GlobalResearch
Center for Research on Globalization

Another NATO Intervention? Libya: Is This Kosovo All Over Again?

By Diana Johnstone
Global Research, March 08, 2011
8 March 2011

Region: Middle East & North Africa
Theme: US NATO War Agenda
In-depth Report: THE BALKANS

Less than a dozen years after NATO bombed Yugoslavia into pieces, detaching the province of Kosovo from Serbia, there are signs that the military alliance is gearing up for another victorious little "humanitarian war", this time against Libya. The differences are, of course, enormous. But let's look at some of the disturbing similarities.

A demonized leader.

As "the new Hitler", the man you love to hate and need to destroy, Slobodan Milosevic was a neophyte in 1999 compared to Muammar Qaddafi today. The media had less than a decade to turn Milosevic into a monster, whereas with Qaddafi, they've been at it for several decades. And Qaddafi is more exotic, speaking less English and coming before the public in outfits that could have been created by John Galliano (another recently outed monster). This exotic aspect arouses the ancestral mockery and contempt for lesser cultures with which the West was won, Africa was colonized and the Summer Palace in Beijing was ravaged by Western soldiers fighting to make the world safe for opium addiction.

The "we must do something" chorus.

As with Kosovo, the crisis in Libya is perceived by the hawks as an opportunity to assert power. The unspeakable John Yoo, the legal advisor who coached the Bush II administration in the advantages of torturing prisoners, has used the Wall Street Journal to advise the Obama administration to ignore the U.N Charter and leap into the Libyan fray. "By putting aside the U.N.'s antiquated rules, the United States can save lives, improve global welfare, and serve its own national interests at the same time," Yoo proclaimed. And another leading theorist of humanitarian imperialism, Geoffrey Robertson, has told The Independent that, despite appearances, violating international law is lawful.

The specter of "crimes against humanity" and "genocide" is evoked to justify war.

As with Kosovo, an internal conflict between a government and armed rebels is being cast as a "humanitarian crisis" in which one side only, the government, is assumed to be "criminal". This a priori criminalization is expressed by calling on an international judicial body to examine crimes which are assumed to have been committed, or to be about to be committed. In his Op Ed piece, Geoffrey Robertson made it crystal clear how the International Criminal Court is being used to set the stage for eventual military intervention. The ICC can be used by the West to get around the risk of a Security Council veto for military action, he explained.

> "In the case of Libya , the council has at least set an important precedent by unanimously endorsing a reference to the International Criminal Court. […] So what happens if the unarrested Libyan indictees aggravate their crimes – eg by stringing up or shooting in cold blood their opponents, potential witnesses, civilians, journalists or prisoners of war?" [Note that so far there are no "indictees" and no proof of "crimes" that they supposedly may "aggravate" in various imaginary ways.) But Robertson is eager to find a way for NATO "to pick up the gauntlet" if the Security Council decides to do nothing.]
>
> "The defects in the Security Council require the acknowledgement of a limited right, without its mandate, for an alliance like NATO to use force to stop the commission of crimes against humanity. That right arises once the council has identified a situation as a threat to world peace (and it has so identified Libya, by referring it unanimously to the ICC prosecutor)."

Thus referring a country to the ICC prosecutor can be a pretext for waging war against that country! By the way, the ICC jurisdiction is supposed to apply to States that have ratified the treaty establishing it, which, as I understand, is not the case of Libya – or of the United States. A big difference, however, is that the United States has been able to persuade, bully or bribe countless signatory States to accept agreements that they will never under any circumstances try to refer any American offenders to the ICC. That is a privilege denied Qaddafi.

Robertson, a member of the UN justice council, concludes that: "The duty to stop the mass murder of innocents, as best we can if they request our help, has crystallized to make the use of force by Nato not merely 'legitimate' but lawful."

Leftist idiocy.

Twelve years ago, most of the European left supported "the Kosovo war" that set NATO on the endless path it now pursues in Afghanistan. Having learned nothing, many seem ready for a repeat performance. A coalition of parties calling itself the European Left has issued a statement "strongly condemning the repression perpetrated by the criminal regime of Colonel Qaddafi" and urging the European Union "to condemn the use of force and to act promptly to protect the people that are peacefully demonstrating and struggling for their freedom." Inasmuch as the opposition to Qaddafi is not merely "peacefully demonstrating", but in part has taken up arms, this comes down to condemning the use of force by some and not by others – but it is unlikely that the politicians who drafted this statement even realize what they are saying.

The narrow vision of the left is illustrated by the statement in a Trotskyist paper that: "Of all the crimes of Qaddafi, the one that is without doubt the most grave and least known is his complicity with the EU migration policy…" For the far left, Qaddafi's biggest sin is cooperating with the West, just as the West is to be condemned for cooperating with Qaddafi. This is a left that ends up, out of sheer confusion, as cheerleader for war.

Refugees.

The mass of refugees fleeing Kosovo as NATO began its bombing campaign was used to justify that bombing, without independent investigation into the varied causes of that temporary exodus – a main cause probably being the bombing itself. Today, from the way media report on the large number of refugees leaving Libya since the troubles began, the

public could get the impression that they are fleeing persecution by Qaddafi. As is frequently the case, media focuses on the superficial image without seeking explanations. A bit of reflection may fill the information gap. It is hardly likely that Qaddafi is chasing away the foreign workers that his regime brought to Libya to carry out important infrastructure projects. Rather it is fairly clear that some of the "democratic" rebels have attacked the foreign workers out of pure xenophobia. Qaddafi's openness to Africans in particular is resented by a certain number of Arabs. But not too much should be said about this, since they are now our "good guys". This is a bit the way Albanian attacks on Roma in Kosovo were overlooked or excused by NATO occupiers on the grounds that "the Roma had collaborated with the Serbs".

Osama bin Laden.

Another resemblance between former Yugoslavia and Libya is that the United States (and its NATO allies) once again end up on the same side as their old friend from Afghan Mujahidin days, Osama bin Laden. Osama bin Laden was a discreet ally of the Islamist party of Alija Izetbegovic during the Bosnia civil war, a fact that has been studiously overlooked by the NATO powers. Of course, Western media have largely dismissed Qaddafi's current claim that he is fighting against bin Laden as the ravings of a madman. However, the combat between Qaddafi and bin Laden is very real and predates the September 11, 2001 attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon. Indeed, Qaddafi was the first to try to alert Interpol to bin Laden, but got no cooperation from the United States. In November 2007, the French news agency AFP reported that the leaders of the "Fighting Islamic Group" in Libya announced they were joining Al Qaeda. Like the Mujahidin who fought in Bosnia, that Libyan Islamist Group was formed in 1995 by veterans of the U.S.-sponsored fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s. Their declared aim was to overthrow Qaddafi in order to establish a radical Islamist state. The base of radical Islam has always been in the Eastern part of Libya where the current revolt broke out. Since that revolt does not at all resemble the peaceful mass demonstrations that overthrew dictators in Tunisia and Egypt, but has a visible component of armed militants, it can reasonably be assumed that the Islamists are taking part in the rebellion.

Refusal of negotiations.

In 1999, the United States was eager to use the Kosovo crisis to give NATO's new "out of area" mission its baptism of fire. The charade of peace talks at Rambouillet was scuttled by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who sidelined more moderate Kosovo Albanian leaders in favor of Hashim Thaci, the young leader of the "Kosovo Liberation Army", a network notoriously linked to criminal activities. The Albanian rebels in Kosovo were a mixed bag, but as frequently happens, the US reached in and drew the worst out of that bag.

In Libya, the situation could be even worse.

My own impression, partly as a result of visiting Tripoli four years ago, is that the current rebellion is a much more mixed bag, with serious potential internal contradictions. Unlike Egypt, Libya is not a populous historic state with thousands of years of history, a strong sense of national identity and a long political culture. Half a century ago, it was one of the poorest countries in the world, and still has not fully emerged from its clan structure. Qaddafi, in his own eccentric way, has been a modernizing factor, using oil revenues to raise the standard of living to one of the highest on the African continent. The opposition to him

comes, paradoxically, both from reactionary traditional Islamists on the one hand, who consider him a heretic for his relatively progressive views, and Westernized beneficiaries of modernization on the other hand, who are embarrassed by the Qaddafi image and want still more modernization. And there are other tensions that may lead to civil war and even a breakup of the country along geographic lines.

So far, the dogs of war are sniffing around for more bloodshed than has actually occurred. Indeed, the US escalated the Kosovo conflict in order to "have to intervene", and the same risks happening now with regard to Libya, where Western ignorance of what they would be doing is even greater.

The Chavez proposal for neutral mediation to avert catastrophe is the way of wisdom. But in NATOland, the very notion of solving problems by peaceful mediation rather than by force seems to have evaporated.

Diana Johnstone is the author of Fools Crusade: Yugoslavia, NATO and Western Delusions.She can be reached at diana.josto@yahoo.fr

---