

Libya: Media Propaganda and “Humanitarian Imperialism”

By [Julie Lévesque](#)

Global Research, April 10, 2011

10 April 2011

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

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [ARAB PROTEST MOVEMENT](#)

Since the beginning of the crisis in Libya, the media has taken sides in favor of the rebels. The media relies almost solely on the rebellion’s claims, while totally dismissing information emanating from the Gaddafi government.

Ascertaining the truth of statements is not to be condemned; quite the contrary, this verification should be systematic, and applied to the claims of Western governments and rebels of all sorts. Yet, the Western media shows virtually no scepticism with regard to the Libyan rebels’ assertions and those of the “benevolent” governments who come to their rescue.

The Rixos Hotel Scene

The most striking example of this bias is the Hotel Rixos scene in Tripoli. On March 26, an unknown woman named Eman al-Obeidy went to this hotel, to bring to the attention of foreign journalists that soldiers of the Libyan regime were involved in acts of rape and torture.

Was she saying the truth? Perhaps. However, in the initial reports, this question wasn’t raised by the journalists. Most of them saw in this incident the evidence of the Libyan regime’s cruelty. In the examples below, the wording gives an aura of credibility to Eman al-Obeidy’s testimony, while showing mistrust towards the Libyan authorities:

However, **the journalists only had one concern: what will happen to the young woman?** Sidestepping the questions on this “case”, he claimed he didn’t have enough elements on the “incident”, assuring that the woman would be “treated according to the law.” ([Une jeune femme violée tente de témoigner devant les journalistes à Tripoli \(A young raped woman tries to testify in front of journalists in Tripoli\)](#) AFP/Le Monde (France), March 26, 2011. Emphasis added).

On Monday a woman burst into the Tripoli hotel where the foreign journalists are staying. Before being **roughly expelled, she was able to tell bits and pieces of her terrible story...** In the hotel, **the terrible testimony** triggers a scramble. A hotel employee threatens her with a knife and yells out: “Traitor!” **The regime’s henchmen** soon intervene to try to silence her. Eman is **hauled out roughly** while **Gaddafi’s men claim the young woman is “mentally ill”**. (Adrien Gaboulaud, [Libye: Eman al-Obeidi, celle qui brise le silence](#), (Libya: Eman al-Obeidy, **The one who breaks the silence**), Paris Match (France), March 29, 2011. Emphasis added.)

On Sunday March 27, the government claims the woman has been released. **Although the media report having difficulties investigating the case, they also consider that the testimony is credible. “CNN could not independently verify Eman al-Obeidy’s testimony, but her wounds seemed consistent with what she was saying”**, the U.S. television explained on its website. The New York Times goes further: **“Her experience corresponds to the longstanding human rights abuses in Libya under the Gaddafi Government”**. (Jerome Delay, [Libye – Confusion autour d’un viol collectif](#), (*Libya – Confusion around a collective rape*) Le Monde (France), March 28 2011. Emphasis added.)

Even Al-Jazeera chose its side. In [this video](#), the journalist doesn’t show any sign of fairness:

Eman al-Obeidi’s harrowing tale of rape and abuse at the hands of Gaddafi’s militias shocked the journalists present. But the reaction of Libyan security and hotel staff added another layer of distress. One waitress pulled a table knife on her and called her a traitor.

As officials tried to silence Eman al-Obeidi then led her away, she called out: “They say they are taking me to a hospital, but they’re really taking me to jail.” **Then the government’s spin began**. The government spokesman... said she was drunk, mentally ill, and that she was not a lawyer as she had said, but a prostitute. And the **final misrepresentation**, that she was home, safe, with her family. In fact she was in the hands of Colonel Gaddafi’s forces once again. But by now, her family were fighting for her (Anita McNaught, [Anger over detention of Libyan woman](#), Al Jazeera English, March 28, 2011. Emphasis added.)

Despite the hordes of photographers and cameramen, there didnot seem to be any available images of the knife, which was in one report pulled by a man, in another by a woman, nor of the presumed victim’s bloody wounds mentioned by several media.

It is otherwise mentioned that she is being expelled “roughly”, but, as we can clearly see in the video, she is neither handcuffed, nor hooded, nor dragged in any way. The peaceful demonstrators at the G20 meetings are usually treated more brutally in the so-called “democratic” countries, as was the case in Toronto, Canada, during the most recent meeting.

The journalist goes on:

In an interview with Al-Jazeera Arabic, **her parents showed a picture of their daughter graduating with her law degree**. (*Ibid.* Emphasis added.)

Yet, what we are shown is her mother holding a regular picture of her without a degree.

The next revelation from the Washington Post should have raised a doubt in the media with regard to Eman al-Obeidy’s testimony:

According to the Washington Post, “Hasan Modeer, **a rebel activist who was with Obaidi’s mother in Tobruk**, said a government official had called Ahmed at 3 a.m. Sunday asking her to persuade her daughter to change her story”. (Tara Bahrapour and Liz Sly, [Libyan government offered money to appease Iman al-Obaidi, woman in rape-claim case, mother says](#), Washington Post, March 27, 2011. Emphasis added.)

If this woman has ties to the rebels, this story could possibly be a fabricated event, a psychological operation designed to galvanize global public opinion in favour of the NATO intervention and to demonize the Libyan regime, in the manner of [Nayirah al-Sabah](#) during the Gulf War. This Kuwaiti gave a touching testimony before the U.S. Congressional Human Rights Caucus on the atrocities apparently committed by the Iraqi regime. It later turned out that this young lady was the daughter of the Kuwaiti ambassador to the U.S. and that her testimony was pure fiction.

Why does the media commit itself to the rebellion in Libya? Is it deliberate or not? The most disturbing aspect of this favouritism is that they keep telling us about the rebels, but never who those Libyan rebels are!

Armed Rebellions and “Humanitarian Interventions”

So, who are these rebels? Who arms them? Who finances them? What interests do they have? Do they have ties to foreign countries? In short, no one seems to have the slightest idea of the nature of this armed rebellion, and yet, the Western press endorses it unreservedly in the way as it supported the popular uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt.

If we look back, the following questions can be asked: are we dealing with the same type of rebels as those who were armed and financed by the CIA in Haiti and contributed in 2004 to overthrowing Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the president elected with a majority of approximately 70%, and who had socialist and anti-imperialist views? (See Michel Chossudovsky, [The Destabilization of Haiti: February 29, 2004](#), Global Research, February 28, 2009)

Or maybe they are similar to the Nicaraguan Contras, those “freedom fighters” supported by the Reagan administration in the 80s? These were also armed and financed by the CIA, and tried to halt the Sandinista revolution, which was also socialist and anti-imperialist. (See Philip Agee, [How United States Intervention Against Venezuela Works](#), Global Research, September 15, 2005)

These examples don’t seem to be part of history for the media, whose historical knowledge is questionable. The only comparison we are given is the one with Kosovo. Yet again, history repeats itself: the Kosovo Liberation Army was armed and financed by the CIA among others. (See Michel Chossudovsky, [The Destabilization of Bolivia and the “Kosovo Option”](#), Global Research, October 7, 2008).

Since the truth struggles to make its way into the self-righteous minds of the Western press, the U.S.-NATO intervention in Yugoslavia is a model of “humanitarian war” which should be followed to avoid “massacres”. And yet, whoever has a basic knowledge of the break-up of Yugoslavia knows the ultimate goal of this U.S.-NATO intervention was to divide and conquer, eliminate a functional socialist economy which is now split into small entities crippled with debts, to the great delight of the major financial institutions of this world. The Serbs were accused of committing atrocities while the violence they were subjected to was and remains largely ignored. (See [Srebrenica Historical Project](#))

There was the “butcher of Bagdad”, the “butcher of Belgrade” and now it’s the “butcher of Tripoli”. Always the same tactic. Always the same saviours. And people always fall for it.

The official narrative of this kind of intervention has inherited the name of “humanitarian war” or “humanitarian intervention”, which some describe quite rightly as “humanitarian

imperialism". Don't forget: states have no friends, only interests.

Those who intervene abroad don't do it to save people, but their economic interests, and the media is wary of explaining the power struggle between Western states in Gaddafi's land, which holds the greatest African oil wealth. (See Michel Chossudovsky, ["Operation Libya" and the Battle for Oil: Redrawing the Map of Africa](#), Global Research, March 9, 2011)

In 2001, following the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, the Orwellian concept of "responsibility to protect" (R2P) was developed under the auspices of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, an initiative of the Canadian government.

After having profusely demonized the Libyan leader, the media hasten to promote the famous "R2P" doctrine to assist the Libyan people, a doctrine also advocated by the leaders in favour of an armed intervention on the rebels' side, whose identity is still not revealed to us.

The Arab League, which declared itself favourable to a no-fly zone on March 13 in order to "protect civilians", includes numerous U.S. allies, such as Yemen, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, which are far from being models of democracy. On the other hand, the African Union has been opposed to a foreign intervention.

Instead of questioning the reasons of this intervention and the interests of its advocates, the major media outlets have advocated interference without knowing who was at the root of the armed rebellion:

While most **tyrants** find noble pretexts to **massacre those who challenge them**, **Gaddafi states his intent to trigger endless bloodshed**. In his eyes, no price is too high to remain in power.

At least, it is all clear. **It is no longer possible to pretend that the threat hovering over the Libyan people is the fruit of a propaganda piece**. It is no longer possible either to pretend that we don't know what is waiting for us, like we did with **Rwanda** or **Bosnia**.

With his foreseen massacre, the sinister Colonel creates a precedent. And puts the international community in a delicate dilemma: **how far must it go to avoid the blood bath?...**

[T]he case of Libya is rather similar to Kosovo's, where NATO had prompted a military offensive in 1999 to protect the population against the Serbian power ...

Incidentally, it is in the wake of this operation that the UN started to explore a new concept: **the "right to protect"**

However, if the **tyrant from Tripoli keeps slaughtering his people**, sooner or later the world will have the opportunity to put the beautiful principle of the "responsibility to protect" to the test. Because if we don't do it in this case, we never will. (Agnès Gruda, [Le devoir de protéger](#), *(The Duty to Protect)*, Cyberpresse (Canada), March 5, 2011. Emphasis added.)

This **doctrine of “liberty to protect”** exists. It was promoted by the Canadian government at the UN a few years ago. Yet, today, neither the Harper government nor the leader of the party that conceived this doctrine, Michael Ignatieff from the LPC, are proposing to use **it to protect the Libyan people against the tyrant who promises “rivers of blood”**.

Luckily, on Saturday, a surprising event occurred. An international organization which Canada is not part of **had the decency to “[provide] urgent and continuing support [to the Libyan people]... from the serious violations and grave crimes committed by the Libyan authorities, which have consequently lost their legitimacy”**. This **organization of consistent democrats, without naming it, called for the implementation of the “responsibility to protect” principle**, by demanding that the UN Security Council impose a no-fly zone on Libya... (Jean-François Lisée, [Mais où est donc la « responsabilité de protéger »](#) (Where on earth is the “responsibility to protect”), L’actualité (Canada), March 13 2011. Emphasis added.)

Here, both authors are mistaken. In fact, it is Gaddafi’s son Seïf Al-Islam, who spoke of “rivers of blood” and, taken out of context, this sensational image duly serves the interventionist propaganda. Prior to that [he said](#): “As the ultimate solution... we are considering arming everyone, **we will arm 5 million Libyans**, Libya is neither Tunisia nor Egypt... Rivers of blood will flow...”

Wouldn’t it be insane for a government challenged by a so-called popular uprising to propose arming 5 million citizens when its country has 6.5 millions of them? The media only emphasized the “promise” to “make rivers of blood flow”, which gives the impression that the armed forces of the regime will launch into a killing spree against an unprotected population.

War Propaganda

In an article entitled “[The Rules of War Propaganda](#)”, Michel Collon details the Western media’s war coverage and the “inevitable rules of ‘war propaganda’”: demonize the enemy, leave out the geographical and historical context, hide the real interest, and avoid recalling past media manipulation. The case of Libya is an obvious example.

Of course, Muammar Gaddafi is not an angel. But was George W. Bush better? Which of the two has more blood on his hands? Under George W. Bush, no one proposed to invade the U.S. to keep them from going to slaughter Iraqis or Afghans.

And if an armed rebellion took place in a Western country, what would the leaders do? If policing is excessive during peaceful demonstrations, we can easily imagine the reaction to an armed rebellion.

Besides, it is worth noting that Westerners attempted more than once to murder Colonel Gaddafi. One of these attempts has incidentally killed one of his daughters. What would happen if the daughter of a Western head of state was killed by Arab forces?

This demonization of Gaddafi is a psychological war tactic which has been used more than once to mobilize the public opinion in favour of armed interventions. In addition, the media is extremely quiet when it comes to facts about Libya: its Human Development Index and

GDP higher than all African states, the quality of its social programmes, etc.

When one looks at the big picture and historical context of humanitarian interventions, it is obvious that this NATO assault against Libya has nothing to do with the protection of civilians.

The U.S. Secretary of Defence, Robert Gates, admitted it himself in an interview on [Meet the Press](#): “No, Libya is not of vital interest for the United States, but we clearly have interests there and it’s a part of the region which is of vital interest for the United States.”

This avowal cannot be clearer: we have interest in the Middle East and that is why we intervene in Libya, to protect our interests in the Middle East.

If the U.S. Secretary of Defence admits that his country intervenes in Libya to protect its interests, how can we possibly still talk about a humanitarian intervention? And these rebels who were supposed to be provided with arms, when will someone dare tell us that they have links with the Western secret services and Al-Qaeda?

Rebels, Al-Qaeda, MI6, CIA

Here’s a Guardian article from 2002. This information has been available for ten years, but the media didn’t think it was newsworthy:

British intelligence paid large sums of money to an al-Qaeda cell in Libya in a doomed attempt to assassinate Colonel Gaddafi in 1996 and thwarted early attempts to bring Osama bin Laden to justice.

The latest claims of MI6 involvement with Libya’s fearsome Islamic Fighting Group, which is connected to one of bin Laden’s trusted lieutenants, will be embarrassing to the Government, which described similar claims by renegade MI5 officer David Shayler as ‘pure fantasy’.

The allegations have emerged in the book *Forbidden Truth*, published in America by two French intelligence experts who reveal that the first Interpol arrest warrant for bin Laden was issued by Libya in March 1998.

According to journalist Guillaume Dasquié and Jean-Charles Brisard, an adviser to French President Jacques Chirac, British and US intelligence agencies buried the fact that the arrest warrant had come from Libya and played down the threat. Five months after the warrant was issued, al-Qaeda killed more than 200 people in the truck bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

The arrest warrant was issued in connection with the murder in March 1994 of two German anti-terrorism agents, Silvan and Vera Becker, who were in charge of missions in Africa. According to the book, the resistance of Western intelligence agencies to the Libyan concerns can be explained by MI6’s involvement with the al-Qaeda coup plot. (Martin Bright, [MI6 ‘halted bid to arrest bin Laden’](#), Guardian, November 10, 2002)

While Gaddafi became the laughing stock of the media when he accused Al-Qaeda of backing the rebellion, on March 28, the Commander of NATO's European forces confirmed half-heartedly, and without being ridiculed, that the network was manipulating the insurgents:

Since the beginning of the insurrection in Libya, Muammar Gaddafi accused Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden. He thus claimed several times that the terrorist network manipulated the insurgents. This Tuesday, James Stavridis, the commander of NATO's forces in Europe, has partly confirmed these claims.

Indeed, during an audit before the U.S. Senate, he explained that some intelligence mentioned signs of an Al-Qaeda, or even of a Lebanese Hezbollah presence among the Libyan opposition. He nevertheless tempered this by underlining that he did not have "enough details" to say whether this presence was "significant or not". ([Libye : l'Otan admet que l'opposition serait infiltrée par Al-Qaïda](#), (*Libya: NATO admits the opposition would be infiltrated by Al-Qaeda*) TF1, March 29, 2011)

Therefore, even if Westerners admit the presence of Al-Qaeda among the rebels, they still choose to intervene in their favour.

To add to this Kafkaesque turn of events, the Libyan National Transition Council (LNTC), representing the Libyan opposition and up to now recognized by France and Qatar [1], has appointed a longstanding CIA collaborator to lead its operations:

The Libyan National Council, the Benghazi-based group that speaks for the rebel forces fighting the Gaddafi regime, has appointed a long-time CIA collaborator to head its military operations. The selection of Khalifa Hifter, a former colonel in the Libyan army, was reported by *McClatchy Newspapers* Thursday [...] (Patrick Martin, [A CIA commander for the Libyan rebels](#), World Socialist Web Site, March 28, 2011)

The next day we [learned](#) during a press conference who the LNTC spokespersons were: Mahmoud Shammam, former *Foreign Policy* journalist, "living between Washington and Doha", and Guma El-Gamaty, "an activist living in London". (Eric Albert, [Les premiers pas politiques hésitants des rebelles libyens](#), (*The Libyan Rebels' first hesitant political steps*), La Tribune, March 29, 2011.)

The Libyan rebels' representatives are thus Libyans living in the U.S. and the U.K., and their chief of operations is a CIA collaborator. The Libyan rebellion is starting to take on the appearance of a Western regime change.

Two days after the release of the *McClatchy* article and after the beginning of the intervention, the New York Times "[revealed](#)" that the CIA had been on Libyan soil for several weeks. As for the MI6 and the British Special Forces, agents were captured early in March by the rebels who had mistaken them for enemy spies. British intelligence was allegedly on the ground to establish connections with the rebellion, which they were apparently not aware of.

Another important fact has been largely ignored by the media: Benghazi is a chosen hideout for jihadists, according to a 2007 study from the United States Military Academy at West Point:

The most striking finding which emerges from the West Point study is that the corridor which goes from Benghazi to Tobruk, passing through the city of Darnah... represents one of the

greatest concentrations of jihadi terrorists to be found anywhere in the world, and by some measures can be regarded as the leading source of suicide bombers anywhere on the planet. (Dr. Webster G. Tarpley, [The CIA's Libya Rebels: The Same Terrorists who Killed US, NATO Troops in Iraq](#), Global Research, March 28, 2011)

All this information reveals a number of facts crucial to the understanding of this conflict, and is available for whomever bothers to do a bit of research. Yet, it seems like the role of the mainstream press is not to deliver facts, but rather propaganda.

Whether this bias is deliberate or not, the result is in any case the same: they are not doing their job correctly. Once again.

To read the original article in French click here: [Libye : Les médias et la propagande en faveur de la rébellion](#)

Julie Lévesque is a journalist and researcher at Global Research, Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).

Notes

1. Italy has now also recognized the Libyan National Transition Council.

The original source of this article is Global Research
Copyright © [Julie Lévesque](#), Global Research, 2011

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Julie Lévesque](#)

About the author:

Julie Lévesque is a journalist and researcher with the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG), Montreal. She was among the first independent journalists to visit Haiti in the wake of the January 2010 earthquake. In 2011, she was on board "The Spirit of Rachel Corrie", the only humanitarian vessel which penetrated Gaza territorial waters before being shot at by the Israeli Navy.

not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca