

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نېاشد تن من مېباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مېباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

by PATRICK COCKBURN
30.06.2020

The Blundering British Political Class has Shown the Same Incompetence in Both Fighting Wars and Coronavirus



Photograph Source: [لیبی صبح](#) – CC BY 2.0

The government's controversial Prevent programme aims to stop individuals becoming terrorists, but it would be much more effective if it taught British political leaders not to engage in wars that become the seed-beds of terrorism.

Consider the case of Khairi Saadallah, the suspect in the killing of three people in a park in Reading who came to the UK as a refugee from Libya in 2012 and was granted asylum in 2018. An ID card reportedly shows that he had been a member of the Union of the February 17 Revolution, one of the paramilitary groups that had fought Muammar

Gaddafi the previous year. Police and intelligence agencies say they have not discovered any current link between Mr Saadallah and jihadist organisations.

But that is not really the point: if David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy and Hillary Clinton had not launched the Nato-led war to carry out regime change in Libya in 2011, it is unlikely that refugees like Saadallah would have come to Britain the following year.

The same is true of Salman Abedi, the Libyan suicide bomber who killed 22 and injured 139 people, mostly children, in the Manchester Arena in 2017. Abedi was personally responsible for this slaughter, but the British government had relaxed controls on the movements of jihadi groups like the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group because MI6 saw them as useful local allies in getting rid of Gaddafi.

It is disgusting how leaders like David Cameron continue to defend the launching of the 2011 Nato intervention in Libya. It was this that led to the ongoing nine-year-long war and the chaos that produced a wave of refugees who needed help and turned the country into a haven for jihadis like Abedi. Yet this predictable consequence of foreign intervention, be it in Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan or Syria, scarcely receives a mention in the wall-to-wall coverage of murders such as those in Manchester, Reading or London Bridge. The media emphasis is on grief and “communities coming together”, a highly convenient response from the point of view of the British government as its own blundering role in turning Libya into place of permanent war is forgotten or is considered irrelevant.

Gaddafi was a dictator but however horrific the conditions under his rule, Libyans are now at the mercy of merciless local warlords who are proxies for foreign powers pursuing their own egocentric interests. This week Turkey and Egypt, and the coalitions they lead, are close to an all-out proxy war as they face off against each other at Sirte, close to where Gaddafi was killed.

This all-consuming violence is not mentioned by the leaders who did so much to bring it about. David Cameron boasts in his autobiography *For The Record* that, thanks to his efforts, American, British and French aircraft stopped the advance of Gaddafi’s tanks. “Benghazi was saved,” he writes, “and a Srebrenica-style slaughter was averted.”

Cameron has not noticed that Benghazi was not saved at all. Its centre is now a sea of ruins, destroyed in the fighting between the anti-Gaddafi warlords. Cameron’s claim that Gaddafi’s forces were about to carry out mass killings in Benghazi was always dubious.

A report by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee said that the belief that Gaddafi would “massacre the civilians in Benghazi was not supported by the available evidence.” His forces had reoccupied other rebel-held towns and there had been no massacre.

Cameron and Britain were not alone in destroying Libya. In a piece of self-glorifying bombast as revolting as anything said by Donald Trump, the US secretary of state Hillary Clinton crowed after the death of Gaddafi: “We came, we saw, he died.”

So did tens of thousands of other Libyans, but is it naïve to imagine that Clinton, Cameron and Sarkozy ever cared much about what happened to the seven million Libyan population? They were equally blind in looking after the interests of their own countries when they replaced a broadly secular authoritarian state in Libya with murderous anarchy.

These three politicians and other interventionists like Tony Blair and George W Bush defend themselves by saying that this is all hindsight. But it was not. I was in Benghazi and Tripoli during the six-month war to overthrow Gaddafi and it was patent that the violence would not end when he was dead. In the week that Britain recognised the rebel leadership in Benghazi as the legitimate government, the rebels had killed, and by some accounts tortured to death, their chief military commander, General Abdel Fattah Younis. Western governments and media had presented the opposition as liberally minded democrats. but an early proposal of the incoming post-Gaddafi transitional government was to put an end to the ban on polygamy.

Western leaders never suffered much political damage from their unforced errors in these wars in the Middle East and North Africa. The countries that were supposedly saved by foreign intervention might be wracked by endless conflict but they had disappeared from the news agenda. Voters at home never connected up terrorist butchery in their streets with wars fought in their name in far away places. I always thought it unjust yet probably inevitable that incompetent ignorant leaders, particularly in Britain, would never pay much of a price for what they had done.

But I was wrong. The same sort of over-confident amateur leadership that I had witnessed committing serial blunders from Basra to Benghazi finally had to face a real crisis in the shape of Covid-19. Their performance was as dismal at home as it had been abroad. Boris Johnson’s shambolic response to the pandemic, producing the worst death toll from the

illness in the world aside from the US and Brazil, was foreshadowed by what David Cameron had done before in Libya. In both instances, unnecessary mistakes had calamitous consequences. Perhaps the British political class had become so used to piggy-backing on US political and military power that it no longer knew what to do when that power stumbled over the last twenty years or finally imploded under Trump.

Competence takes a long time to create and its disintegration can also be imperceptibly slow. Nobody in Britain was much interested in the fate of Libya as it was torn apart in an escalating civil war. Even when Britain is the victim of a small proportion of that violence, there is a reluctance to put any of the blame on past British actions. The pretence is that somehow shouldering any responsibility lets the perpetrators off the hook. In reality, both the relatively limited number of British casualties stemming from its Middle East wars and the horribly large loss of life because of coronavirus have a common source: a political class that is hollowed out and no longer copes successfully with real crises.

CounterPunch 29.06.2020