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On the 10th anniversary of Libyan war, the New York Times covers up crimes of imperialism



This month marks the 10th anniversary of the US-NATO war against Libya. Launched on the pretext of defending “democracy” and “human rights,” the war unfolded as the rape and destruction of what had been the country with the highest per capita income and most developed social infrastructure on the African continent.

Eight months of continuous bombing laid waste to whole swathes of the country, while the US and the European powers utilized Al Qaeda-linked militias as their proxy ground troops in a war for regime-change that ended in the torture and murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Today, the devastating results of this war are stark. Libya has been transformed from the most prosperous country in the region to a living hell for its population. Tens of thousands were killed in the war and many thousands more have died over the ensuing decade, during which the country has been subjected to uninterrupted violence at the hands of rival militias backed by foreign powers.

Basic requirements of human life go unmet. Literally nothing that was destroyed in the war begun in March of 2011 has been rebuilt.

The capital Tripoli and other cities are regularly plunged into blackouts, and there are severe fuel shortages. This is in a country with the largest oil reserves in all of Africa. According to official figures, more than one third of the population lives below the poverty line of less than two dollars a day, as the collapse of the Libyan currency, the dinar, and soaring inflation have left many without the means to obtain sufficient food. Access to clean water is also limited. Last year saw the already ravaged Libyan economy plummet by 66.7 percent, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Once boasting the most advanced public health system in the region, Libya's hospitals and clinics still lie in ruins today as the COVID-19 pandemic spreads throughout the country. Thus far, there has not been a single vaccination in Libya.

The country has also become the most violent center of human trafficking on the planet, with desperate refugees imprisoned, murdered, tortured, raped and literally bought and sold by rival militia factions, which seek to extract ransoms from their families. Many of those who manage to escape Libya end up drowning in the Mediterranean Sea.

It is under these conditions that the *New York Times* published an editorial Tuesday titled "A Chance for Libya to Fix Itself," proclaiming the editorial board's detection of a "glimmer of hope."

The editorial begins: "Few countries exemplify the tragedy of the Arab Spring like Libya. The fall of the 42-year dictatorship of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi brought a decade of anarchy as competing governments, militias and foreign powers struggled to seize control of the oil-rich country. The United States and NATO allies that had backed the anti-Qaddafi uprising with a bombing campaign largely turned their backs after he fell, and past United Nations efforts to forge a government foundered in the chaos."

How many distortions, evasions and outright lies can be packed into a single editorial? Libya exemplifies not the "tragedy of the Arab Spring," but the monstrous consequences of three decades of uninterrupted US imperialist wars and interventions, which have ravaged entire societies and caused millions of deaths.

Libya lies between Egypt and Tunisia, two countries whose long-time US- and European imperialist-backed dictators were overthrown by popular revolutions in 2011. The US-led war against Libya was aimed at crushing the "Arab Spring" and installing a more reliable imperialist puppet regime in the region.

By the *Times*' reckoning, the only blame borne by Washington and NATO for the present catastrophe in Libya lies in their having "turned their backs" on the country after Gaddafi "fell"—a euphemism for the bloody lynching that was infamously celebrated by then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who declared with a chortle, "We came, we saw, he died." The editorial goes on to insist that while Washington is not "directly involved" in stoking the continuing civil war in Libya, "it bears responsibility for the mess by bailing out of the conflict" after Gaddafi's murder. In other words, Libya's tragedy lies not in the country's destruction by US bombs and CIA-backed Islamist militias, but in Washington's failure to follow up with a colonial-style occupation, as in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The *Times* is covering up not only US imperialism's responsibility for Libya's devastation, but its own role as chief propagandist for the US-NATO war of aggression. The so-called "newspaper of record" relentlessly demonized Gaddafi in preparation for the war, while promoting the lie that his government was on the verge of carrying out a "bloodbath" and even "genocide" in the eastern city of Benghazi, a center of the Islamist-led opposition. This fabricated pretext for the imperialist intervention was later debunked by the Pentagon itself.

In the run-up to the war, the *Times* editorial board advocated the imposition of a "no-fly" zone in Libya as the framework for preparing the bombing campaign. The ineffable *Times* foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman went even further, writing, "I believe that it is naïve to think that we can be humanitarians only from the air... I don't know

Libya, but my gut tells me that any kind of decent outcome there will require boots on the ground.”

The crusade conducted by the *Times* for US intervention in the interests of “humanitarianism” and “democracy” found a wellspring of political support within the pseudo-left, whose politics reflect the interests of privileged sections of the upper-middle class. Ranging from cynical academics like Juan Cole at the University of Michigan to political groups like the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France and the since-dissolved International Socialist Organization in the US, this socio-political layer promoted the detestable lie that “democracy” and even “revolution” could be advanced by means of American smart bombs and ballistic missiles.

When the war ended with the murder of Gaddafi in October 2011, the *Times* responded with triumphalism. Foreign affairs columnist Roger Cohen penned a piece titled “Score One for Interventionism,” while fellow columnist Nicholas Kristof, the *Times*’ most ardent advocate of “human rights imperialism,” wrote a column titled “Thank you America!” Kristof made the ludicrous claim that by bombing Libya into ruins, Americans had been transformed into “heroes in the Arab world.”

The newspaper proclaimed that the war embodied a new “Obama doctrine” for the Middle East, suggesting that doctrine could next be employed in Syria, where a CIA-orchestrated war for regime-change, using some of the same Al Qaeda-linked militias employed in Libya, would in the ensuing years claim half a million lives.

If the *Times* today seeks to obscure this history, it is not because it is squeamish about Washington’s war crimes in Libya, or even its own direct complicity in facilitating and defending them. Rather, it wants to prevent any lessons from being learned as US imperialism prepares new and even bloodier interventions.

The US officials who orchestrated the wars in both Libya and Syria are back at the State Department and the White House, from Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken on down, and the soiled banners of “human rights” and “democracy” are once again being waved in preparation for war.

In Libya, the “glimmer of hope” perceived by the *Times* lies in the UN-brokered appointment of one of the country’s most corrupt businessmen, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, as the prime minister of an “interim government” that is supposed to unite the country’s two main factions: the UN-recognized Tripoli government—backed by Turkey, Qatar and Italy, along with Islamist militias supplemented by thousands of mercenary fighters from Syria—and its rival government in the east of the country, which is defended by the Libyan National Army of ex-CIA “asset” Khalifa Haftar, with the backing of Egypt, the UAE, Russia and France.

Washington is preparing to make use of this deal to enter more aggressively into the scramble for control of Libya, demanding that other powers—particularly Russia and Turkey—pull out as it pushes in. The *Times* is unabashed about US motives in the country. Its editorial Tuesday states: “Peace in Libya matters for reasons beyond its own sake. The country has huge reserves of oil...”

US imperialism is determined to deny control of these resources and domination of the strategically vital North African country to its “great power” rivals, Russia and, in particular, China. Before the 2011 war, the latter was playing an increasing role in Libya’s development. More broadly, “human rights” imperialism is being revived in preparations for direct confrontation with both Russia and China. The lurid lies about a “Benghazi bloodbath” and “genocide” used to promote war on Libya find an ominous echo in the propaganda campaigns led by the *Times* over the lie that the coronavirus originated in a Wuhan laboratory and claims of Chinese “genocide” against the country’s Muslim Uyghur minority.

The only way to prevent the eruption of a new and even more catastrophic war is through the mobilization of the working class in Africa, the Middle East and internationally, unifying its

growing struggles with those of workers in the US, Europe and the rest of the world in a socialist anti-war movement. Without the revolutionary intervention of the working class, the threat of a third world war will only grow.

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