries of division and painful conflicts (. . .). America and China have already begun the conquest of Africa. How long will Europe wait to build the Africa of tomorrow? While Europe hesitates, others advance.”

Not wanting to be left behind, Dominique Strauss-Kahn around the same time expressed his desire for a Europe stretching “from the cold ice of the Arctic in the North to the hot sands of the Sahara in the South (. . .) and that Europe, I believe, if it continues to exist, will have reconstituted the Mediterranean as an internal sea, and will have reconquered the space that the Romans, or Napoleon more recently, attempted to consolidate.” And by the way, the highest distinction bestowed by the EU was baptized the “Charlemagne Prize” — a hint as to what European integration was from its origins and has never ceased to be: a project necessarily and essentially imperial and ultra-free-market.

The point then is not whether or not Colonel Kadhafi is an innocent choir boy exclusively concerned with the happiness of peoples, but rather what tomorrow’s world will be like: the free choice of each people deciding its future, or the acceptance of intervention as the norm, no doubt dressed up as “human rights”?

For there is one obvious truth that should never be forgotten: intervention has never been, and will never be, anything other than the intervention of the strong in the affairs of the weak. The respect for sovereignty in international relations is what the equal vote is to citizenship: certainly no absolute guarantee, far from it, but a substantial asset against the law of the jungle. The latter is what could very well take over the world stage. If all that seems too abstract, let us come back to the recent history of Libya. After years of being subjected to embargo and treated as a pariah, Colonel Kadhafi undertook the rapprochement mentioned above with the West, which notably took the form in December 2003 of an official renunciation of any nuclear arms program in exchange for guarantees of non-aggression promised specifically by Washington. Eight years later, there is no getting around the fact that that commitment lasted only up until the day when they felt they now

had reasons to trample it under foot. Suddenly, in the four corners of the earth everyone can measure the worth of the word given by the powerful and just how much they value the commitments they have made. The leaders of the DPRK (North Korea) thus publicly congratulated themselves for not having given in to pressure to abandon their nuclear program. They were right. It would be logical to draw the obvious conclusions in Teheran, in Caracas, in Minsk, and in many other capitals. It would be perfectly legitimate.

Barely a few months before Libya, there was Ivory Coast — another point of pride for Sarkozy; already the UN Security Council gave its blessing to gunboat diplomacy, on the sole pretext of allegations of electoral irregularities — a first!

And already the Westerners are polishing up their (military and ideological) weapons for their next adventures. Thus Paddy Ashdown, who notably spent four years as EU High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina, confided to the *Times* that from now on we should adopt and get used to the “Libyan model” of intervention, in contrast to the “Iraqi model” of massive invasion, which showed its inadequacies.

For his part, the NATO Secretary General made a plea on September 5 for the Europeans to pool better their military means in this period of budgetary restriction. For Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “as Libya proved, we can’t know where the next crisis will come, but it will come.” At least that much is clear.

That being the case, does it really make any sense to analyze the Syrian crisis as the uprising of a people against the “tyrant” Bashar al-Assad? On the contrary, one may be forgiven for thinking that he is just the next on the hit list of Western governments. In that case, is there really nothing more urgent to do, even in terms of the cause of emancipation of peoples, than to align oneself with the latter, even unintentionally?

As for the positions taken by Ignacio Ramonet, one will not insult him by assimilating him to the “left” which has long since given up the memory of struggles. But one is obliged to note that in this case he finds himself swept along with the latter which unhesitatingly chose its side in the Libyan affair. That once again illustrates the sad paradox of our era: the forces of globalized capitalism and reinvigorated imperialism henceforth draw their essential ideological ammunition from “the left” — from “human rights” to immigration, from ecology to globalism (which is the exact opposite of internationalism). But that is another debate.

Or is it?

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