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## NATO nations set to reap spoils of Libya war

As rebels take Tripoli, foreign powers are eyeing the prize of Libya's high quality crude oil.

Rachel Shabi

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France's President Nicolas Sarkozy, like his counterparts in the UK, Italy, the US and other countries, is keen to garner oil contracts once a new government emerges in Libya [Reuters]

It looks like the more telling news on Libya has migrated to the business pages. With jubilant reporting of Gaddafi's imminent downfall seizing headlines, it's the financial pages that have the

clinical analysis. So, for instance, it is in this section that the *Independent* reports a "[dash for profit in the post-war Libya carve up](#)".

Similarly, Reuters, under the headline, "[Investors eye promise, pitfalls in post-Gaddafi Libya](#)" noted that a new government in that country could "herald a bonanza for Western companies and investors".

Before Tripoli has completely fallen, before Gaddafi and his supporters have stepped down and before the blood dries on the bodies that have yet to be counted, Western powers are already eyeing up what they view as just rewards for the intervention.

There are no more illusions over how far [NATO forces](#) exceeded the UN security resolution that mandated its campaign. For months, NATO officials insisted it was operating within brief - an air campaign, designed to protect civilians under threat of attack. But now it is described as an "open secret" that NATO countries were operating undercover, on the ground.

Add to that the reluctance to broker a negotiated exit, the practice of advising, arming and training the rebels, and the spearheading of an escalation in violence and it looks like NATO's job morphed from protecting civilians to regime change.

### **Oil for regime change**

And there's a reason for this sudden rush of honesty over its involvement. As alluded to by the *Economist*, each country's contribution to the NATO effort in Libya is expected to have some impact on how much of the spoils it gets in the looming post-war period.

The French *Le Figaro* newspaper is keen to talk up Libya as "[Sarkozy's war](#)", while the British *Telegraph* drops references to the involvement of British military and intelligence officers, including MI6 and the RAF.

Aiding the Libyan rebel forces of the National Transitional Council has created a debt of gratitude. In the context of responsibility for what happens next in Libya, an anonymous British official told the *Economist* that NATO's involvement in the Libyan uprising means that: "Now we own it."

As Reuters reports, "Western companies look well positioned as billions of dollars in oil exploration and construction contracts come up for grabs as part of the reconstruction effort."

Leaving aside the massive profits from the rebuilding that Libya is now going to need, there are vast oil spoils to distribute. The Libyan oil industry produced 1.6 million barrels a day prior to the war. The country is thought to have 46 billion barrels of reserves - the largest in Africa.

### **Winners and losers**

And this is what the information manager at the rebel-controlled Arabian Gulf Oil Company, Libya's largest oil producer, had to say about who it now intends to trade with: "We don't have a

problem with Western countries like the Italians, French and UK companies. But we may have some political issues with Russia, China and Brazil." Those last three countries weren't involved in the NATO mission in Libya.

None of that is to bemoan the downfall of a terrifying dictator who has kept Libyans crushed and brutalised for decades. Gaddafi's demise is welcome; the courage of Libyans who fought his regime is staggering and only a stone would fail to be moved by their celebration of freedom now.

But it does not negate those factors to point out that NATO countries have not previously seemed bothered by the bloodiness of this dictator's 42-year-rule - or that the striking feature of the West's relationship to the Middle East has been its cynical alliances with repressive rulers, propped up to shut down their populations while opening up resources to foreign access.

It is exactly this track record - of being a corrosive influence and a self-interested broker - that has made Middle Eastern countries wary of any Western intervention in the tide of revolutions now sweeping the region. Libyan rebels asked for help, but were wary of what was viewed as a necessary alliance with Western forces. It does the flow of Arab uprisings a disservice to now glorify NATO's mission. A liberal intervention for humanitarian ends may be the comfortable hook; but securing assets and resources, as usual, is the real goal.