

Libya and the Return of Humanitarian Imperialism

By [Jean Bricmont](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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The whole gang is back: The parties of the European Left (grouping the “moderate” European communist parties), the “Green” José Bové, now allied with Daniel Cohn-Bendit, who has never seen a US-NATO war he didn’t like, various Trotskyist groups and of course Bernard-Henry Lévy and Bernard Kouchner, all calling for some sort of “humanitarian intervention” in Libya or accusing the Latin American left, whose positions are far more sensible, of acting as “useful idiots” for the “Libyan tyrant.”

Twelve years later, it is Kosovo all over again. Hundred of thousands of Iraqis dead, NATO stranded in an impossible position in Afghanistan, and they have learned nothing! The Kosovo war was made to stop a nonexistent genocide, the Afghan war to protect women (go and check their situation now), and the Iraq war to protect the Kurds. When will they understand that all wars claim to have humanitarian justifications? Even Hitler was “protecting minorities” in Czechoslovakia and Poland.

On the other hand, Robert Gates warns that any future secretary of state who advises a US president to send troops into Asia or Africa “must have his head examined”. Admiral McMullen similarly advises caution. The great paradox of our time is that the headquarters of the peace movement are to be found in the Pentagon and the State Department, while the pro-war party is a coalition of neo-conservatives and liberal interventionists of various stripes, including leftist humanitarian warriors, as well as some Greens, feminists or repentant communists.

So, now, everybody has to cut down his or her consumption because of global warming, but NATO wars are recyclable and imperialism has become part of sustainable development.

Of course the US will go or not go to war for reasons that are quite independent of the advice offered by the pro-war left. Oil is not likely to be a major factor in their decision, because any future Libyan government will have to sell oil and Libya is not big enough to significantly weigh on the price of oil. Of course, turmoil in Libya leads to speculation that itself affects prices, but that is a different matter. Zionists are probably of two minds about Libya: they hate Qaddafi, and would like to see him ousted, like Saddam, in the most humiliating manner, but they are not sure they will like his opposition (and, from the little we know about it, they won’t).

The main pro-war argument is that if things go quickly and easily, it will rehabilitate NATO and humanitarian intervention, whose image has been tarnished by Iraq and Afghanistan. A new Grenada or, at most, a new Kosovo, is exactly what is needed. Another motivation for intervention is to better control the rebels, by coming to “save” them on their march to victory. But that is unlikely to work: Karzai in Afghanistan, the Kosovar nationalists, the

Shiites in Iraq and of course Israel, are perfectly happy to get American help, when needed, but after that, to pretty much pursue their own agenda. And a full-fledged military occupation of Libya after its “liberation” is unlikely to be sustainable, which of course makes intervention less attractive from a US point of view.

On the other hand, if things turn badly, it will probably be the beginning of the end of the American empire, hence the caution of people who are actually in charge of it and not merely writing articles in *Le Monde* or ranting against dictators in front of cameras.

It is difficult for ordinary citizens to know exactly what is going on in Libya, because Western media have thoroughly discredited themselves in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine, and alternative sources are not always reliable either. That of course does not prevent the pro-war left from being absolutely convinced of the truth of the worst reports about Qaddafi, just as they were twelve years ago about Milosevic.

The negative role of the International Criminal Court is again apparent, here, as was that of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia in the case of Kosovo. One of the reasons why there was relatively little bloodshed in Tunisia and Egypt is that there was a possible exit for Ben Ali and Mubarak. But “international justice” wants to make sure that no such exit is possible for Qaddafi, and probably for people close to him, hence inciting them to fight to the bitter end.

If “another world is possible”, as the European Left keeps on saying, then another West should be possible and the European Left should start working on that. The recent meeting of the Bolivarian Alliance could serve as an example: the Latin American left wants peace and they want to avoid US intervention, because they know that they are in the sights of the US and that their process of social transformation requires above all peace and national sovereignty. Hence, they suggest sending an international delegation, possibly led by Jimmy Carter (hardly a stooge of Qaddafi), in order to start a negotiation process between the government and the rebels. Spain has expressed interest in the idea, which is of course rejected by Sarkozy. This proposition may sound utopian, but it might not be so if it were supported by the full weight of the United Nations. That would be the way to fulfill its mission, but it is now made impossible by US and Western influence. However, it is not impossible that now, or in some future crisis, a non-interventionist coalition of nations, including Russia, China, Latin America and maybe others, may work together to build credible alternatives to Western interventionism.

Unlike the Latin American left, the pathetic European version has lost all sense of what it means to do politics. It does not try to propose concrete solutions to problems, and is only able to take moral stances, in particular denouncing dictators and human rights violations in grandiloquent tones. The social democratic left follows the right with at best a few years delay and has no ideas of its own. The “radical” left often manages both to denounce Western governments in every possible way and to demand that those same governments intervene militarily around the globe to defend democracy. Their lack of political reflection makes them highly vulnerable to disinformation campaigns and to becoming passive cheerleaders of US-NATO wars.

That left has no coherent program and would not know what to do even if a god put them into power. Instead of “supporting” Chavez and the Venezuelan Revolution, a meaningless claim some love to repeat, they should humbly learn from them and, first of all, relearn what it means to do politics.

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