

REPORT FROM TRIPOLI: More NATO “Humanitarian Intervention:” The Bombing of Al Fateh University, Campus B

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Since coming to Tripoli to see first hand the consequences of the NATO military operations, it has become clear to me that despite the ongoing silence of the international press on the ground here in Libya, there is clear evidence that civilian targets have been hit and Libyan civilians injured and killed.

This Tuesday morning I was taken from my hotel across the city through its bustling traffic to the Al Fateh University.

On 9 June, Dean Ali Mansur was outside in the parking lot. The sky was blue like Carolina blue. The clouds were white—no chemtrails in sight. Puffy and white. Dean Mansur was visibly upset. It seems that some of the young men at Al Fateh University, Campus B were fighting over girls. He explained to me that Libyans are hot blooded. With a gleam in his eye, he whispered to me that girls are important to young men.

Yes, that was clearly evident today as I approached the campus of Al Fateh University, Campus B, formerly known as Nasser University. Under the trees, throughout the lawn as we approached the campus gates, I could see young men and women talking to each other, talking on cell phones, walking to and fro, assembled, probably talking about the latest campus news—whatever that might be. Today, on the Al Fateh campus, life was teeming. Student life seemed vibrant. This feel and ambiance of this university was not unlike the hundreds of other universities that I have visited in the US and around the world.

Libyan boys and girls are like ours. My son would easily fit into the life of this university.







The campus seemed vibrant, too. Cranes everywhere indicated a healthy building program, adding new buildings to enhance the student learning environment. Despite the students' fracas, Dean Mansur had everything to be happy about as he saw his university becoming bigger, better, and stronger. Her told me that they had even signed an agreement with a British university to begin programs in the English language. Not English studies, Dean Mansur emphasized, but an entire curriculum of study taught in the English language! Of course, he intoned, that's all disappointingly ended now.

Al Fateh University, Campus B consists of about 10,000 undergraduates, 800 masters degree candidates, and 18 Ph.D. students; 220 staff, 150 ad hoc professors, 120 employees. It has eight auditoriums, 19 classrooms, 4 extra large classrooms. It also has a rural campus at Al Azizia where 700 students are taught and are a part of the university system. Dean Mansur compares himself to a mayor because he has so many responsibilities presiding over a large community of students engaging in a rich and vibrant academic life.

Dean Mansur told me that life at the university and, for him personally, changed forever on the afternoon of Thursday 9 June, 2011.

He recalled that the university opened as usual around 8:00 am and was to close later that evening at about 8:00 pm.

Thursday, 9 June, he thought, was going to be just like any other day, except for the fracas over the girls that had cleared the campus of many of the students who didn't want to have any part in the fighting. So, outside in the campus parking lot, Dr. Mansur told me he was preoccupied thinking how he would deal with the disciplinary issue before him.

Then, out of nowhere and all of a sudden, he heard something loud up in the sky.

He said it began out of no where, a loud roar. Then a frightful high pitched the hissing sound. He said he looked up into the sky and couldn't hardly believe his eyes: something shiny up in the sky appeared dancing in front of him. He said it moved about like an atari game or something. It danced and zig-zagged all over the sky. He said he was transfixed on the object for what seemed like minutes but in truth must have only been seconds.

Up and down and sideways it raced in the sky and then, without warning, it just came crashing down into the ground nearby. It was a NATO missile.

Tragically it had found its target: Al Fateh University, Campus B.

Dean Mansur said he saw one missile, lots of fire, lots of different colors all around it, and then a huge plume of smoke. He saw one missile, but heard what seemed like many explosions. He said he now can't honestly say how many.

Dr. Mansur said the force and shock of the blast held him frozen in his place. He said his heart stopped for a moment. He wasn't afraid, just frozen. He didn't run away; he didn't cower; he said he just stood stupefied.

The force of the blast cracked thickened concrete walls, shattered hundreds of windows and brought numerous ceilings down in lecture halls.

Whether it was a wayward Tomahawk Cruise Missile or a misdirected laser guided bomb, no one knows.

His immediate thoughts were for the thousands of his students in the university and for his own three children who study there.

After about 30 minutes, the Libyan press came to see what had happened. the University President and other officials of the school all came. But to Dr. Mansur's surprise not the international press.

And what did they see?

The media saw the widespread structural damage to many of the buildings, all of the windows blown out in every one of the eight auditoriums. Doors blown off their hinges. Library in a shambles. Books and debris everywhere. The campus mosque was damaged. Glass heaped up in piles. Some efforts at cleaning up had begun.

Dr Mansur says that they have kept the university, wherever practicable, in much the same condition as it was on the day of the attack. Except that the main classroom area that students work in has been cleaned and will be renamed the Seif Al-Arab auditorium complex in memory of Muammar Qaddafi's son murdered on April 30, 2011 in his home by NATO bombs.

On Thursday, NATO missiles. Friday and Saturday are considered the weekend here. Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, the students are back to school undaunted by the bombing. In many of the classrooms I saw today, students were taking final exams amid the debris. As I walked around the campus, one male voice shouted out and spoke to me in Arabic:

“Where’s Obama?”

Good question I thought.

I’ve always wondered if the politicians who regularly send our young men and women away to war and who regularly bomb the poor peoples of the world have ever, themselves, been on the receiving end of a Cruise Missile attack or placed themselves and their family at the mercy of a laser guided depleted uranium bomb. Maybe, just maybe I thought, that if they had experienced first hand the horror of a NATO attack on a civilian target they might just stop and question for a minute the need to dispatch our armed forces to attack the people of Libya.

I didn’t want to disturb the students taking exams so I found some students standing outside not taking exams to talk to. I asked them if they had anything to say to President Obama. One professor, a woman, spoke up readily and said, “We are working under fire: physical and psychological.” One student spoke up and said that President Obama should “Free Palestine and leave Libya alone.” He continued, “We are one family.”

More on that later, but briefly, every Libyan is a member of a tribe and every tribe governs itself and selects its leaders; those leaders from all of the tribes then select their leaders, and so on until there is only one leader of all of the tribes of Libya. I met that one tribal leader yesterday in another part of Tripoli and I am told he is the real leader of this country. He presides over the Tribal Council which constitutes Libya’s real policymakers. So when the young man said “We are one family,” that is actually the truth.

Dr. Mansur, trained in the United States and spoke fondly of his time in the US and the many friends he made there. He is proud of his students and the richness of his university’s community life. He was just like any University Dean in the United States.

In my view God intervened on Thursday 9 June, 2011.

On the day that the missile struck, not one student was killed. It could so easily have been different. It could have been a catastrophe taking the lives of hundreds of teenagers.

I am told that in the surrounding area immediately outside the university others were not so fortunate.

Reports are that there were deaths in the nearby houses.

It’s a funny thing about war. Those who cause war become oblivious and removed from its consequences; they seem happy to inflict harm on others and become numb to its ill effects while war’s victims find a way to normalize the abnormal and live with the constant threat of death and destruction.

After visiting Tripoli, I remain as opposed to war as ever before.

The students at Al Fateh University continue their studies despite the siege that their country is under.

And oh, that second group of students that I randomly spoke to? I asked them how much they pay for tuition. They looked at me with puzzled faces even after the translation. I asked them how much they pay for their books. Again, the same puzzled face. Tuition at Al

Fateh University is 16 dinars per year-about \$9. And due to the NATO embargo on gasoline imports, the school now has started 10 free bus lines to its surrounding areas in order to make sure that the students can get to school, free of charge.

I told them that I was about to enter a Ph.D. program in the US myself and that I needed tuition and book money costing tens of thousands of dollars. I continued that my cousin is in debt \$100,000 because she went to the schools of her choice and received a Master's degree.

They said to me, "We thank Muammar Qaddafi. Because of Muammar Qaddafi we have free education. Allah, Muammar, Libya obes!"

Well as for NATO, they still cling to the chimera that their strikes are against military targets only and that theirs is a "humanitarian intervention."

I'm still waiting to find evidence somewhere in the world that bombing poor civilian populations of the Third World from the air is good for their voting rights, democracy, medical care, education, welfare, national debt, and enhancing personal income and wealth distribution. It seems clear to me that complex life issues require more complex intervention than a Cruise Missile could ever deliver.

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