

# Welcome to the New Libya, a Country 'Liberated' by NATO: No Oil Revenues, No Security, No Water, No Electricity...

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Welcome to the new Libya, a country 'liberated' by NATO which now finds itself without the oil revenues which could make it rich, with no security, no stability and assassinations and corruption at unprecedented levels.

Last Friday, the *Economist* magazine published a report about the implosion of Libya. My attention was caught by the pictures that illustrated the piece – particularly one of some graffiti on the wall of a sea front cafe in the capital Tripoli. 'The only way to Heaven is the way to the airport' it read.

The joke is indicative of the troubled state of Libya nowadays following 'liberation' by NATO warplanes in the sky and the revolution on the ground which toppled the dictatorial regime of Muammar al-Ghaddafi.

Recently I have met many people who are visiting London from Libya and they tell stories of life there which are hard to believe.

The capital Tripoli had no water or electricity for a whole week.

The armed militia dominate and rule the streets in the absence of a workable government, a national security establishment and basic municipal services.

Onoud Zanoussi, the 18 year-old daughter of Abdullah Zanoussi, the former chief of Ghaddafi's security establishment, was kidnapped on her release from prison following seven months behind bars accused of entering her country illegally. She was abducted in front of the prison gates and the abductor was one of the guards!

Two years ago, the British and French business community sharpened their teeth and rubbed their hands with glee in anticipation of their share of Libyan reconstruction. Now there isn't a single foreign businessman in Tripoli, all of them ran for their lives after the assassination of the American Ambassador and attacks on several foreign Embassies and Consulates.

During the NATO bombardment, news from Libya dominated the front pages and was the first news item on every Western and Arabic television station. There was 24-hour coverage about the Libyan Liberation miracle and the great victory achieved by NATO and the revolutionaries. Nowadays it is very rare to find a Western reporter there and even more rare to read a decent report about Libya and what is really going on there.

Oil was the main objective and the real reason for the NATO intervention; but oil production has all but ceased due to a strike by security guards on the oil fields and export terminal. The ostensible reason for this strike is the demand for a pay rise but there is another, equally powerful, motive – they are protesting the demands of various separatist movements who are calling for self-rule for oil-rich Barca (Cyrenaica) with its capital in Benghazi. Most of Libya's oil reserves are situated here.

Rather than the local or national government, a militia is in control of most of the oil fields and the export terminal; it has started to sell huge amounts of oil on the black market and is trying to expand these activities leading Ali Zidan, the Prime Minister, to threaten to bomb any unauthorized oil tanker going anywhere near these sites.

The irony is that the same thing is happening now in Eastern Syria where the militia and local tribes are in control of the oil fields in Deir Al-Zour, refining the oil themselves by hand and selling it on illegally. The same thing is still happening in the south of Iraq.

Iraq and Libya, of course, have 'benefitted' from Western intervention and Britain and France have been proud to repeat what the mother of the West (the US) used to say about Iraq; first in Libya and now – of negotiations fail – in Syria. That is: intervention will bestow great sophistication on the affected country which will immediately become a model of prosperity and stability and lead the way for other Arab countries, which are ruled by dictators, to invite and welcome military intervention. In fact, this model has produced the worst kind of anarchy, failed security, political collapse and disintegration of the state.

Chaos rules in Libya. The assassination of politicians and journalists has become normal news in today's Libya to the extent that Colonel Yussef Ali al-Asseifar – who was charged with investigating a rash of assassinations and arresting the people behind it – was himself assassinated on the 29 August when men from an unidentified group put a bomb under his car.

On the anniversary of 9/11 last week, a huge bomb ripped through the Foreign Ministry building in Benghazi.

Human Rights Watch has highlighted another atrocity in Tripoli on August 26, 2013, at the Main Corrections and Rehabilitation Institution, known by its former name al-Roueimy, where around 500 detainees, including five women, were being held. The prisoners were on hunger strike to protest the fact that were detained without charge and in the absence of a fair trial. Unable to produce its own security detail, the government called in the Supreme Security Committee – composed of former anti-Gaddafi militiamen – to put down the uprising. Militia forces stormed the prison and shot the prisoners with live ammunition, wounding 19 people.

The Prime Minister of Libya – Awadh al-Barassi resigned on 4 August and was replaced by Ali Zeidan. Then, on 18 August, the interior minister, Mohammed al-Sheikh, resigned after only three months in post. He cited lack of support from Ali Zeidan and the government's failure to deal with widespread unrest and violence, to gain the people's trust, or to adequately fund state agencies to provide the most basic services.

Libya is simply disintegrating along tribal and geographical fault lines. Most of its people are

in state of fury, including the Berbers in the south, and national reconciliation is a distant prospect.

Popular frustration is at its peak; yet when demonstrators took to the streets outside the barracks of the powerful 'Libyan Shield Brigade' to protest the unwarranted power of the militia, 31 people of their number were shot dead. The militia act completely outside the law.

Suleiman Kjam, a member of the parliamentary committee for Energy, told a Bloomberg reporter that the government is now spending its financial reserves after the production of oil dropped from 1.4 million barrels per day earlier this year to less than 160,000 bpd. He warned that if this situation continues, in the next few months, the government will not be able to pay the salaries of its employees.

The Gadaffi regime – and we say this for the millionth time – was an oppressive dictatorship but Libya nowadays, with corruption at its peak and security non-existent, is difficult to understand or accept. Especially when we remember that Libya was liberated by the most sophisticated and advanced countries on the planet, according to Western criteria.

Mr Mohammad Abdel Azziz, the Libyan foreign minister, surprised many in the West and Arab world alike on 4 September when he objected to imminent US air strikes on Syria at a special meeting of the Arab League he was chairing to discuss possible intervention.

Maybe Mr Abdel Azziz, like many of his Libyan people, has formed his opinions as a result of the experiences of his own countrymen after Western military intervention

We hope that the people of other Arab countries, and particularly Syria, will learn from the Libyan example.

It is true that some suggest that this is a temporary state of affairs for Libya and that following this transitional period, stability will reign. They advise us to be patient.

We hope their prophecy will prove to be correct but remain extremely skeptical with Iraq and Afghanistan also before our eyes.

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