

Libya's descent into civil war: The bitter fruit of the pseudo-left's pro-imperialism

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The threat of a bloody battle for Tripoli has continued to mount as “Field Marshal” Khalifa Haftar has massed troops and tanks south of the Libyan capital and warplanes belonging to his so-called Libyan National Army have bombed the city’s sole functioning airport, stranding civilians seeking to escape the country.

Partial casualty figures have included 51 dead and over 181 wounded. Thousands have fled their homes to escape the fighting, and there are reports that thousands of refugees and migrants, held under unspeakable conditions in concentration camps run by various rival militias, are frantic over the prospect of becoming helpless victims of a potential massacre.

In the midst of the escalation toward full-scale civil war, the United Nations human rights chief Michelle Bachelet warned that any attack on civilians in Libya could amount to war crimes and demanded that all sides “respect international humanitarian law, and to take all possible measures to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, including schools, hospitals and prisons.”

The UN human rights body’s attitude toward the latest flareup of violence in Libya stands in stark contrast to its response to the one-sided US-NATO war waged in 2011 under the pretext of protecting civilian lives from repression at the hands of the government headed by Col. Muammar Gaddafi. A UN resolution allowing for a no-fly zone was used as the pretext to launch a seven-month-long bombing campaign in support of CIA-backed Islamist militias to destroy Libya’s security forces and vital infrastructure and overthrow its government. This campaign culminated in the carpet bombing of the coastal city of Sirte, a Gaddafi stronghold, and the lynch-mob torture and murder of Gaddafi himself.

The UN human rights advocates held their tongues throughout this campaign of imperialist slaughter, whose victims number in the tens of thousands, far beyond any estimate of the number who lost their lives to the repression of the Gaddafi regime.

Only in March of 2012, months after the end of the regime-change operation did the UN Human Rights Commission issue a report that allowed it had “confirmed civilian casualties and found targets that showed no evidence of any military function.” It confined its investigation to just 20 airstrikes, when the total number of bombings were well over 1,000 times that number.

The present crisis and threat of a full-blown bloodbath in Libya are the direct product of the supposedly “humanitarian” intervention waged eight years ago under the fraudulent banner of

the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) proclaimed by the liberal advocates of imperialism in respect to the oppressed peoples of former colonial countries where the major powers continue to pursue their strategic interests.

Among the protagonists on either side of the developing conflict are the so-called “revolutionaries” and “democrats” that the war was supposedly launched to protect. These include Khalifa Haftar himself, the former Gaddafi general who was flown into Benghazi after spending decades as an asset of the US Central Intelligence Agency and living in close proximity to its headquarters in Langley, Virginia, where he obtained US citizenship

An indispensable role in promoting the “humanitarian” intervention in Libya by the US and its NATO allies was played by a coterie of pseudo-left political organizations, politicians and academics who amplified and embellished upon the phony pretexts advanced by Washington, Paris and London for a war of imperialist aggression against a former colonial country.

Among those embracing the war was University of Michigan Professor Juan Cole, whose *Informed Comment* web site had gained a following for its limited opposition to the Iraq war and its criticism of Israeli policy.

Cole expressed his enthusiasm for the US-NATO intervention by declaring, “If NATO needs me, I’m there.” Now that full-scale fighting is erupting once again in Libya, it is unknown whether Professor Cole feels a renewed urge to put on a uniform, and if he did so whether he would choose to mount one of Khalifa’s tanks or get on one of the machine gun-mounted pickups of the Tripoli militias.

At the outset of the war, Cole published “An Open Letter to the Left” in which he demanded that so-called “leftists” “learn to chew gum and walk at the same time,” i.e., posture as somehow left-wing, while supporting imperialist war.

The “left”, he insisted, had to determine its attitude to wars launched by the US on “a case-by-case basis,” declaring that “To make ‘anti-imperialism’ trump all other values in a mindless way leads to frankly absurd positions.”

Cole said that he was “unabashedly cheering the liberation movement on and glad that the UNSC [United Nations Security Council]-authorized intervention has saved them from being crushed.”

Cole’s reduction of anti-imperialism to a subjective “value” that must be balanced with other equally important ones, such as “human rights,” exposes the entirely petty-bourgeois and anti-Marxist outlook underlying his rush to enlist in imperialism’s

war.

These petty-bourgeois ideologists reject the conception that imperialism is an objective economic, social and political stage in the historical development of capitalism, based on monopolization of the economy, the dominance of finance capital and the carve-up of the entire planet by a handful of advanced capitalist countries—the advent of a period of global war and revolution. Instead they claim that it is merely an excess committed by an otherwise healthy system, which is capable of performing “humanitarian” rescues of oppressed populations as well.

A similar if not even more reactionary role was played by Gilbert Achcar, an academic working at London’s School of Oriental and African Studies, while serving as a principal propagandist for the wars in both Libya and Syria for the Pabloite *International Viewpoint*. At the outset of the war in March 2011, Achcar gave an interview praising the US-NATO intervention. He stated, “... given the urgency of preventing the massacre that would inevitably have resulted from an assault on Benghazi by Gaddafi’s forces, and the absence of any alternative means of achieving the protection goal, no one can reasonably oppose it... You can’t in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians.”

After the war was over, the claims about an imminent massacre in Benghazi were proven a sheer fabrication.

As the war went on, Achcar became even more militant in support for imperialist regime change, demanding that the US and other Western powers deliver more arms to the “insurgency” and, in August 2011, chiding them for failing to drop sufficient amounts of munitions on the Libyan population, describing its airstrikes—whose victims would number in the tens of thousands—as “low-key.”

The same essential arguments would be reprised for the regime-change war in Syria, with political charlatans like Achcar and Ashley Smith, of the recently dissolved International Socialist Organization (ISO), demanding more weapons for Syria’s CIA-orchestrated “revolution” and condemning the Obama administration for not enforcing its “red lines,” including through a potential confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia, in order to topple the government of Bashar al-Assad.

The politics of these scoundrels and their organizations have nothing whatsoever to do with Marxism, and whatever “socialist” rhetoric they employ is nothing more than a cover for their unrestrained integration into bourgeois, imperialist politics. They function as a sort of species of specialized NGOs, acting much like the National Endowment for Democracy, serving as political fronts and conduits for the operations of the CIA and US imperialism.

Never did any of these self-proclaimed “socialists” question the motives of the humanitarian imperialist wolves in the Middle East. They dismissed out of hand any suggestion that their war on Libya was motivated by the desire of the major imperialist powers and their energy conglomerates to exert unfettered control over the country’s oil reserves, the largest on the African continent. Or, for that matter, that the war in Syria was provoked with the aim of installing a US puppet regime in a country that has long been a strategic crossroads of the Middle East.

As for the “revolutionaries” that they backed in Libya and Syria, neither Cole, Achcar, Smith nor any of the other pseudo-lefts produced any program for which they were supposedly fighting, any analysis of the class forces that they represented or, for that matter, the name of a single supposed leader who could speak for their aims. Behind this wall of silence lay the fact that the CIA-backed and armed criminals mobilized against both Gaddafi and Assad were dominated by CIA assets and Islamist militias, with Al Qaeda-linked forces as their predominant element.

In its 2016 statement *Socialism and the Fight Against War*, the International Committee of the Fourth International established the objective foundations of the transformation of radicalized middle-class political tendencies that emerged as part of the movement against the Vietnam war into cheerleaders for imperialist intervention:

Over the past four decades, these layers have undergone a profound social and political transformation. The vast rise in share values—facilitated by the continuous imposition of wage and benefit concessions on workers, the intensification of the rate of exploitation, and the extraction of an ever-greater mass of surplus value from the working class—has given a privileged section of the middle class access to a degree of wealth they could not have imagined at the outset of their careers. The protracted stock market boom enabled imperialism to recruit from among sections of the upper-middle class a new and devoted constituency. These forces—and the political organizations that give expression to their interests—have done everything in their power to not only suppress opposition to war, but also to justify the predatory operations of imperialism.

The intervening years have only seen an intensification of social inequality and polarization along with a global upsurge in the class struggle that is pushing these tendencies ever further to the right.

The Libyan events make it even clearer that these accomplices of imperialist intervention have blood on their hands. The political education of the working class requires that they be exposed for the reactionaries and political criminals they are.

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