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Libya and the world we live in

by William Blum

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"Why are you attacking us? Why are you killing our children? Why are you destroying our infrastructure?"

– Television address by Libyan Leader Muammar Gaddafi, April 30, 2011

A few hours later NATO hit a target in Tripoli, killing Gaddafi's 29-year-old son Saif al-Arab, three of Gaddafi's grandchildren, all under twelve years of age, and several friends and neighbors.

In his TV address, Gaddafi had appealed to the NATO nations for a cease-fire and negotiations after six weeks of bombings and cruise missile attacks against his country.

Well, let's see if we can derive some understanding of the complex Libyan turmoil.

The Holy Triumvirate — The United States, NATO and the European Union — recognizes no higher power and believes, literally, that it can do whatever it wants in the world, to whomever it wants, for as long as it wants, and call it whatever it wants, like "humanitarian".

If The Holy Triumvirate decides that it doesn't want to overthrow the government in Syria or in Egypt or Tunisia or Bahrain or Saudi Arabia or Yemen or Jordan, no matter how cruel, oppressive, or religiously intolerant those governments are with their people, no matter how much they impoverish and torture their people, no matter how many protesters they shoot dead in their Freedom Square, the Triumvirate will simply not overthrow them.

If the Triumvirate decides that it wants to overthrow the government of Libya, though that government is secular and has used its oil wealth for the benefit of the people of Libya and Africa perhaps more than any government in all of Africa and the Middle East, but keeps insisting over the years on challenging the Triumvirate's imperial ambitions in Africa and raising its demands on the Triumvirate's oil companies, then the Triumvirate will simply overthrow the government of Libya.

If the Triumvirate wants to punish Gaddafi and his sons it will arrange with the Triumvirate's friends at the International Criminal Court to issue arrest warrants for them.

If the Triumvirate doesn't want to punish the leaders of Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and Jordan it will simply not ask the ICC to issue arrest warrants for them. Ever since the Court first formed in 1998, the United States has refused to ratify it and has done its best to denigrate it and throw barriers in its way because Washington is concerned that American officials might one day be indicted for their many war crimes and crimes against humanity. Bill Richardson, as US ambassador to the UN, said to the world in 1998 that the United States should be exempt from the court's prosecution because it has "special global responsibilities". But this doesn't stop the United States from using the Court when it suits the purposes of American foreign policy.

If the Triumvirate wants to support a rebel military force to overthrow the government of Libya then it does not matter how fanatically religious, al-Qaeda-related,¹ executing-beheading-torturing, monarchist, or factionally split various groups of that rebel force are at times, the Triumvirate will support it, as it did certain forces in Afghanistan and Iraq, and hope that after victory the Libyan force will not turn out as jihadist as it did in Afghanistan, or as fratricidal as in Iraq. One potential source of conflict within the rebels, and within the country if ruled by them, is that a constitutional declaration made by the rebel council states that, while guaranteeing democracy and the rights of non-Muslims, "Islam is the religion of the state and the principle source of legislation in Islamic Jurisprudence."²

Adding to the list of the rebels' charming qualities we have the Amnesty International report that the rebels have been conducting mass arrests of black people across the nation, terming all of them "foreign mercenaries" but with growing evidence that a large number were simply migrant workers. Reported Reuters (August 29): "On Saturday, reporters saw the putrefying bodies of 22 men of African origin on a Tripoli beach. Volunteers who had come to bury them said they were mercenaries whom rebels had shot dead." To complete this portrait of the West's newest darlings we have this report from The Independent of London (August 27): "The killings were pitiless. They had taken place at a makeshift hospital, in a tent marked clearly with the symbols of the Islamic crescent. Some of the dead were on stretchers, attached to intravenous drips. Some were on the back of an ambulance that had been shot at. A few were on the ground, seemingly attempting to crawl to safety when the bullets came."

If the Triumvirate's propaganda is clever enough and deceptive enough and paints a graphic picture of Gaddafi-initiated high tragedy in Libya, many American and European progressives will insist that though they never, ever support imperialism they're making an exception this time because ...

The Libyan people are being saved from a "massacre", both actual and potential. This massacre, however, seems to have been grossly exaggerated by the Triumvirate, al Jazeera TV, and that station's owner, the government of Qatar; and nothing approaching reputable evidence of a massacre has been offered, neither a mass grave or anything else; the massacre stories appear to be on a par with the Viagra-rape stories spread by al Jazeera (the Fox News of the Libyan uprising). Qatar, it should be noted, has played an active military role in the civil war on the side of NATO. It should be further noted that the main massacre in Libya has been six months of daily Triumvirate bombing, killing an unknown number of people and ruining much of the infrastructure. Michigan U. Prof. Juan Cole, the quintessential true-believer in the good intentions of American foreign policy who nevertheless manages to have a regular voice in progressive media, recently wrote that "Qaddafi was not a man to compromise ... his military machine would mow down the revolutionaries if it were allowed to." Is that clear, class? We all know of course that Sarkozy, Obama, and Cameron made compromises without end in their devastation of Libya; they didn't, for example, use any nuclear weapons.

The United Nations gave its approval for military intervention; i.e., the leading members of the Triumvirate gave their approval, after Russia and China cowardly abstained instead of exercising their veto power; (perhaps hoping to receive the same courtesy from the US, UK and France when Russia or China is the aggressor nation).

The people of Libya are being "liberated", whatever in the world that means, now or in the future. Gaddafi is a "dictator" they insist. That may indeed be the proper term to use for the man, but it must still be asked: Is he a relatively benevolent dictator or is he the other kind so favored by Washington? It must also be asked: Since the United States has habitually supported dictators for the entire past century, why not this one?

The Triumvirate, and its fawning media, would have the world believe that what's happened in Libya is just another example of the Arab Spring, a popular uprising by non-violent protestors against a dictator for the proverbial freedom and democracy, spreading spontaneously from Tunisia and Egypt, which sandwich Libya. But there are several reasons to question this analysis in favor of seeing the Libyan rebels' uprising as a planned and violent attempt to take power in behalf of their own political movement, however heterogeneous that movement might appear to be in its early stage. For example:

They soon began flying the flag of the monarchy that Gaddafi had overthrown

They were an armed and violent rebellion almost from the beginning; within a few days, we could read of "citizens armed with weapons seized from army bases"³ and of "the policemen who had participated in the clash were caught and hanged by protesters"⁴

Their revolt took place not in the capital but in the heart of the country's oil region; they then began oil production and declared that foreign countries would be rewarded oil-wise in relation to how much each country aided their cause

They soon set up a Central Bank, a rather bizarre thing for a protest movement

International support came quickly, even beforehand, from Qatar and al Jazeera to the CIA and French intelligence

The notion that a leader does not have the right to put down an armed rebellion against the state is too absurd to discuss.

Not very long ago, Iraq and Libya were the two most modern and secular states in the Mideast/North Africa world with perhaps the highest standards of living in the region. Then the United States of America came along and saw fit to make a basket case of each one. The desire to get rid of Gaddafi had been building for years; the Libyan leader had never been a reliable pawn; then the Arab Spring provided the excellent opportunity and cover. As to Why? Take your pick of the following:

Gaddafi's plans to conduct Libya's trading in Africa in raw materials and oil in a new currency — the gold African dinar, a change that could have delivered a serious blow to the US's dominant position in the world economy. (In 2000, Saddam Hussein announced Iraqi oil would be traded in euros, not dollars; sanctions and an invasion followed.) For further discussion see here.

A host-country site for Africom, the US Africa Command, one of six regional commands the Pentagon has divided the world into. Many African countries approached to be the host have declined, at times in relatively strong terms. Africom at present is headquartered in Stuttgart, Germany. According to a State Department official: "We've got a big image problem down there. ... Public opinion is really against getting into bed with the US. They just don't trust the US."⁵

An American military base to replace the one closed down by Gaddafi after he took power in 1969. There's only one such base in Africa, in Djibouti. Watch for one in Libya sometime after the dust has settled. It'll perhaps be situated close to the American oil wells. Or perhaps the people of Libya will be given a choice — an American base or a NATO base.

Another example of NATO desperate to find a *raison d'être* for its existence since the end of the Cold War and the Warsaw Pact.

Gaddafi's role in creating the African Union. The corporate bosses never like it when their wage slaves set up a union. The Libyan leader has also supported a United States of Africa for he knows that an Africa of 54 independent states will continue to be picked off one by one and abused and exploited by the members of the Triumvirate. Gaddafi has moreover demanded greater power for smaller countries in the United Nations.

The claim by Gaddafi's son, Saif el Islam, that Libya had helped to fund Nicolas Sarkozy's election campaign⁶ could have humiliated the French president and explain his obsessiveness and haste in wanting to be seen as playing the major role in implementing the "no fly zone" and other measures against Gaddafi. A contributing factor may have been the fact that France has been weakened in its former colonies and neo-colonies in Africa and the Middle East, due in part to Gaddafi's influence.

Gaddafi has been an outstanding supporter of the Palestinian cause and critic of Israeli policies; and on occasion has taken other African and Arab countries, as well as the West, to task for their not matching his policies or rhetoric; one more reason for his lack of popularity amongst world leaders of all stripes.

In January, 2009, Gaddafi made known that he was considering nationalizing the foreign oil companies in Libya.⁷ He also has another bargaining chip: the prospect of utilizing Russian, Chinese and Indian oil companies. During the current period of hostilities, he invited these countries to make up for lost production. But such scenarios will now not take place. The Triumvirate will instead seek to privatize the National Oil Corporation, transferring Libya's oil wealth into foreign hands.

The American Empire is troubled by any threat to its hegemony. In the present historical period the empire is concerned mainly with Russia and China. China has extensive energy investments and construction investments in Libya and elsewhere in Africa. The average American neither knows nor cares about this. The average American imperialist cares greatly, if for no other

reason than in this time of rising demands for cuts to the military budget it's vital that powerful "enemies" be named and maintained.

For yet more reasons, see the article "Why Regime Change in Libya?" by Ismael Hossein-zadeh, and the US diplomatic cables released by Wikileaks — Wikileaks reference 07TRIPOLI967 11-15-07 (includes a complaint about Libyan "resource nationalism")

A word from the man the world's mightiest military powers have been trying to kill

"Recollections of My Life", written by Col. Muammar Gaddafi, April 8, 2011, excerpts:

Now, I am under attack by the biggest force in military history, my little African son, Obama wants to kill me, to take away the freedom of our country, to take away our free housing, our free medicine, our free education, our free food, and replace it with American style thievery, called "capitalism," but all of us in the Third World know what that means, it means corporations run the countries, run the world, and the people suffer, so, there is no alternative for me, I must make my stand, and if Allah wishes, I shall die by following his path, the path that has made our country rich with farmland, with food and health, and even allowed us to help our African and Arab brothers and sisters to work here with us ... I do not wish to die, but if it comes to that, to save this land, my people, all the thousands who are all my children, then so be it. ... In the West, some have called me "mad", "crazy". They know the truth but continue to lie, they know that our land is independent and free, not in the colonial grip.

The state of our beloved capitalist system, early 21st century

I pay attention to the fat content of my food, so I was pleased to find a can of Pam canola oil cooking spray that had 0 grams fat per serving. Great, can't do better than zero fat, can you? I used it often for a few months ... until one day I took a closer look at the "Nutrition Facts" ... Yes, it said 0 grams fat per serving. A serving. How big was that? Let's see ... "Serving Size about 1/4 second spray" ... Hmm, how does one press down on a button for 1/4 second? Is it humanly possible? Even the manufacturer had to say "about". I had been taken. My hat is off to you Capitalist Robber Barons — You're good!

The Dow Jones industrial average of blue-chip stocks fell 635 points on Monday August 8.

On Tuesday it rose by 430 points.

Wednesday, the market, in its infinite wisdom, decided to fall again; this time by 520 points.

And on Thursday ... yes, it rose once again, by 423 points.

The Dow changed directions for eight consecutive trading sessions.

Upon such marvels of mankind countless people build careers, others wager their life savings, philanthropic foundations and universities risk much of their endowments, and conservative sages deliver sermons to the world on the wisdom and sacredness of the free market.

Main Street is the climax of civilization.
That this Ford car might stand in front of

the Bon Ton store, Hannibal invaded Rome
and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters.
– Sinclair Lewis, "Main Street", 1920

Do the economic fundamentals really change dramatically overnight? Or is our economic system as psycho as our foreign policy? The Washington Post's senior economic columnist, Steven Pearlstein, wrote on August 14th of the four days described above: "I suppose there are some schnooks who actually believe that those wild swings in stock prices last week represented sober and serious concerns by thoughtful, sophisticated investors about the Treasury debt downgrade or European sovereign debt or a slowdown in global growth. But surely such perceptions don't radically change each afternoon between 2 and 4:30, when the market averages last week were gyrating out of control."

Last month "Pope Benedict XVI denounced the profit-at-all-cost mentality that he says is behind Europe's economic crisis" as he arrived in hard-hit Spain. "The economy doesn't function with market self-regulation but needs an ethical reason to work for mankind," he declared. "Man must be at the center of the economy, and the economy cannot be measured only by maximization of profit but rather according to the common good."⁸

"I am a Marxist," said the Dalai Lama last year. Marxism has "moral ethics, whereas capitalism is only how to make profits."⁹

"I don't believe in anything," said Barack Obama. "At least not really strongly." (No, I made that one up.)

Perhaps the worst outcome of the United States "winning the Cold War" is that countless progressive people think there's no alternative to the capitalist system. Seventy years of anti-communist education and media stamped in people's minds a lasting association between socialism and what the Soviet Union called communism. Socialism meant a dictatorship, it meant Stalinist repression, a suffocating "command economy", no freedom of enterprise, no freedom to change jobs, few avenues for personal expression, and other similar truths and untruths. This is a set of beliefs clung to even amongst many Americans opposed to US foreign policy. No matter how bad the economy is, Americans think, the only alternative available is something called "communism", and they know how awful that is.

Meanwhile, the Communist Party USA has endorsed Barack Obama for re-election.¹⁰

"When plunder becomes a way of life for a group of men living in society, they create for themselves, in the course of time, a legal system that authorizes it and a moral code that glorifies it."

– Frederic Bastiat, (1801-1850) French economist, statesman, and author

Notes

For example, see: The Telegraph (London), August 30, 2011: "Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi, the Libyan rebel leader, has said jihadists who fought against allied troops in Iraq are on the front lines of the battle against Muammar Gaddafi's regime." There is a plethora of other reports detailing the ties between the rebels and radical Islamist groups. ↪

Washington Post, August 31, 2011

McClatchy Newspapers, February 20, 2011 ↵

Wikipedia, Timeline of the 2011 Libyan civil war, February 19, 2011 ↵

The Guardian (London), June 25, 2007 ↵

The Guardian (London), March 16, 2011 ↵

Reuters, January 21, 2009 ↵

Associated Press, August 11, 2011 ↵

Agence France Presse, May 21, 2010 ↵

"Yikes! Look who just endorsed Obama for 4 more years", WorldNetDaily, August 3 2011 ↵