

Libya Recolonised: New African Bases For AFRICOM-NATO Combine

At least 50,000 Deaths resulting from NATO Bombing

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On the outskirts of Tripoli, a residential building reduced to rubble in a NATO airstrike on June 19. Even the most conservative estimates suggest that the war on Libya has led to the loss of at least 50,000 lives, mostly at the hands of NATO's bombers and local allies.

FROM Kabul in October 2001 to Tripoli in October 2011, a decade of unremitting planetary warfare has seen countries devastated and capitals occupied over a vast swathe of territory from the Hindu Kush to the northern end of Africa's Mediterranean coast. Within the Arab world, this ultra-imperialist offensive of Euro-American predators may yet move on to Syria as well – and beyond that to Iran at some future date. For now, in any case, the occupation of Libya by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) clients and corporations marks the vanquishing of the spirit of rebellion that was ignited in neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt earlier this year and has been under attack ever since. For much of Africa, though, this may yet be merely a beginning of a new conquest by the Euro-American consortium that may ravage the continent even more ferociously than did the famous "Scramble for Africa" that was sanctified in Berlin at the end of the 19th century.

Humanitarian Interventionism

Afghanistan was invaded in the name of "War on Terror" plus human rights. Iraq was invaded in the name of "War on Terror" plus nuclear non-proliferation plus human rights. Libya is the first country that has been invaded almost exclusively in the name of human rights. In the very early days of hostilities in Libya, President Barack Obama said dramatically that if NATO had waited "one more day, Benghazi could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world". His senior aides claimed that the imminent "massacre" could have led to the death of one lakh people, and this is what got repeated ad nauseum on U.S. television channels as well as in

all the halls of power where the option of human rights interventionism got discussed with a view to obtaining a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution. This was a bare-faced lie, very much in the mould of the lie about Iraq's purported nuclear weapons that was brandished around by Obama's predecessor, President George Bush Jr. It was on the basis of such disinformation that Resolutions 1970 and 1973 were passed in the Security Council, invoking the dubious principle of the "responsibility to protect", which was inserted into the duties of the U.N. as late as 2005, after the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq were already afoot.

This was the time when the Bush administration was openly claiming in international fora, including at the U.N. itself, that (a) in this Age of Terror the U.S. reserved the right of pre-emptive military attack against any state that the U.S. considered a threat to its national security, and that (b) in the conditions of the "War on Terror" many aspects of the Geneva Conventions were no longer applicable. This discourse of the right to pre-emptive invasion was then supplemented by the discourse of the benign nature of the empire itself, in the shape of human rights interventionism. The claim now was that the "international community" - as defined by Euro-American powers - had the right to intervene in the internal affairs of any sovereign country if "massacre" or "genocide" was imminent. The NATO bombings in Libya that began in the third week of March were the first that had ever been authorised by the Security Council in its entire history on this dubious principle of human rights interventionism. Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, was in his own way quite right when he asserted in the early hours of March 25: "It's a historic moment... what is happening in Libya is creating jurisprudence... it is a major turning point in the foreign policy of France, Europe, and the world" (emphasis added).

No credible evidence has ever emerged to support Obama's claim that a massacre (of up to 100,000) was imminent in Benghazi, and no massacres ensued in the rebellious cities and towns that Qaddafi's troops did occupy in the earlier stages of the fighting. On the contrary, there is incontrovertible evidence of massacres at the hands of NATO's mercenaries. Neighbouring countries, such as Niger, Mali and Chad, have reported the eviction of some three lakh black African residents from Libya as NATO's local allies and clients rolled on towards Tripoli under the devastating shield of NATO's own 40,000-plus bombings over large parts of Libya. Together with these mass evictions of workers and refugees from neighbouring countries - whom the Qaddafi regime had welcomed to make up for labour shortages in an expanding economy - there are also credible reports of lynchings and massacres of black Libyans themselves. The scale of these depredations is yet undetermined but it is already clear that upwards of 50,000 have died as a result of the war unleashed by NATO with the collusion of the Security Council, and half a million or more have been rendered homeless, mostly at the hands of NATO-armed "rebels" who have now been appointed as the new government of the country. Neither the Security Council nor NATO commanders nor, indeed, President Obama - the first black President in the history of the U.S. and himself the son of a Kenyan father - has seen it fit to take up the "responsibility to protect" these hapless people, most of them black Africans, even though several heads of African states have protested, including the very pro-U.S. President of Nigeria.

One of the most pernicious aspects of the liberal discourse of human rights in our time is that this doctrine is utilised in country after country to justify imperialist interventionism in the affairs of the sovereign countries of the tricontinent in direct violation not only of the United Nations Charter and the Westphalian order of nation-states as such but, even more fundamentally, of the very spirit and practices of the anti-colonial movements that fought to

dismantle the colonial empires of yesteryear. The right to independent nationhood is inseparable from the right to choose one's own government without foreign interference. In virtually every country of Latin America over the past half a century, peoples have fought against the most brutal kinds of dictatorship but without ever asking for a foreign intervention. For three simple reasons: (1) it is only the people themselves, in their collectivity, who have the right to change their government; (2) it would be hard to find a dictator, including Qaddafi and Saddam Hussein, who has not colluded with imperialism at one point or another; and (3) a military intervention is always, without exception, the intervention of the strong against the weak - always, without exception, in pursuit of the interests of those who intervene.

From Geneva to Sirte

IN the Geneva Convention, Convention (III) relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. Geneva, August 12, 1949:

ARTICLE 13
Prisoners of war must at all times be humanely treated. Any unlawful act or omission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endan-

gering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention. In particular, no prisoner of war may be subjected to physical mutilation or to medical or scientific experiments of any kind which are not justified by the medical, dental or hospital treatment of

the prisoner concerned and carried out in his interest.

Likewise, prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity.

Measures of reprisal against prisoners of war are prohibited.

PICTURES: REUTERS TO/HANDOUT





IN SIRTE ON October 20. Images on television show Muammar Qaddafi before his death being caught from a drainpipe under a road where he was hiding and dragged around and beaten by rebel fighters.

Given this basic principle, the issue of Qaddafi's dictatorial rule is just as irrelevant today as was the nature of Saddam Hussein's rule in the past; and as irrelevant as would be the dictatorial temper of Bashar al-Asad in Syria or Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in Iran in case of invasions yet to come. We shall come to the paradoxical character of the Qaddafi regime, and it cannot be anyone's case that Qaddafi was some sort of liberal democrat. It needs to be said, though, that he was no more dictatorial than most rulers of Africa and the Arab world, most notably the friends of the West in Saudi Arabia and the whole complex of various emirates in the Gulf. His authoritarianism was indeed ferocious. However, if matters are viewed from the perspective of the well-being of the Libyan people, we shall also have to concede that Qaddafi built the most advanced welfare state in Africa - just as Iraq was the most advanced welfare state in the Arab East, Saddam's authoritarianism notwithstanding. Dismantling of the welfare state - and privatisation and corporatisation of the national assets - is in fact the filthy underbelly of this human rights imperialism. If human rights were even remotely the issue in such interventionism, Saudi Arabia would be the logical first target. And, why should there not be a NATO occupation of Israel, immediately, for protecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and the implementation of numerous Security Council resolutions?

In reality, the great crusade for human rights and democracy in Libya was conducted by NATO with the aid of, among others, personnel from Qatar and the Emirates, just as NATO's own Islamists in Turkey have joined hands with Saudi Arabia in providing weapons to the Muslim Brotherhood and its allies in Syria against the Assad regime in the name of

democracy and human rights.

Empire goes where oil is

The Security Council resolution that authorised NATO's "humanitarian intervention" in Libya was well reflected in a secret proposal to the French government by the National Transitional Council (NTC) in the early days of the "rebellion", which offered to France 35 per cent of Libya's gross national oil production "in exchange", in the words of the proposal, for "total and permanent" French support for the NTC. The French government, of course, denied it when the French newspaper Liberation published the communication. This coyness of the conspirators was not to last long. On October 21, less than 24 hours after the announcement of Qaddafi's assassination, Britain's new Defence Minister, Philip Hammond, announced that the United Kingdom had presented to the NTC a "request" for a licence to drill for oil. He then added:

"Libya is a relatively wealthy country with oil reserves, and I expect there will be opportunities for British and other companies to get involved in the reconstruction of Libya.... I would expect British companies, even British sales directors, [to be] packing their suitcases and looking to get out to Libya and take part in the reconstruction of that country as soon as they can."

As the U.S. Ambassador, Gene Cretz, unfurled the flag over the American Embassy in Tripoli, at its reopening ceremony on September 22, he was equally upbeat:

THE CIVIL WAR IN LIBYA 2011

February 15/16 The arrest of human rights activist Fethi Terbet starts a riot in Benghazi.

February 24 Anti-government militias take control of central coastal city of Misrata after evicting forces loyal to Qaddafi.

February 26 The U.N. Security Council imposes sanctions on Qaddafi and his family, and refers the crackdown on rebels to the International Criminal Court (ICC).

March 5 The rebel National Transitional Council (NTC) in Benghazi declares itself Libya's sole representative.

March 17 The Security Council votes to authorise a no-fly zone over Libya and military action - to protect civilians against Qaddafi's army.

March 19 The first air strikes halt the advance of Qaddafi's forces on Benghazi and target Libya's air defences.

April 30 A Nato missile attack on a house in Tripoli kills Qaddafi's youngest son and three grandchildren, his government says.

June 27 The ICC issues arrest warrants for Qaddafi, his son Saif al-Islam, and his brother-in-law Abdullah al-Senussi, concerning crimes against humanity.

August 21 Rebels enter Tripoli. Qaddafi makes audio addresses over state television calling on Libyans to fight off the rebel "rats".

August 23 The rebels overrun Qaddafi's fortified Bab al-Aziziya compound in Tripoli, trashing the symbols of his rule.

August 29 Qaddafi's wife, his daughter Aisha and two of his sons enter Algeria. Aisha gives birth in a clinic in a border town hours after crossing the frontier.

September 8 Interim Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril arrives in Tripoli on his first visit since it was taken by his forces.

September 11 Libya starts producing oil again.

September 15 France's Nicolas Sarkozy and Britain's David Cameron land in Libya to a heroes' welcome.

September 16 The Security Council eases sanctions on Libya, including on its national oil company and central bank. The U.N. General Assembly approves a request to accredit interim government envoys as Libya's sole representatives at the U.N., effectively recognising the NTC.

September 20 U.S. President Barack Obama calls for the last of Qaddafi's loyalist forces to surrender as he announces the return of the U.S. ambassador to Tripoli. Qaddafi taunts NATO in a speech broadcast by Syrian-based Arria television station.

September 27 NATO says Libya's interim rulers have taken full control of the country's stockpile of chemical weapons and nuclear material.

October 12 Government fighters capture Qaddafi's son Mo'tassim after he tried to escape Sirte.

October 14 Gunfights break out in Tripoli between Qaddafi supporters and NTC forces, the first sign of armed resistance to the new government.

October 17 NTC forces celebrate the capture of Bani Walid, one of the final bastions of Qaddafi loyalists. A Syrian television station confirms Qaddafi's son Khamis was killed in fighting southeast of Tripoli on August 29.

October 18 U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton arrives in Libya on an unannounced visit, urges militias to unite.

October 20 Qaddafi is captured and killed as NTC fighters take his hometown Sirte ending a two-month siege. An NTC official says Qaddafi's son Mo'tassim is dead.

October 21 Qaddafi's body lies in an old meat store, viewed by hundreds of onlookers, as arguments over a burial, and his killing after being captured, dog efforts by Libya's new leaders to make a formal start on a new era.



Text source: www.nasbc.nas.com/Graphics; T.S. Viewnandin

“We know that oil is the jewel in the crown of Libyan natural resources, but even in Qaddafi’s time they were starting from A to Z in terms of building infrastructure and other things. If we can get American companies here on a fairly big scale, which we will try to do everything we can to do that, then this will redound to improve the situation in the United States with respect to our own jobs.”

Referring to the Italian oil company, the Foreign Minister of Italy, Franco Frattini, added his own gleeful chime to this triumphalist chorus: “Eni will play a No.1 role in the future.” Qatar, whose overt and covert contribution to the NATO offensive was very considerable indeed, is already handing oil sales in eastern Libya and will also be entering the distribution of the spoils of war from a position of strength. The New York Times noted: “Libya’s provisional government has already said it is eager to welcome Western businesses (and)... would even give its Western backers some ‘priority’ in access to Libyan business.” That was accurate. “We don’t have a problem with Western countries like Italians, French and U.K. companies,” Abdeljalil Mayouf, a spokesman for the NTC-controlled oil company, Agogco, was quoted by Reuters as saying, “but we may have some political issues with Russia, China and Brazil.”

Libya's 46 billion barrels of oil make it home to Africa's largest proven deposit of conventional crude, though Nigeria and Angola dispute this Libyan pre-eminence. Before the civil war began in earnest in February, Libya was pumping about 1.6 million barrels a day, most of which went to southern Europe, whose refineries were tailored to refine Libya's light, high-quality crude. By contrast, Saudi crude is heavier and unsuitable for many of those refineries, while Libya's geographical proximity also makes it much more attractive. Almost 70 per cent of Libya's oil went to four countries, Spain, Germany, France and Italy, even before the NATO war, and oil-producing regions were of course the first to be secured as NATO started bombing its way to victory. The oil industry's biggest players, meanwhile, are ready to reclaim their old concessions and get new ones. The vast Ghadames and Sirte basins, largely off limits to foreign oil companies since Qaddafi came to power 42 years ago, are now expected to be privatised and opened to foreign corporations. The same applies to Libya's offshore oil and gas resources.

The loss of political sovereignty thus leads necessarily to great curtailment of economic sovereignty as well.



THE PRODUCTION FACILITIES of a German oil firm in the Libyan desert near the oasis of Jakhira, which was shut in February following the violence. Almost 70 per cent of Libya's oil went to four countries - Spain, Germany, France and Italy - even before the NATO bombings, during which the oil-producing regions were the first to be secured.

African Union vs “The international Community”

At a meeting between the two parties on June 15 this year, some three months after NATO initiated its aerial bombings of Libya, the High Level Ad hoc Committee of the African Union (A.U.) handed over to the Security Council a letter spelling out the A.U. position on the Libyan crisis. Now, even after the fall of Tripoli and the assassination of Qaddafi, the contents of that communication are worth re-visiting if we wish to assess the great gap of perceptions and prescriptions, on issues of interventionism, between nation-states of the tricontinent on the one hand, and, on the other hand, those institutions of “the international community” whose task it is to justify Euro-American interventionism. We shall first offer a series of quotations from that key document:

1. “Whatever the genesis of the intervention by NATO in Libya, the A.U. called for dialogue before the U.N. Resolutions 1970 and 1973 and after those resolutions. Ignoring the A.U. for three months and going on with the bombings of the sacred land of Africa has been high-handed, arrogant and provocative.”

2. "An attack on Libya or any other member of the African Union without express agreement by the A.U. is a dangerous provocation... sovereignty has been a tool of emancipation of the peoples of Africa who are beginning to chart transformational paths for most of the African countries after centuries of predation by the slave trade, colonialism and neocolonialism. Careless assaults on the sovereignty of African countries are, therefore, tantamount to inflicting fresh wounds on the destiny of the African peoples."

3. "Fighting between government troops and armed insurrectionists is not genocide. It is civil war.... It is wrong to characterise every violence as genocide or imminent genocide so as to use it as a pretext for the undermining of the sovereignty of states."

4. "The U.N. should not take sides in a civil war. The U.N. should promote dialogue.... The demand by some countries that Col. Muammar Qaddafi must go first before the dialogue is incorrect. Whether Qaddafi goes or stays is a matter for the Libyan people to decide. It is particularly wrong when the demand for Qaddafi's departure is made by outsiders.... Qaddafi accepted dialogue when the A.U. mediation committee visited Tripoli on April 10, 2011. Any war activities after that have been provocation for Africa. It is an unnecessary war. It must stop.... The story that the rebels cannot engage in dialogue unless Qaddafi goes away does not convince us. If they do not want dialogue, then, let them fight their war with Qaddafi without NATO bombing.... The externally sponsored groups neglect dialogue and building internal consensus and, instead, concentrate on winning external patrons."

It goes without saying that the A.U. is by no means a conglomeration of radicals; it is a conservative grouping of state governments, most of whom are, in one way or another, allied with the West; many of the heads of states participating in A.U. proceedings at any given time are venal, corrupt, authoritarian or worse. That is, however, no more relevant than the personal venality of Sarkozy or Silvio Berlusconi or any other Western leader. The point, rather, is that the A.U.'s is the only united voice through which African states speak and that the principles and points of fact raised here are unexceptionable.

The very first point is that the Security Council, NATO or any other conglomeration of states and institutions simply have no right to represent themselves as "the international community" when what they say and do is opposed by the united voice of the African state system. The second point is that the issue of state sovereignty is posed in Africa and Asia not only in European, Westphalian terms, but, far more sensitively and explosively, in the perspective of the recently won and still very fragile independence of states after a long history of colonial predation. Further, the A.U. letter rejects the position - enunciated by Obama, his NATO allies and the Security Council - that there was any genocide or imminent genocide in Libya. Rather, it speaks strictly of a "civil war" between "government troops and armed insurrectionists", calls upon the U.N. not to take sides in the "civil war" and goes on then to contemptuously dismiss the "externally sponsored groups" and their "demands" that are designed for "winning external patrons".

The most important practical point in any case is that Qaddafi had accepted the principle of negotiation and arbitration by the A.U. as early as April 10, after which the A.U. quite rightly demanded that NATO stop its military mission and the U.N. concentrate on facilitating negotiations under A.U. auspices. A significant section of the letter laid out an elaborate plan for negotiations, for policing of violence inside Libya by an A.U. brigade as had been done in Burundi, and for conflict resolution processes using the principles of "provisional immunity" during the peace negotiations, and for the establishment of truth and reconciliation bodies for reconciliation after peace has been re-established.

None of it was heeded, precisely because the voice of reason had come from the weak, while the will for intervention and regime change had come from self-appointed masters of the universe.

Civilisation and the ecstasy of conquest

In the moment of victory, President Obama was relatively more measured in his words than many other Western leaders. The fall of Libya to 40,000-plus NATO bombings was proof, he said, that “we are seeing the strength of the American leadership across the world”. And he was not entirely mistaken in taking the credit. The Security Council resolution that authorised NATO operations would have been inconceivable without the coercive powers of the U.S. Obama’s cavalier condoning of assassination and extra-judicial execution, as displayed to the world in the cases of Osama bin Laden and Anwar al-Awlaki among others, was part of the implicit licence to kill the unarmed Qaddafi as well. Less than 48 hours before Qaddafi was actually assassinated, Hillary Clinton, the U.S. Secretary of State, was on a triumphant visit to Tripoli, the Libyan capital now occupied by NATO and its local clients, and said unambiguously: “We hope he [Qaddafi] can be captured or killed soon.” Incitement to murder could hardly be couched in words more stark.

This issue of an authorised assassination should detain us somewhat, for it does impinge upon the imperial duplicity of the human rights discourse. Details of Qaddafi’s death and burial are still unclear. We do know that the town of Sirte, to which he had retreated during the siege of Tripoli, was devastated by hundreds of aerial bombings by NATO with the single-minded intent to kill him and those close to him. We also know that he was leaving Sirte in a convoy when the convoy too was bombed; the French claimed that it was their Rafale fighter jet that disabled his vehicle; the Americans claimed that it was the work of one of their Predators. The main point is that he was captured alive and unarmed by NATO’s mercenaries on the ground, kicked around, beaten and killed. Considering how many American, French, British, Qatari and other special forces have been there, commanding the Libyan “rebels”, it is significant that the body of the dead man was never taken away from the milling “rebels”. Christof Heyns, the U.N. Special Rapporteur, seems to be clear on this point: “The Geneva Conventions are very clear that when prisoners are taken they may not be executed wilfully and if that was the case then we are dealing with a war crime, something that should be tried.”

The complication, however, is that the Western alliance had previously announced an award of \$20 million to anyone who kills (or helps kill/capture) Qaddafi. So, here is a test for Western values: should the man who killed Qaddafi be tried in a court of law? Should he be awarded \$20 million and celebrated as a hero? Or should he be allowed to slip out of the grip of the law, history and public memory – and settled, with a handsome settlement, in Miami, southern California or a villa on the Rhine?

Qaddafi’s own tribe issued this statement: “We call on the U.N., the Organisation of the Islamic Conference and Amnesty International to force the [National] Transitional Council to hand over the martyrs’ bodies to our tribe in Sirte and to allow them to perform their burial ceremony in accordance with Islamic customs and rules.” But there was no such luck! NATO’s mercenaries displayed Qaddafi’s body, along with that of his son Mutassim, naked to the waist, in freezers in a meat store in Misrata, inviting souvenir photographs.

Human rights imperialism seems to be inventing a brand new entertainment industry: that of necrophilic tourism.

Be that as it may. President Obama is right in claiming that the event proved “the strength of American leadership”. U.S. Special Forces and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) teams were on the ground since before the beginning of the rebellion and made sure that those who were destined to be NATO’s mercenary army on the ground were armed from the start; they were then joined by their French and British counterparts and backed by armed groups from Qatar, the Emirates and the like. Bombings were left largely to the Franco-British component of NATO but much of the high electronics and infrastructural nitty-gritty was handled by the U.S. forces: collecting electronic intelligence and smashing the Libyan anti-aircraft systems, for example, and blockading the coast. NATO warplanes used U.S. bases for refuelling and these bases supplied munitions when their European counterparts ran low. In an important sense, the military operation in Libya was a highly successful experiment in an assault coordinated between AFRICOM – the U.S. Command for the control of Africa – and its European partners.

If President Obama was cryptic, his icy Vice President, Joe Biden, was precise: “In this case, America spent \$2 billion and didn’t lose a single life. This is more of the prescription for how to deal with the world as we go forward than it has been in the past.” By “life”, Biden obviously means American life, considering that even the most conservative estimates suggest that the war in Libya has led to the loss of at least 50,000 lives, mostly at the hands of NATO bombers and their local allies.

More broadly, what is at issue is a U.S. objective, first conceived during the Vietnam War, to develop an “automated battlefield” with technologies so advanced that wars may be won and entire countries conquered without any significant ground deployment. Across the Atlantic, that same idea was invoked by people like Paddy Ashdown, who once served for four years as E.U. High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina, who said that from now on the West should adopt the “Libyan model” of intervention rather than the “Iraqi model” of massive invasion.

This kind of hard-boiled Anglo-Saxon pragmatism can easily be translated by an ambitious politician like Nicolas Sarkozy, the current French President, into the sophistries of a high-minded Gallic discourse on history and civilisation. Pierre Lévy, a former editor of *L’Humanité*, recently recalled a passage from a speech Sarkozy delivered in 2007 in which he glorified “the shattered dream of Charlemagne and of the Holy Roman Empire, the Crusades, the great schism between Eastern and Western Christianity, the fallen glory of Louis XIV and Napoleon...” and then went on to declare that “Europe is today the only force capable of carrying forward a project of civilisation.” This claim to a unique civilisational mission then led quickly to an ambition to conquer: “I want to be the President of a France which will bring the Mediterranean into the process of its reunification after 12 centuries of division and painful conflicts.... America and China have already begun the conquest of Africa. How long will Europe wait to build the Africa of tomorrow? While Europe hesitates, others advance.”

Lévy then goes on to quote Dominique Strauss-Kahn, a senior leader of the Socialist Party (much in the news recently for alleged sexual misdemeanours), who matched Sarkozy’s bombast with his own desire for a Europe stretching “from the cold ice of the Arctic in the North to the hot sands of the Sahara in the South (...) and that Europe, I believe, if it continues to exist, will have reconstituted the Mediterranean as an internal sea, and will have re-conquered the space that the Romans, or Napoleon more recently, attempted to consolidate.”

In this world view, then, NATO is seen as having inherited a mission from the Roman Empire and the Napoleonic conquests, which then involves the “re-conquest” of North Africa. It was, after all, only about 50 years ago that France finally relinquished its claim that Algeria was not a foreign colony but an “outlying province” of France itself. What is very striking in any case is how closely the rhetoric of “civilisation” is woven into the rhetoric of “conquest” and even “re-conquest.”

Obama, Africa and the Imperial Project

Poor little “Olde Europe”! Even in its wildest civilisational ravings, all it can imagine is the re-conquest of its colonial empire in North Africa. By contrast, the U.S. knows how to get directly to the point. In the second week of October, when the war against Libya had been won but Qaddafi yet not assassinated, President Obama announced: “I have authorised a small number of combat-equipped U.S. forces to deploy to central Africa to provide assistance to regional forces.... On October 12, the initial team of U.S. military personnel with appropriate combat equipment deployed to Uganda. During the next month, additional forces will deploy.... These forces will act as advisers to partner forces that have the goal of removing from the battlefield Joseph Kony and other senior leadership of the LRA [Lord’s Resistance Army].... Subject to the approval of each respective host nation, elements of these U.S. forces will deploy into Uganda, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”

So, in the wake of the Libyan conquest, U.S. troops are to be immediately deployed to countries across the middle of Africa, in four countries and in cooperation with regimes that have hideous records of dictatorship and human rights abuses, not the least on the part of Uganda’s “President-for-life”, Yoweri Museveni. Obama justified this newly minted “humanitarian mission” in Uganda in the name of eliminating the LRA. This is odd. The LRA has actually been around for almost a quarter century and has never been weaker than it is today. Why, suddenly, such an operation across a huge part of Africa? Paul Craig Roberts, a former Under Secretary of State for Treasury under President Ronald Reagan (and thus not a left-winger by a long shot), put the matter succinctly: “With Libya conquered, AFRICOM will start on the other African countries where China has energy and mineral investments.... Whereas China brings Africa investment and gifts of infrastructure, Washington sends troops, bombs and military bases.”

Even this recent deployment may be just the tip of an oncoming iceberg. For many years now, the U.S. has been building up a special Command for Africa, the AFRICOM, in tandem with CENTCOM that is responsible for operations in the Middle East (West Asia). As part of this imperial mission in Africa, the U.S. is actively engaged in training the militaries of Mali, Chad, Niger, Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, Gabon, Zambia, Uganda, Senegal, Mozambique, Ghana, Malawi and Mauritania. Together with other NATO countries, the U.S. has staged numerous military exercises in Africa with the ostensible purpose of preparing contingency plans for “protecting energy supplies” in the Niger delta and the Gulf of Guinea. Aside from Libya, major oil producers in the region include Angola, Nigeria, Cameroon, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Chad and Mauritania. All these, and many others besides, are to be “protected” – pretty much on the “Libyan model” if need be.

This is not the place to go into details. Suffice it to say that the fall of Libya is likely to serve as the first major step in the offensive to capture Africa’s plentiful natural resources. In the fullness of time, as multiple insurgencies and bloodlettings are let loose across the

continent, we are likely to see the erection of many new bases for the AFRICOM-NATO combine, very much on the model of Iraq and Afghanistan. The objective is not only to reserve African resources for the Euro-American imperium as much as possible but also to deny those resources to China, which gets about one third of its oil from Africa – Angola and Sudan in particular – in addition to important materials like platinum, copper, timber and iron ore. Some 75 Chinese companies were working in Libya with 36,000 personnel, not so much in the oil sector as in infrastructural development projects; and China accounted for about 11 per cent of Libya’s pre-war exports. It evacuated its personnel and complained that NATO had unilaterally changed the U.N. resolution from protecting civilians to regime change.

The U.S. would like to see this eviction of China from Libya to become permanent and for such evictions to be repeated across Africa. Will that happen? Too soon to tell. The U.S. has the military might and the impatient arrogance of a declining superpower, but China is the one that has the cash and the almost glacial patience of a rising economic power. A confrontation is on, and it will take decades to settle.

Conclusion

Major issues pertaining to the significance of the Libya war have not been addressed here: the meaning of all this for the so-called “Arab Spring”; the nature of the fallen Qaddafi regime; the likely composition of the emerging dispensation; the social disintegration and multiple internal conflicts that are now likely to ensue; the destabilisation and the prospect of multiple civil wars across the Sahel region caused by the war on Libya; and so on. Other contributors to this issue of Frontline may clarify these issues, or this author may return to them in a future contribution.

So, let me conclude this piece by noting that Qaddafi did leave a brief will, and it is important that we recall some of his last words:

“Let the free people of the world know that we could have bargained over and sold out our cause in return for a personally secure and stable life. We received many offers to this effect but we chose to be at the vanguard of the confrontation as a badge of duty and honour. Even if we do not win immediately, we will give a lesson to future generations that choosing to protect the nation is an honour and selling it out is the greatest betrayal that history will remember forever despite the attempts of the others to tell you otherwise.”

That is true. Friendly African countries had offered him safe sanctuaries, while some European countries would have preferred to have him as a neutralised client rather than a celebrated martyr in (at least parts of) Libya. Offers were indeed made. Given the choices, he preferred to die. In that brief will, he also expressed a simple wish:

“Should I be killed, I would like to be buried, according to Muslim rituals, in the clothes I was wearing at the time of my death and my body unwashed, in the cemetery of Sirte, next to my family and relatives. I would like that my family, especially women and children, be treated well after my death.”

In Islamic custom, the stipulation that the body be washed and wrapped in a fresh shroud is lifted in the case of martyrs. Right or wrong, Qaddafi did think of his own impending death as martyrdom. We may not think so, but many others probably will. Qaddafi was quite largely a buffoon, in many ways brutish, more so as he grew older and more egomaniacal,

but not everyone is going to forget that he also had a visionary side to him and built for his people the most advanced welfare state on the continent. His is a contradictory legacy. We have described earlier in this piece what the winners did to his corpse. Not just the members of his own family or his tribesmen, but many, many others might not so easily forget all that.

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