

The Mainstream Media and the Destruction of Libya

Love For Libya: 2011-2015

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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Islamic State's horrific [mass beheading](#) of 21 Coptic Christians last month forced a reluctant UK media system to return to Libya, scene of saturation news coverage in 2011.

Then, the media lens hovered obsessively over every Libyan government crime – indeed, over every alleged and even predicted crime – in an effort to justify a Nato 'intervention' that was [supported](#) by most media and 557 British MPs, with just 13 opposed.

'We have to do *something*', we were told. The results are summed up by the single fact that 'about 1.8 million Libyans – nearly a third of the country's population – have fled to Tunisia'. Civilians have been 'driven away by random shelling and shooting, as well as shortages of cash, electricity and fuel', with conditions 'only worsening', the New York Times [reports](#).

Today, as many as 1,700 armed gangs are fighting over a country in which at least five governments have tried and failed to restore basic order. Djiby Diop, a 20-year-old from Senegal who spent three months amidst the chaos, [explains](#):

'Everyone in Libya is armed now. Every guy of my age has a gun. If you don't work for them, they shoot you. If you don't give them all your money, they shoot you. Or they shoot you just for fun. Or they will throw you in prison and you have to pay 400 dinars (£200) to get released.'

Or in the words of Flavio Di Giacomo, a spokesman for the International Organisation for Migration:

'It's complete anarchy in Libya and it has become very, very dangerous for migrants.'

One [consequence](#) is that thousands of Libyan refugees are risking their lives in rough winter seas as they try to reach Italy. The bad weather and small vessels mean the journey, frequently forced at gunpoint, is 'like a death sentence'.

According to the New York Times, the fighting has damaged Libya's oil exports so severely that 'there is now a risk that the country's currency and economy will soon collapse'. Musbah Alkari, manager of the reserves department at the Central Bank of Libya, [warns](#):

'A currency collapse is less than two years away.'

The atrocity by Islamic State terrorists took place in Sirte, a city of 100,000 people that was reduced to a smoking ruin by Nato's terror flyers in 2011. The BBC [reported](#) in 2012 that it was 'hard to find a building undamaged by bullets or shells'. Or indeed bombs.

'An Inspiration To The World'

Just three-and-a-half years ago, controversial British prime minister David Cameron flew to Benghazi to celebrate Britain's role in illegally overthrowing the Libyan government under Colonel Gaddafi. Cameron [declared](#):

'It's great to be in a free Benghazi and a free Libya. Your city was an inspiration to the world.'

To its credit, even the Daily Mail [perceives](#) a problem:

'With carnage spreading throughout the Arab world, this is yet another lesson to jejune politicians, of every party, that they should be careful what they wish for – and think once, twice and three times before they intervene in foreign wars.'

The Mail's own record on Nato's regime change – technical term, 'no-fly zone' – although oppositional was patchy. In March 2011, a Mail leader wrote of Cameron:

'In this respect, his plan to establish a military no-fly zone is sensible, if not without risk to British pilots.' (Leader, 'Mr Cameron and a gamble on Gaddafi,' Daily Mail, March 1, 2011)

In fact, as was obvious then, Nato's bombing campaign made regime change all but inevitable, if not without risk to the entire Libyan population. Gaddafi would of course not be allowed to 'defy the international community' and thus humiliate Nato.

It is now clear that the claims that Gaddafi used Viagra-fuelled mass rape and foreign mercenaries as weapons of war, and that he had plans for a massacre in Benghazi, were [pure invention](#). Similarly, there is no doubt that the West, fully focused on regime change, refused to negotiate a peaceful solution to the conflict.

How much of this has been covered by 'mainstream' news just four years later? The level of denial was indicated by BBC News at Ten on February 16:

'Islamic State extremists have exploited a power vacuum in Libya after the fall of Colonel Gaddafi, and started building a power base there as well as in Iraq and Syria.'

Islamic State can be made to take the blame for the actions of our own, far more lethal, extremists. There was no hint from the BBC that Western power was a major cause of the 'power vacuum'. Over triumphant archive footage from Benghazi, diplomatic correspondent James Robbins added:

‘David Cameron and then French President Sarkozy jointly celebrated with the Libyans of Benghazi after leading Western air strikes which saved the city and helped bring down Gaddafi, a ruthless dictator.’

‘Saved the city’? In the Telegraph, right-wing London mayor Boris Johnson peddled a similarly deceptive version of history, [claiming](#) that David Cameron ‘was instrumental in ending the massacre in Benghazi’. Johnson is presumably aware that the massacre never actually took place. He presented the UK’s record of mass killing as a kind of Wodehousian lark:

‘It is not necessarily something to brag about, but it is nonetheless a fact that of the roughly 200 countries in the world today, Britain has at one time or other invaded or conquered 178 of them. The only people to escape are places like Luxembourg... All we want is to do our very considerable best to help keep the world safe...’

With a million dead in Iraq, with Afghanistan, Libya and Syria in ruins, Johnson chuckled:

‘As our American friends instinctively understand, it is the existence of strong and well-resourced British Armed Forces that gives this country the ability to express and affirm our values overseas: of freedom, democracy, tolerance, pluralism.’

Thus the loveable, tousle-haired rogue – Bertie Wooster redrawn by Stephen King – proving once again that anything goes.

‘Where Government Falters’

A Guardian leader on February 16, [commented](#):

‘Where government falters or is absent, simple chaos can be the consequence, which is bad enough. But it is worse when such movements as Islamic State (Isis) take root.’

Libya’s government did *not* falter in 2011; it was overthrown with the crucial assistance of Nato’s air armada. Literally the only, oblique reference to US-UK responsibility came in this Guardian comment:

‘Outside actors supporting different groups have made matters worse.’

Even this could have been a reference to post-bombing support. The Guardian’s reticence is understandable given its enthusiasm for the ‘intervention’. On February 24, 2011, in a leader titled, ‘The urge to help,’ the Guardian wrote:

‘The quicker Muammar Gaddafi falls, the better.’

The newspaper [supported](#) the no-fly zone:

'If... the [Libyan] regime starts, or resumes, bombarding its citizens and shows signs of being able to do so for some time, a no-fly zone should become an option. Lord Owen was therefore right to say that military preparations should be made and the necessary diplomatic approaches, above all to the Russians and the Chinese, set in train to secure UN authority for such action.'

Whereas the Guardian 2015 buried the role of Nato, the Guardian on March 29, 2011, [commented](#):

'That gives Nato planes a slender window to tip the military balance further against Gaddafi.'

The Guardian quietly cheered the results of violence five months later:

'Critics and supporters of the intervention should be able to join in agreeing that it was a close-run thing, that we are lucky it has turned out, so far, reasonably well...'

Four years later, with thousands dead, towns smashed and 400,000 homeless, the same newspaper [reported](#):

""It was better under Gaddafi," says the young Libyan student, studying the froth bubbling over the top of his cappuccino in a cafe in Tunis as he contemplates the revolution that swept Muammar Gaddafi from power four years ago. "I never thought to say this before, I hated him, but things were better then. At least we had security.""

In the ostensibly left-liberal, oligarch-owned Independent, Ian Birrell recognised that almost a third of the country's 6.2 million population had fled. No matter, Birrell felt able to [write](#):

'I would argue that Britain and France were right to step in. The failures came later on... And it should be remembered that this was not the unwarranted invasion of a foreign nation, as in Iraq, but limited air strikes in support of a popular uprising against a hated regime.'

Again, with US-UK prestige on the line, Gaddafi *had* to be overthrown – the 'no-fly zone' was a de facto invasion. The attempt to 'build a democracy' failed for various historical reasons, Birrell laments, but:

'That does not mean it was wrong to support those seeking dignity and freedom.'

The problem was not that the Nato allies became involved in a violent and illegal regime change but that they didn't interfere more deeply:

'Unfortunately the West, scarred by experiences in Iraq, was reluctant to become too involved in the country's post-conflict reconstruction...'

Birrell concludes:

‘British foreign policy should be biased on the side of democracy and human rights rather than towards despotic regimes that cannot last for ever.’

Yes it should, but the fact is *it is not*, making a nonsense of the idea that ‘we’ *should* have done more to ‘build a democracy’.

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