

Libya: Another Neocon War

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Liberal supporters of this 'humanitarian intervention' have merely become useful idiots of the same old nefarious purposes

The [US department of justice \(DOJ\) has submitted a written defence](#) of the US role in this new war in [Libya](#) to the [US Congress](#). The DOJ claims the war serves the US national interest in regional stability and in maintaining the credibility of the [United Nations](#). Who knew?

The regional stability line would be a stretch for the UK but is downright nuts for the US. Who, outside of US Strategic Command types working on weapons in space, thinks Libya and America are in the same region? (In fact, the US is in Northcom and Libya in Africom, in the lingo of the Pentagon's structure of global domination. Europe is in Eucom.) And what has done more good this year for the region that Libya is actually in than *instability* (think Tunisia, Egypt)?

The bit about the credibility of the United Nations is really cute coming from a government that invaded [Iraq](#) in 2003 - [despite UN opposition and for the express purpose \(among others\) of proving the UN irrelevant](#). This also comes from the [same government that just this month refused](#) to allow the UN special rapporteur to visit a US prisoner named Bradley Manning to verify that he is not being tortured. How does that maintain UN credibility? And how exactly does [authorising the CIA to violate the UN arms embargo](#) in Libya maintain UN credibility? How does [violating the UN ban](#) on "a foreign occupation force of any form" in Libya maintain UN credibility?

So, one of the main justifications offered to the first branch of the US government is that the war in Libya is justified by a UN resolution, the credibility of which must be maintained even while violating it. But the DOJ memo also stresses that such a justification is not needed. A US president, according to this memo, albeit in violation of the US Constitution, simply has the power to launch wars. Any explanations offered to Congress are, just like the wars, acts of pure benevolence.

The DOJ memo also argues that this war doesn't really measure up to the name "war", given how quick, easy and cheap it's going to be. In fact, President Obama has already announced the handover of the war to [Nato](#). I think we're supposed to imagine Nato as separate from the US, just as Congress does when it conducts no investigations of any atrocities in [Afghanistan](#) that the US attributes to Nato. Do the other Nato nations know that this is the purpose Nato serves in US politics?

But how quick and easy will this war really be? [One expert predicts it will last 20 years](#), with the US eventually pulling out and allowing the [European Union](#) to inherit the illness of empire it had earlier shared with us. Certainly, the promise of a quick and easy war in Iraq in

2003 was based on the same baseless idea as this one, namely that killing a president will hand a country over to outside control (excuse me, I mean, flourishing democracy). The blossoming democracy in Iraq has just banned public demonstrations. The fact is that Gaddafi has a great deal of support, and making him a martyr would not change that.

Popular “progressive” US radio host [Ed Schultz argues, with vicious hatred in every word he spits out on the subject](#), that bombing Libya is justified by the need for vengeance against that Satan on earth, that beast arisen suddenly from the grave of Adolf Hitler, that monster beyond all description: [Muammar Gaddafi](#). But you can’t really fight a war against one person. The last time we did that to Gaddafi, we killed his little daughter, while he survived.

Even if you had the legal or moral right to assassinate foreign leaders, and even if you independently and rationally worked up your passion to kill a particular dictator by sheer coincidence in the same moment in which your government wanted to bomb him, you couldn’t do it without killing innocent people and shredding the fabric of international law (with or without UN complicity). Hatred of a single individual is great propaganda - until people begin to question what killing him will involve and what will come next.

Popular US commentator Juan Cole supports the very same war that Ed Schultz does, but supports it as a gentle act of humanitarian generosity. The Libya war has become [less popular more quickly in the US than any previous US war](#), but it has its supporters. And to them, it doesn’t matter that half their fellow war supporters have a different or even opposing motive. For years, Americans cheered the slaughter of the hated Iraqi people while other Americans praised the Iraq war as a great act of philanthropy for the benefit of the Iraqi people (whether *they* wanted it or not).

But let’s examine Cole’s claims about Libya, because they are quite popular and central to the idea of a “good war”. One claim is that the Nato countries are motivated by humanitarian concern. Another is that this war might have humanitarian results. These have to be separated because the former is laughably absurd and the latter worthy of being examined. Of course, many people in Nato countries are motivated by humanitarian concern; that’s why wars are sold as acts of philanthropy. Generosity sells. But the US government, which has become a wing of the Pentagon, does not typically intervene in other nations in order to benefit humanity. In fact, it’s not capable of intervening anywhere, because it is already intervened everywhere.

The [United States was in the business of supplying weapons to Gaddafi](#) up until the moment it got into the business of supplying weapons to his opponents. In 2009, [Britain, France and other European states sold Libya over \\$470m-worth of weapons](#). Our wars tend to be fought against our own weapons, and yet we go on arming everyone. The [United States](#) can no more intervene in Yemen or Bahrain or Saudi Arabia than in Libya. We are arming those dictatorships. In fact, to win the support of Saudi Arabia for its “intervention” in Libya, the [US gave its approval](#) for Saudi Arabia to send troops into Bahrain to attack civilians, a [policy that US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton publicly defended](#).

The “humanitarian intervention” in Libya, meanwhile, whatever civilians it may have begun by protecting, [immediately killed other civilians with its bombs](#) and immediately shifted from its defensive justification to [attacking retreating troops and participating in a civil war](#). The United States has very likely used depleted uranium weapons in Libya, leading [American journalist Dave Lindorff to remark](#):

“It would be a tragic irony if rebels in Libya, after calling for assistance from the US and other Nato countries, succeeded in overthrowing the country’s long-time tyrant Gaddafi, only to have their country contaminated by uranium dust – the fate already suffered by the peoples of Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan and Kosovo.”

Irony is one word for it. Another is hypocrisy. Clearly, the military power of the west is not driven by humanitarian concerns. But that still leaves the question of whether, in this particular case, such power could accidentally have humanitarian results. The claim that a massive massacre of civilians was about to occur, on careful review, [turns out to have been massively inflated](#). This doesn’t mean that Gaddafi is a nice guy, that his military wasn’t already killing civilians, or that it isn’t still killing civilians. Another irony, in fact, is that Gaddafi is reportedly using horrible weapons, including landmines and cluster bombs, that much of the world has renounced – but that the United States has refused to.

But warfare tends to breed more warfare; and cycles of violence usually, not just occasionally, spiral out of control. That the United States is engaging in or supporting the killing of civilians in Afghanistan, Iraq, Yemen, Bahrain and elsewhere, while ignoring the killing of civilians in various other countries, is not a reason to tolerate it in Libya. But escalating a war and doing nothing are, contrary to Pentagon propaganda, not the only two choices. The United States and Europe could have stopped arming and supporting Gaddafi and – in what would have been a powerful message to Libya – stopped arming and supporting dictators around the region. We could have provided purely humanitarian aid. We could have pulled out the [CIA](#) and the special forces and sent in nonviolent activist trainers of the sort that accomplished so much this year in the nations to Libya’s east and west. Risking the deaths of innocents while employing nonviolent tools is commonly viewed as horrific, but isn’t responding with violence that will likely cause more deaths in the end even more so?

[Washington imported a leader for the people’s rebellion in Libya](#) who has spent the past 20 years living with no known source of income a couple of miles from the CIA’s headquarters in Virginia. Another man lives even closer to CIA headquarters: former US Vice President [Dick Cheney](#). He expressed great concern in a speech in 1999 that foreign governments were controlling [oil](#). “Oil remains fundamentally a government business,” he said. “While many regions of the world offer great oil opportunities, the [Middle East](#), with two thirds of the world’s oil and the lowest cost, is still where the prize ultimately lies.”

Former supreme allied commander Europe of Nato, from 1997 to 2000, [Wesley Clark claims that in 2001, a general in the Pentagon showed him a piece of paper and said:](#)

“I just got this memo today or yesterday from the office of the secretary of defence upstairs. It’s a, it’s a five-year plan. We’re going to take down seven countries in five years. We’re going to start with Iraq, then Syria, Lebanon, then Libya, Somalia, Sudan, we’re going to come back and get Iran in five years.”

That agenda fit perfectly with the plans of Washington insiders, such as those who famously spelled out their intentions in the reports of the thinktank called the Project for the New American Century. The fierce Iraqi and Afghan resistance didn’t fit at all. Neither did the nonviolent revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. But taking over Libya still makes perfect sense in the neoconservative worldview. And it makes sense in explaining [war games used by](#)

[Britain and France to simulate the invasion of a similar country.](#)

The [Libyan government controls more of its oil](#) than any other nation on earth, and it is the type of oil that Europe finds easiest to refine. Libya also controls its own finances, leading [American author Ellen Brown to point out an interesting fact](#) about those seven countries named by Clark:

“What do these seven countries have in common? In the context of banking, one that sticks out is that none of them is listed among the 56 member banks of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS). That evidently puts them outside the long regulatory arm of the central bankers’ central bank in Switzerland. The most renegade of the lot could be Libya and Iraq, the two that have actually been attacked. Kenneth Schortgen Jr, writing on Examiner.com, noted that ‘[s]ix months before the US moved into Iraq to take down [Saddam Hussein](#), the oil nation had made the move to accept euros instead of dollars for oil, and this became a threat to the global dominance of the dollar as the reserve currency, and its dominion as the petrodollar.’ According to a Russian article titled ‘Bombing of Libya - Punishment for Gaddafi for His Attempt to Refuse US Dollar’, Gaddafi made a similarly bold move: he initiated a movement to refuse the dollar and the euro, and called on Arab and African nations to use a new currency instead, the gold dinar. Gaddafi suggested establishing a united African continent, with its 200 million people using this single currency. During the past year, the idea was approved by many Arab countries and most African countries. The only opponents were the Republic of South Africa and the head of the League of Arab States. The initiative was viewed negatively by the US and the European Union, with French President Nicolas Sarkozy calling Libya a threat to the financial security of mankind; but Gaddafi was not swayed and continued his push for the creation of a united Africa. [...] If the Gaddafi government goes down, it will be interesting to watch whether the new central bank [created by the rebels in March] joins the BIS, whether the nationalised oil industry gets sold off to investors, and whether education and healthcare continue to be free.”

It will also be interesting to see whether Africom, the Pentagon’s Africa Command, now based in Europe, establishes its headquarters on the continent for which it is named. We don’t know what other motivations are at work: concerns over immigration to Europe? Desires to test weapons? War profiteering? Political calculations? Irrational lust for power? Overcompensation for having failed to turn against Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak until after he’d been unseated? But what about this one: actual fear of another Rwanda? That last one seems, frankly, the least likely. But what is certain is that such humanitarian concern alone did not launch this war, and that the continued use of war in this way will not benefit humanity.

The United Nations, far from being made credible, is being made the servant of wealthy nations making war on poor ones. And within the United States, where the United Nations is alternatively held up as a justification or mocked as irrelevant, the power to make war and to make law has been decisively placed in the hands of a series of single individuals who will carry the title “president” - precisely the outcome American revolutionaries broke with Britain in order to avoid.

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<http://warisalie.org>

<http://davidswanson.org>

<http://warisacrime.org>

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