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afgazad@gmail.com

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[Asia Times Online](http://AsiaTimesOnline)

R2P is now Right 2 Plunder

By Pepe Escobar

8/27/2011

The white man's burden doesn't allow asking Africans what they think about the current Western/monarchical Arab onslaught on the northern shores of their continent. At least some are not beating around the bush.

Over 200 African leaders and intellectuals released a letter in Johannesburg, South Africa, stressing the "misuse of the United Nations Security Council to engage in militarized diplomacy to effect regime change in Libya", as well as the "marginalization of the African Union".

As for the Western "winners" in Libya, they are not even playing smoke and mirrors anymore. Richard Haass, president of that

Gotha of the US establishment that is the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote a Financial Times op-ed blatantly stating, "The 'humanitarian' intervention introduced to save lives believed to be threatened was in fact a political intervention introduced to bring about regime change."

As for those lowly bit part local actors - Libyans from Cyrenaica - Haass already dispatched them to the dustbin of history: "Libyans will not be able to manage the situation about to emerge on their own", and with "two million barrels of oil a day" at stake, the only solution is an "international force". Translation: occupation army - as in Afghanistan and Iraq. Welcome to neo-colonialism 2.0.

Payback time

So the US establishment is now as brazen as the wealthy right-wing nut jobs of the Donald "that thing on his head" Trump variety. Trump told Fox News, "We are NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]. We back NATO in terms of money and weapons. What do we get out of it? Why won't we take the oil?"

In geopolitical Groundhog Day mode, it's indeed Afghanistan and Iraq all over again - an orgy of looting, statue-smashing, eye-catching TV reality show segments, even street banners cheerleading NATO (imagine Americans thanking the Chinese for "liberating" New York by bombing).

Not to mention prime corporate media idiocy. CNN has moved Tripoli east - to the eastern Mediterranean, somewhere near Lebanon. The BBC showed a Tripoli Green Square "rebel" celebration set in ... India, with Indian flags. Hail the total integration of NATO and Western/GCC media; GCC is the Gulf Cooperation Council, the six wealthy fundamentalist satrapies also known as the Gulf Counter-revolution Club.

Considering that the GCC virtually orders the Arab League what to do, no wonder the league has recognized the dodgy, "rebel" Transitional National Council (TNC) as the country's legitimate government, even though it only represents Cyrenaica and even though The Big G Colonel Muammar Gaddafi is already at large, with a bounty of US\$1.6 million on his head. Let's assume this is payback for Gaddafi calling Saudi King Abdullah "stupid" in the run-up towards the war on Iraq.

It's also as if Libya now is only an Arab emirate-to-be, and has nothing to do with Africa anymore. The GCC financed and armed the "rebels". The African Union was almost universally against the NATO/GCC war. Ergo, as far as NATO/GCC are concerned, screw Africa; the only thing that will really matter - strategically - is an Africom/NATO military/naval base in Libya.

Now for another Green Zone

It's now common knowledge that British SAS, French intelligence, US Central Intelligence Agency assets, Qatar special forces and mercenaries of all stripes were parachuted as boots on the ground for months, planning and training the "rebels" and in close coordination with that philanthropic prodigy, NATO.

That was never the UN mandate - but who cares? NATO/GCC paid the bills, NATO conducted the bombing and NATO/GCC will "stabilize" the mess, according to a 70-page plan leaked by the British to Rupert Murdoch's Times of London.

Only fools would believe the predictable spin that the plan was drawn by the Transitional National Council (TNC) with "Western help". NATO wouldn't be so brazen - at least initially - to go for Caucasians on the ground, so the proposal of a 10,000-15,000 strong "Tripoli task force", resourced by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to take over, may be implemented sooner

rather than later. The juicy question is - will they be Blackwater-trained foreign mercenaries (Jordanians, South Africans, Colombians) or Libyan tribals on a UAE payroll?

And what next: a Green Zone remix near Green Square?

This is almost as delicious as the TNC's ambassador to the UAE, Aref Ali Nayed, painfully regretting the plan's leak while Benghazi confirmed this is the real thing.

It's now also common knowledge that the juicy reconstruction of everything NATO bombed will profit - who else - the "winners"; NATO/GCC nations (see [Disaster Capitalism swoops over Libya](#) Asia Times Online, August 25). TNC leader Mustafa Abdel Jail has confirmed it once again in Benghazi.

Expect local - and global - fireworks as far as grabbing the loot is concerned. Without even considering the (still unexplored) oil and gas wealth, Libya's foreign assets are worth at least \$150 billion. Libya's central bank, now about to be privatized, has no less than 143.8 tons of gold. Then there's at least a millennium supply of fresh water, which had started to be harnessed by Gaddafi via the spectacular, multibillion dollar Great Man-Made River (GMR) project.

This is yet another solid answer to the question of why France has been so frantic to topple Gaddafi; French water companies are the world's largest, and the lure of privatizing a 1,000-year supply of fresh water is turning their executives, well, bubbly.

So as a vast, potentially very profitable new market for European companies, right at the other side of the Mediterranean, Libya is the genuine article, adding a whole new meaning to the humanitarian imperialist doctrine of R2P ("responsibility to protect"); an Asia Times Online reader has christened it "Right 2 Plunder".

Italian Premier Silvio "bunga bunga" Berlusconi has been swift, meeting in Milan with TNC's Prime Minister Mahmoud Jibril, right in front of the new Libyan flag (which is in fact the old monarchical flag) alongside the Italian and European Union flags.

And to think that only a year ago the dashing Silvio was throwing a lavish party for his buddy - whose hand he was fond of kissing - Big G, complete with 30 Bedouin riders from the storm parading imported Libyan thoroughbreds.

In 2008, Silvio and Big G signed a treaty to bury the bitter 1911-1942 colonial era, according to which Italy would spend \$5 billion over 25 years investing in infrastructure such as highways and railways; thanks to the treaty at least 180 Italian companies subsequently got fabulous Libyan contracts and Italy became Libya's top trading partner.

So inevitably, TNC's leader Mustafa Abdel Jalil had to assure Silvio that new Libya will have "special relationships" with all NATO/GCC war "winners"; and he did single out Italy.

Next week will be the turn of Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, the UAE's foreign minister, to visit Benghazi to gobble up a piece of the juicy reconstruction cake; the UAE is crammed with

starving developers ready to roll after real estate prices went on free fall in the Emirates.

And now for the road map

Meanwhile, what if the Big G has got the gold? The former governor of Libya's central bank maintains that in Tripoli there is, physically, no less than \$10 billion worth in gold reserves.

So while British SAS soldiers in Arab civilian garb and brandishing the same Kalashnikovs as the "rebels" are scrambling for Gaddafi "dead or alive", Texas George W Bush-style, The Big G may be literally buying his tribal allegiance in gold. Not to mention that he does count on support from the Qaddafi tribe (cunning night hunters), the al-Magarha tribe (first-class snipers) and most of all Gaddafi's wife's tribe, the Warfallah (the largest in the country, with up to 2 million people).

As much as the TNC has been relentlessly spinning that post-Gaddafi Libya will be pluralist and multicultural, signs point to Quagmire City.

Arabs in the north absolutely despise Berbers in the south - and vice-versa. The people in Tripolitania absolutely despise Salafis in Cyrenaica - and vice-versa.

With so much loot at stake, it's easy to visualize a road map going something like this.

A weak TNC puppet government; shock doctrine neo-liberal troops alienating many who were used to free education, free health services and free housing; a guerrilla force against foreign occupation; Salafi-jihadis from other Arab latitudes joining the fray; desert towns developing as guerrilla bases; pipelines from the southeastern desert being bombed; a replica of Baghdad from 2004 to 2007; a surge; a non-stop civil/tribal war scenario; and Afghanistan 2.0 with a twin guerrilla front - the Gaddafi group against the rebels/NATO, and the Salafis against NATO, because the West will never allow Libya to become an Islamic state.

Gaddafi is actually gambling that the joint NATO/GCC ops will turn Libya into the new Iraq/Afghanistan. Arguably NATO itself may love the idea. It will force it to be even more entrenched in northern Africa. It will allow the use of the same old imperial divide-and-rule tactics while Western companies exercise their Right 2 Plunder options.

It will keep Americans and Europeans worried with yet another subplot of the "war on terror" even as recession eats away what's left of their savings. And it will keep the industrial-military complex and assorted weapons/security contractors with smiles on their faces. Iraq/Afghanistan all over again? Bring it on.