

US/NATO 'blow it' in Libya

by Jean Bricmont and Diana Johnstone via stan - Counter[feather]punch Wednesday, Aug 17 2011, 2:32am

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The entire world now knows the Libyan 'intervention' is a criminal enterprise

From servile Ban Ki-moon through to every European and US CRIMINAL participant in this FAILED, grotesquely obvious MORALLY unjust, criminal war -- STAND RIGHTFULLY ACCUSED of TERRORISM, you criminal filth

The entire world is WITNESSING the horrid TRUTH unfold daily in Libya, as botched illegal assassination attempts and outrageous civilian killing, rape and ethnic cleansing continue under the PRETEXT of a 'humanitarian intervention;' would someone please dispense the medication to NATO and US officials -- you have 'BLOWN IT,' BIG TIME! And no amount of fickle, titillating media distraction will background this outrage from the public consciousness.

Last March, a coalition of Western powers and Arab autocracies banded together to sponsor what was billed as a short little military operation to “protect Libyan civilians”.

On March 17, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1973 which gave that particular “coalition of the willing” the green light to start their little war by securing control of Libyan air space, which was subsequently used to bomb whatever NATO chose to bomb. The coalition leaders clearly expected the grateful citizens to take advantage of this vigorous “protection” to overthrow Moammar Gaddafi who allegedly wanted to “kill his own people”. Based on the assumption that Libya was neatly divided between “the people” on one side and the “evil dictator” on the other, this overthrow was expected to occur within days. In Western eyes, Gaddafi was a worse dictator than Tunisia’s Ben Ali or Egypt’s Mubarak, who fell without NATO intervention, so Gaddafi should have fallen that much faster.

Five months later, all the assumptions on which the war was based have proved to be more or less false. Human rights organizations have failed to find evidence of the “crimes against humanity” allegedly ordered by Gaddafi against “his own people”. The recognition of the Transitional National Council (TNC) as the “sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people” by Western governments has gone from premature to grotesque. NATO has entered and exacerbated a civil war that looks like a stalemate.

But however groundless and absurd the war turns out to be, on it goes. And what can stop it?

This summer’s best reading was Adam Hochschild’s excellent new book on World War I, *To End All Wars*. There are many lessons for our times in that story, but perhaps the most pertinent is the fact that once a war starts, it is very hard to end it.

The men who started World War I also expected it to be short. But even when millions were bogged down in the killing machine, and the hopelessness of the whole endeavor should have been crystal clear, it slogged on for four miserable years. The war itself generates hatred and vengefulness. Once a Great Power starts a war, it “must” win, whatever the cost – to itself but especially to others.

So far, the cost of the war against Libya to the NATO aggressors is merely financial, offset by the hope of booty from the “liberated” country to pay the cost of having bombed it. It is only the Libyan people who are losing their lives and their infrastructure. So what can stop the slaughter?

In World War I, there existed a courageous anti-war movement that braved the chauvinist hysteria of the war period to argue for peace. They risked physical attack and imprisonment.

Hochschild’s account of the struggle for peace of brave women and men in Britain should be an inspiration – but for whom? The risks of opposing this war are minimal in comparison to 1914-1918. But so far active opposition is scarcely noticeable.

This is particularly true of France, the country whose President Nicolas Sarkozy took the lead in starting this war.

Evidence is accumulating of deaths of Libyan civilians, including children, caused by NATO bombing.

The bombing is targeting civilian infrastructure, to deprive the majority of the population living in territory loyal to Gaddafi of basic necessities, food and water, supposedly to inspire the people to overthrow Gaddafi. The war to “protect civilians” has clearly turned into a war to terrorize and torment them, so that the NATO-backed TNC can take power.

This little war in Libya is exposing NATO as both criminal and incompetent.

It is also exposing the organized left in NATO countries as totally useless. There has perhaps never been a war easier to oppose. But the organized left in Europe is not opposing it.

Three months ago, when the media hype about Libya was launched by the Qatari television Al Jazeera, the organized left did not hesitate to take a stand. A couple of dozen leftist French and North African organizations signed a call for a “solidarity march with the Libyan people” in Paris on March 26. In a display of total confusion, these organizations simultaneously called for “recognition of the National Transition Council as the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people” on the one hand and “protection of foreign residents and migrants” who, in reality, needed to be protected from the very rebels represented by that Council. While implicitly supporting the military operations in support of the NTC, the groups also called for “vigilance” concerning “the duplicity of Western governments and the Arab League” and possible “escalation” of those operations.

The organizations signing this appeal included Libyan, Syrian, Tunisian, Moroccan and Algerian exile opposition groups as well as the French Greens, the Anti-Capitalist Party, the French Communist Party, the Left Party, the anti-racist movement MRAP and ATTAC, a widely based popular education movement critical of financial globalization. These groups together represent virtually the entire organized French political spectrum to the left of the Socialist Party – which for its part supported the war without even calling for “vigilance”.

As civilian casualties of NATO bombing mount, there is no sign of the promised “vigilance concerning escalation of the war” deviating from the UN Security Council Resolution.

The activists who in March insisted that “we must do something” to stop a hypothetical massacre are doing nothing today to stop a massacre that is not hypothetical but real and visible, and carried out by those who “did something”.

The basic fallacy of the "we must do something" leftist crowd lies in the meaning of "we". If they meant "we" literally, then the only thing they could do was to set up some sort of international brigades to fight alongside the rebels. But of course, despite the claims that "we" must do "everything" to support the rebels, no serious thought was ever given to such a possibility.

So their "we" in practice means the Western powers, NATO and above all the United States, the only one with the "unique capabilities" to wage such a war.

The "we must do something" crowd usually mixes two kind of demands: one which they can realistically expect to be carried out by those Western powers - support the rebels, recognize the TNC as the sole legitimate representative of the Libyan people - and the other which they cannot realistically expect the Great Powers to follow and which they themselves are totally incapable of accomplishing: limit the bombing to military targets and to the protection of civilians, and stay scrupulously within the framework of UN resolutions.

Those two sorts of demands contradict each other. In a civil war, no side is primarily concerned about the niceties of UN resolutions or the protection of civilians. Each side wants to win, period, and the desire for revenge often leads to atrocities. If one "supports" the rebels, in practice one is giving a blank check to their side to do whatever they judge to be necessary to win.

But one also gives a blank check to the Western allies and NATO, who may be less bloodthirsty than the rebels but who have far greater means of destruction at their disposal. And they are big bureaucracies that act as survival machines. They need to win. Otherwise they have a "credibility" problem (as do the politicians who supported the war), which could lead to a loss of funding and resources. Once the war has started, there is simply no force in the West, lacking a resolute antiwar movement, that can oblige NATO to limit itself to what is allowed by a UN resolution. So, the second set of leftist demands fall on deaf ears. They serve merely to prove to the pro-war left itself that its intentions are pure.

By supporting the rebels, the pro-intervention left has effectively killed the antiwar movement. Indeed, it makes no sense to support rebels in a civil war who desperately want to be helped by outside interventions and at the same time oppose such interventions. The pro-intervention right is far more coherent.

What both the pro-intervention left and right share is the conviction that "we" (meaning the civilized democratic West) have the right and the ability to impose our will on other countries. Certain French movements whose stock in trade is to denounce racism and colonialism have failed to remember that all colonial conquests were carried out against satraps, Indian princes and African kings who were denounced as autocrats (which they were) or to notice that there is something odd about French organizations deciding who are the "legitimate representatives" of the Libyan people.

Despite the efforts of a few isolated individuals, there is no popular movement in Europe capable of stopping or even slowing the NATO onslaught. The only hope may be the collapse of the rebels, or opposition in the United States, or a decision by ruling oligarchies to cut the expenses. But meanwhile, the European left has missed its opportunity to come back to life by opposing one of the most blatantly inexcusable wars in history. Europe itself will suffer from this moral bankruptcy.

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