

One Down

Earlier this year, Tariq Ali wrote that the NATO intervention in Libya is ‘another case of selective vigilantism by the US and its attack dogs in the west.’ The ‘humanitarian intervention’ ‘is part of an orchestrated response to show support for the movement against one dictator in particular and by so doing to bring the Arab rebellions to an end by asserting western control, confiscating their impetus and spontaneity and trying to restore the status quo ante’ (‘Libya is another case of selective vigilantism by the west,’ *The Guardian*, 29 March 2011). The lack of a no-fly zone over Yemen or oil-dry Syria reflects the West’s general tactic when it comes to dictators in the Middle East: Support them as long as possible, and when the army, the business world, or another source of private power overthrows them, send them off somewhere obscure and issue dramatic proclamations about our passionate love affair with democracy and human rights, before working towards resorting the old regime at the cost of a few altered faces.

But in the case of Libya the promises of a no-fly zone were completely empty. UN Resolution 1973 did in fact call for a no-fly zone, but Britain, France and the US immediately disregarded it and turned their attention to supporting the rebels, with a ceasefire being imposed on Gaddafi’s forces only. So although supporting the rebels (who, we should add, didn’t ask for help to begin with) was a more sensible option than supporting Gaddafi, we should recognise this intervention for what it actually was – an effort for regime change, illegal under international law. By lending a hand to overthrow an unreliable dictator, the West ensured that the natural resources of Libya will continue to flow into the right hands, and not be used for national development projects inside the devastated nation. Ali’s warnings that ‘a new Karzai is on the way’ seem to accurately forebode the state of the nation after the recent death of its leader.

A Stop the War Coalition newsletter recently commented that ‘in Libya itself it is already clear that there are many divisions between the different elements in the new government, and not at all clear that a stable regime will emerge. Even if it does, the ordinary people of Libya will see their interests subjugated to the oil companies and other western business, backed up by Nato, which has no intention of vacating the scene’ (Newsletter No.1224, 21 October 2011).

According to the internal documents of Britain and the US, the greatest fear of policy planners has always been ‘the virus of nationalism’ through which the countries of the Middle East threaten to use the region’s resources to benefit their own people – an intolerable affront to Anglo-American ‘security.’ A Saudi Arabia dominated by the majority Shiite population, for instance, has always been one the West’s greatest fears. But this is not the first time Libya has been used by the US or Britain. After September 11th 2001, the Blair and Bush administrations were quite happy to send terror suspects to Libya for ‘coercive interrogation’ in Gaddafi’s highly efficient torture chambers – one of those things it ‘wouldn’t do’ to say, in Orwell’s words.

UN Resolution 1973 also ‘called for an arms embargo that applies to the entire territory of Libya, which means that any outside supply of arms to the opposition would have to be covert’ – a small technicality which didn’t stop NATO’s lending a hand after fabricating a potential genocide by Gaddafi’s forces (Kareem Fahim and David D. Kirkpatrick, ‘Rebel advance halted outside Qaddafi’s hometown,’ *The New York Times*, 28 March 2011). With his scrupulous choice of misleading words, William Hague spoke in July 2010 of Whitehall’s efforts to ‘elevate links with the Gulf’ and of ‘strengthening our ties across the board.’ Pretending to be a foreign secretary, he also publically announced his deep feelings of inspiration after meeting with rebels in the northern city of Benghazi in June, tears running down his cheeks as he passes Gaddafi’s armoured crowd control vehicles produced by the

British 'defence' company, NMS. During one of his sermons, David Cameron announced that Britain's hopes are trained on the opportunity to 'build' democracy in North Africa, shying away from adding that the heads of Britain's leading arms manufacturers, including the bosses of Rolls-Royce and BAE, followed him in his peaceful mission. Libyan armed forces are also equipped with Heckler & Koch G3 rifles, and in 2010 the coalition government sent military cameras, sniper rifles, and tear gas to Gaddafi, one of the region's most notorious 'local cops on the beat.'

With Gaddafi now gone, to my knowledge there's been no mention in the media of the fact that the world's current longest surviving dictator, Qaboos bin Said Al Said, happens to be Britain's closest ally in the Gulf, and has reigned in Oman for over forty years. Britain's collusion with Oman has been just as horrific as its relationships with other Gulf dictators, as Mark Curtis outlines:

'Virtually a colony in the 1950s to 1970s, due to the extent of British influence over the Omani government and the oil business, the Omani regime was also one of the world's most repressive, then or since. Even by 1970 it was forbidden to smoke in public, to play football, to wear glasses or to speak to anyone for more than 15 minutes. Britain fought wars in defence of the Omani regime in the late 1950s and 1960s and British officers remained as commanders of the Omani military until the 1980s. Oman today remains the closest British ally in the Gulf' (*The Great Deception: Anglo-American Power and World Order*, London: Pluto Press, 1998, p. 21).

The Marxist Daniel Morley explained in March earlier this year that 'insurgents in Libya are waging a war with a counterrevolutionary state. But despite the obvious international implications and origins of this movement, they are struggling in isolation. Imperialism has now intervened, exploiting the lack of an international revolutionary organisation capable of intervening and offering revolutionary assistance. But the "West" has only intervened to secure its own interests and not those of the Libyan masses' (Daniel Morley, 'Marxist and Anarchist Theory,' 31 March 2011, *In Defence of Marxism*).

A few months later in June, documents were released incriminating Colonel Gaddafi in the slaughter of Libyan civilians. In a letter addressed March 4th before the Misrata killings, Gaddafi's general, Youssef Ahmed Basheer Abu Hajar, addressing the 'fighting formations,' issued an instruction: 'It is absolutely forbidden for supply cars, fuel and other services to enter the city of Misrata from all gates and checkpoints' (Chris Stephen, *The Observer*, 19 June 2011). The starvation of Misrata, however, is strikingly similar (though far less severe) to the US's illegal blockage of humanitarian aid sent in truck convoys from Pakistan to Afghanistan in mid-September 2001, helping to ease the passing of some of the 7-8 million starving Afghans who at the time relied crucially on Pakistan's aid. The military strikes themselves forced the removal of NGO workers, crippling the assistance of aid programmes. Christian Aid's Dominic Nutt warned: 'It's as if a mass grave has been dug behind millions of people. We can drag them back from it or push them in. We could be looking at millions of deaths' (Stephen Morris and Felicity Lawrence, 'Afghanistan Facing Humanitarian Disaster,' *The Guardian*, 19 September 2001). Similar reports of aid groups and the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation were met with silence in the mainstream (with exceptions at the margins) giving us a helpful insight into our elite culture, which finds little difficulty in cursing Gaddafi with sharp adjectives.

But there is a difference between Bush and Obama (with his recent 'hope in the promise of tomorrow'). After September 11th 2001, Bush's favourite tactic was to illegally imprison and torture his enemies. Obama, on the other hand, just kills them. Part of his international assassination campaign, the illegal killings of Osama bin Laden, Anwar al-Awlaki (a US citizen) and others were met praise in the US and Europe. The concept of presumption of innocence in Anglo-American law, which used to be part of general

consciousness, is now totally gone. There's also a difference between Bush and Obama on the one hand and Bin Laden and Al-Awlaki on the other: the latter were suspects, whereas Bush and Obama aren't suspects at all, since there's overwhelming proof that their actions in Iraq, Afghanistan and now Yemen were war crimes. The legitimate murder of suspects, then, now appears once again on the table. Without a hint of irony, the American law professor Jonathan Turley recently pointed out the Obama is well on the way to becoming the worst US president in history with regards to civil liberties (Jonathan Turley, 'Obama: A disaster for civil liberties,' *Los Angeles Times*, 29 September 2011).

During an interview after the murder of Bin Laden, Andrew Marr also laughed off with Obama how it simply wouldn't have been pragmatic to capture the al-Qaeda leader alive, and how sending an elite battalion into Pakistani territory to achieve this, before dumping him at sea, was the most sensible and 'realistic' option. International law, the rational man understands, is a joke, to be used as an affront to the power of official enemies, and discarded when our own 'national interest' is at risk. The *Economist* reports that 'The president's defenders claim that strikes against al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters are legal under the September 2001 Authorisation to Use Military Force Act, which allows Mr Obama to employ "all necessary and appropriate force" against any country, organisation or person involved in the September 11th attacks or "to prevent future acts of international terrorism"' ('Drones and the law,' *The Economist*, 8 October 2011). To quote Bush I: 'What we say goes.'

On October 14th, Obama (that 'Son of Africa') announced that he would send 100 US special forces to fight in the Ugandan civil war, commenting satirically that they would only 'engage' for 'self-defence.' Troops will also be sent to South Sudan, Congo and the Central African Republic. As John Pilger points out, with Libya now secured the US invasion of Africa is in motion. Leading mainstream journalists have described the decision as 'surprising' and 'weird.' Taking post-war US foreign policy into account, from Guatemala (where one CIA agent, Howard Hunt, declared that 'a little harmless bombing' was required to assert the dominance of the United Fruit Company over the Guatemalan economy and overthrow the democratically elected Arbenz government) to Nicaragua, it is neither. The Lord's Resistance Army which Obama's 'humanitarian intervention' seeks to defeat has committed various atrocities administered by Washington, 'such as the bloodbath in the 1960s following the CIA-arranged murder of Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese independence leader and first legally elected prime minister, and the CIA coup that installed Mobutu Sese Seko, regarded as Africa's most venal tyrant' (John Pilger, 'With Libya secured an American invasion of Africa is under way,' Stop the War Coalition, 20 October 2011). The LRA today has an estimated 100-400 fighters and is in its weakest ever condition. But as any Mafia boss can tell you, weak targets are the only ones worth the risk of attacking if you have any sense.

NATO's own 'harmless bombing' of Libya also caused the deaths of an untold number of civilians. While no exact figures are yet to emerge, in September the new Libyan health minister estimated that 'at least 30,000 people had been killed and 50,000 wounded during the first six months of war.' In Tripoli on June 19th 'a NATO missile missed its target, killing at least nine civilians as a result. NATO admitted its culpability in the deaths. By the end of the month, three separate NATO airstrikes around the country would ultimately claim another 34 civilian lives. However, the largest single incident came on August 9, when the government reported that 85 people had been killed in a NATO airstrike on Majar, a village some 90 miles east of Tripoli' ('Civilian cost of NATO victory in Libya,' *RT*, 20 October 2011).

The main ideological reason the US is intervening in Africa is the same reason it bombed 'anything that flies on anything that moves' (as Henry Kissinger put it, in probably the most explicit call for genocide in political history) in Cambodia and Vietnam: the threat of China, the least violent of the world's 'grand powers.' Thanks to the scholarship of

mainstream media outlets like the BBC, who ‘impartially’ regurgitate government policy and equate it with the truth, and popular historians like Niall Ferguson, China (and Iran) is slowly overtaking al-Qaeda as the official ‘threat’ to civilization.

Always a healthy mix of propaganda and cliché, Ferguson is one of the many acclaimed academics who help marginalise and silence any unacceptable radical (read: rational) views. Now often appearing on television, Ferguson taught at NYU and Oxford before moving to Harvard. He refers in his book *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* to Noam Chomsky and Edward Said’s ‘predictable comments’ about US foreign policy – so predictable, in fact, that he fails to quote, analyze or refute any of them. He does confess, however, that the Shah of Iran ‘was not the worst of the despots installed and propped up by the United States during the cold war,’ and, astonishingly, that ‘the invasion of Iraq in 2003 was not without a legitimate basis in international law’ (Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*, London: Penguin, 2004, p. 117, 133). In March 2003, the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva expressed its ‘deep dismay’ that the US, Britain and its allies were ‘poised to launch an outright illegal invasion of Iraq, which amounts to a war of aggression.’ The ICJ explained that ‘a war waged without a clear mandate from the United Nations Security Council’ would constitute ‘a flagrant violation of the prohibition of the use of force’ (‘Iraq – ICJ Deplores Moves Toward a War of Aggression on Iraq,’ International Commission of Jurists, 18 March 2003). In a TED talk in July of this year, for which he received a standing ovation from an audience of early iPad users, Ferguson also attacked those foolish enough to blame the suffering of third world countries on imperialism by saying that ‘everybody did empire’ back then so we can’t just blame the West. QED.

But it’s unfair to focus on Ferguson, since his behaviour is quite typical of professional historians. Oxford Professor Robert O’Neill, for instance, noted shortly after his country’s complicity in the Rwandan genocide that ‘Britain has a very demanding and influential security role to play in the decades ahead. The US needs more support and company. ... Britain’s global experience, capability and good standing places her next in importance to the US as an upholder of international security’ (Speech by Professor Robert O’Neill, *Britain in the World: Conference Proceedings*, London: RIIA, 29 March 1995, p. 105). The American academic Robert Art also cautioned that, with the US’ major Soviet enemy now gone, there exists a real danger of the Whitehouse becoming engaged in ‘potentially endless acts of charity’ (Robert Art, ‘A US military strategy for the 1990s: Reassurance without dominance,’ *Survival*, vol. 34, no. 4, Winter 1992-3, p. 6).

NATO’s charitable acts of violence in Libya encouraged the US ambassador Gene Cretz to confess recently that ‘We know that oil is the jewel in the crown of Libyan natural resources.’ The conquest of Libya by the dominant triumvirate of imperial powers (Britain, France and the US) along with the new campaign in Uganda is strikingly paralleled to the ‘scramble for Africa’ at the end of the 19th century and the triumvirate’s battle for the Middle East against Russia. Submitting the Second Afghan War (1878-1880) to some scrutiny will, unfortunately, reveal how little the unaccountable and undemocratic western military strategies have changed. To quote a parliamentary inquiry of 1879:

‘The object ... is to help our countrymen to understand by what steps they have been involved in a war with the Afghan nation, and what grounds are assigned for that war by its authors. The war was sprung on us with great suddenness. Not only was there no consultation of parliament by our government, no communication to that body of any change of policy tending to involve us in a quarrel, but, when questions were asked on the subject the answers given were calculated to mislead, and did mislead the most sceptical officials and experts, and through them the whole nation.’