

Challenging the Left on Libya

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By **Michael McGehee**

Libyan rebel fighters raise the Kingdom of Libya flag.

It is upsetting to see so many leftists calling for intervention, or a No-fly Zone in Libya, or romanticizing the rebellion to the point of delusion leaving reality unrecognizable.

In a country of over 6 million people where a third of which are black Africans—the most oppressed group in the country—why aren't they a part of the rebellion? Why is this an "Arab revolt"? It is very astonishing to see the most oppressed group not only uninvolved with the revolution but fleeing it in fear. When I see videos of anti-Gaddafi protesters chanting "We are Arabs!" I get a little nauseous. The ethnocentricity of it is not something I can get behind, especially while black Africans are being attacked and made to run for their lives.

The idea being circulated by writers like Immanuel Wallerstein and Louis Proyect that Gaddafi has been a rehabilitated figure in the US and the West for the last decade is largely a myth. True, the US has *tried* to bring him under its aegis but it has proved too much of a liability. Just look at what happened when Al-Megrahi was released. The US and Western governments went crazy mad over it and the mainstream presses followed suit. It wasn't just FOX but CNN and MSNBC and BBC and so on. We can skip the point that Al-Megrahi is innocent for that's another topic and focus on the fact that there is still a considerable anti-Gaddafi position, so much so that it had to be a point to be made this past February that UK PM Gordon Brown was "cleared" of pushing for Al-Megrahi's release. Repeat: the anti-Gaddafi frenzy is still so strong that a European leader had to be cleared of

being involved with the release of an innocent man.

The common narrative for the Left seems to be we are supporting rebellions to topple US client regimes. We are for freedom and democracy and the end of the imperial stooges. That is noble. We should support the end of tyranny, or our empire (but we should also be concerned about what follows!). However, Libya is definitely the odd man out in this one, and that the US and Western governments are talking about intervention and No-fly Zones ought to sound alarms for anti-imperialists. If this rebellion is against their interests why are they embracing it?

Why is the US and France and UK not talking about setting up a No-fly Zone—or intervention—in Saudi Arabia or Bahrain on behalf of the rebellions? That's a rhetorical question. We know why. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are client states. Any intervention will be on the side of the government and against the rebels, which is already the case! Libya under Gaddafi continues to pose the problem of the threat of independence, therefore we side with the rebels who are assuring the world that, "We mounted this fight to live under the values of the West."

The leadership of the National Transitional Council (NTC), the leaders of the rebellion, comes from the Gaddafi regime itself and they have called for the No-fly Zone and for foreign assistance to assassinate Gaddafi and military force to overthrow him. While some may point to the initial statement of the group which said they oppose direct intervention on Libyan soil Gheriani, a council spokesman, said only two days ago that, "We are telling the west we want a no-fly zone, we want tactical strikes against those tanks and rockets that are being used against us and we want a strike against Gaddafi's compound. This is the message from our delegation in Europe."

I think it is reasonable to inspect the liberatory credentials of Messieurs Abdul-Jalil, Jebril, Gheriani, Al-Younis, Al-Honi, Al-Essawi, Al-Musrati, etc. Even Muhammad as-Senussi, the "heir to the throne," supports this motley group of former regime officials and announced his return to the country earlier this month. This is worth bringing up since (A) the uprising started over the call for a constitutional monarchy; and (B) the old monarchy flag is the flag of the NTC. They have met with France's President Sarkozy and US Secretary of State Clinton and likely assured them that they will be obedient servants. Since then they have said they will honor oil contracts with foreign governments and that they will remember their friends (wink, wink) once the dictator is gone.

Considering that it is very possible that this is not a revolution but rather a regime change, or reinstatement of the monarchy. It seems all we lack right now is a New York Times article from Thomas Friedman mirroring what he said about Saddam Hussein in 1991: "Washington would have the best of all worlds: an iron-fisted Iraqi junta without Saddam Hussein."

And that is what the US wants, "the best of all worlds" and that is what the rebellion offers: the same old song and dance . . . without Gaddafi.

Why are so many of us supporting this?

I suspect the reason many of us are failing to include the plight of black Africans, or the ethnocentricity of the "Arab revolt," or how the rebel leaders are more pro-US than Gaddafi is because we identify with the protesters, the rebels. It's groupthink. A few years ago Noam Chomsky had a discussion with evolutionary biologist Robert Trivers on the subject:

RT: We generalize positively to ourselves, particularize negative and reverse it when we're talking about other people.

NC: Sounds like normal propaganda. Islamic people are all fascists. The Irish are all crooks.

RT: Yes, exactly. Generalize a negative characteristic in the other.

I feel that perhaps much of the Left is doing something similar in regards to Gaddafi and the rebellion. Just look at the socialistworker.org to see their romantic treatment of the rebels, and for our generalizing the negative characteristics of Gaddafi we don't have to look at the mainstream

press. We can look at almost any leftist media outlet as well.

I mean, I don't favor Gaddafi. I am not and have no intentions to play apologia for the guy but just because I oppose him (by the way, his racist warnings to the world about how only he can stop black Africans from overtaking Europe was absolutely disgusting) that doesn't mean I hold delusions about those seeking to overthrow him.

We have recent historical examples where this lesson should have already been internalized. Just as the left didn't favor Milosevic, we shouldn't have favored the KLA; just as the left didn't favor the Rwandan government, we shouldn't have favored the RPF. These forces were tools for imperialism and we have good reason to suspect the same of the NTC.

According to news reports this morning France is saying Arab forces are ready to attack Gaddafi. This, remember, is while the NTC is saying they will honor oil contracts and will remember their friends. As in Bahrain, maybe it will be "Arab armies" overthrowing Gaddafi but you can bet they will be under US tutelage and using US weapons. In fact former UK ambassador-turned-whistleblower Craig Murray recently blogged that:

A senior diplomat in a western mission to the UN in New York, who I have known over ten years and trust, has told me for sure that Hillary Clinton agreed to the cross-border use of troops to crush democracy in the Gulf, as a quid pro quo for the Arab League calling for Western intervention in Libya.

Did you get that? Washington "agreed." The decision for the use of force by a foreign army in a foreign country is for the Empire to make.

(On a similar note while some are noting that Russia and China will block any attempt of establishing a No-fly Zone through the UN Security Council, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates has said the US could enforce it if President Obama ordered it. Again, the nuance is astounding: such an act would be enforced unilaterally regardless of international law or what the world thinks. Chalk it up as just one more example of the similarities between George W Bush and Barack Obama.)

So, maybe we shouldn't call them "Arab forces"—or as in Bahrain, "Saudi troops"—but rather the American Foreign Legion.

When and if Gaddafi is toppled Libya will likely get, what is for the US, the best of all worlds: an iron-fisted Libyan junta without Muammar al-Gaddafi. Version 2.0. Social liberation just isn't in the cards for Libya right now. We should accept that and be there with our support when it is. And we should stop allowing groupthink to blind us to the ugly side of those we identify with.

Constructively Critical and in Solidarity,
Michael

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