

Demolishing Libya: How “Humanitarian Interventions” Come Back to Haunt Us

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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

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If ever there was a brutalised poster boy for the failure of humanitarian intervention, then bloodied, wounded Libya would be it. In 2011, the morally indignant, the ethically charged, and the generally outraged powers of the UK, France and to a lesser extent, the US, did a patchwork job under what, on the surface, was given a legal deep finish. It was executed under the guidance - supposedly - of a UN Security Council resolution. It has the cri de coeur flourish of a scatterbrained French philosopher promising stains on the French flag if French missiles were not deployed.

The current Libyan state, if it even deserves to be called that name, sees escalating food prices, electricity cuts, and the disappearance of critical media - up to 14 journalists were assassinated last year - and an overall sense of institutional collapse.[1] The education system has all but vanished, with parents attempting to school their children at home.

International powers, as they have been doing since 2011, have been dirtying their noses in backing the assortment of militias that proliferated like fungi after the dictatorship collapsed. Qatar is providing backing for self-declared rulers in Tripoli, generally consisting of a coalition of militias termed Libya Dawn. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt, have aligned themselves with the Libyan National Army, led by Khalifa Haftar.

Haftar, who only last year left his home in northern Virginia, is adopting the tactic of secular stomping: bashing extremism by being a touch extremist in his own techniques. This is fitting, providing a sense of redux perversity: it was Haftar who, as an army cadet, participated in Qaddafi's coup against the Libyan monarchy in 1969. But Qaddafi's flattery of the cadet's skills was nowhere to be seen when he was disavowed as a prisoner of war, captured in disastrous encounters with the troops of Chad in 1987.[2]

There are now suggestions that Libya is poised to become the next “gateway” in terms of ISIL's campaign, a possible means of threatening Europe from the south. The British anti-extremist group Quilliam is posing the greatest of nightmares for advocates of security and refugees - the promise that fighters may use people trafficking vessels, thereby gaining access to European states. (The idea is daft in its futile dangerousness, but the very fact that it is being floated is worth nothing.)

Egypt's ambassador to the UK, Nasser Kamel, has also done his best to rattle nerves with suggestions that the increased number of refugees from north Africa pose a threat to European security, which is another way of suggesting that if you don't assist such questionable regimes as those in Cairo, your own security is set for the chop. “Those boat people who go for immigration purposes and try to cross the Mediterranean... in the next

few weeks, if we do not act together, they will be boats full of terrorists also.”[3]

Egyptian President Abdel Fatah al-Sissi, in an interview with a French radio station, has also called for a UN-backed military operation in light of the beheading of 21 Egyptian Christians by associates of the Islamic State.[4] The Egyptian president is also acutely aware of the large population of Egyptian workers stationed in Libya.

Kamel, despite stoking the interventionist flames, did make a valid point about the chaos in Libya. “I think after toppling Qaddafi, while no one is questioning that he was a dictator, we as an international community, especially those that intervened militarily, did not put enough resources (in) for developing a modern, democratic, Libyan state.”

To that end, it all seems rather rich to see the statement, issued by the United States, France, Italy, Germany, Spain and Britain, that emphasises how the current forces of disruption “will not be allowed to condemn Libya to chaos and extremism”. In what seems to be mere diplomatic piffle, the signatories insist that such forces will “be held... accountable by the Libyan people and the international community for their actions” (*The Washington Post*, Feb 17).

Britain’s Prime Minister, David Cameron, added a good dose of sauce to the cant with his statement that the world was clearly “better off” without Qaddafi at the helm. The reason? Qaddafi had been a key figure in arming the IRA with explosives during the period of the troubles. Instead, what Britain was doing was “giving Libya support through our aid budget. We gave a major training project for the Libyan security forces” (*The Telegraph*, Feb 17). Such sanctimonious attitudes have been typical for powers in the aftermath of regime change: we are doing our very best to stem the slide into vicious oblivion with “training budgets” and aid.

The latest contribution by Jon Lee Anderson for *The New Yorker* (Feb 23) simply affirms what we already knew in accounts of the immediate aftermath of post-Qaddafi Libya. It is a description of a state that is not so much failing as failed, crumbling over claims made by two competing governments, rampant militias, the dwindling of oil revenues, and the deaths of some three thousand people in the last year. “What has followed the downfall of a tyrant – a downfall encouraged by NATO airstrikes – is the tyranny of a dangerous and pervasive instability.”

It is not an instability that will tolerate an occupation regime, or an intervention force based upon the principles of humanitarian restoration. That, after all, had been attempted – with calamitous results. Europe, the United States, and Libya’s neighbours, are now reaping the whirlwind.

Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: bkampmark@gmail.com

Notes:

[1] <http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/whats-left-libya>

[2] <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/02/23/unravelling>

[3] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2957129/Britain-warned-expect-boats-->

[terrorists-ISIS-seizes-control-Libya-2-000-migrants-rescued-Mediterranean.html](http://terrorists-isis-seizes-control-Libya-2-000-migrants-rescued-Mediterranean.html)

[4] [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/egypt-calls-for-united-nations-backed--military-operation-in-libya/2015/02/17/a70b6804-b6ad-11e4-bc30-a4e75503948a_story.html?postshare=8261424248143895](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/egypt-calls-for-united-nations-backed-military-operation-in-libya/2015/02/17/a70b6804-b6ad-11e4-bc30-a4e75503948a_story.html?postshare=8261424248143895)

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