



## LIBYAN INVASION: HUMANITARIAN MISSION OR HUMANITARIAN MAYHEM?

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**Abstract:** The delusion of world politics is that conformity to universal human rights is sometimes used to achieve ulterior goals at the expense of the human rights of other people. Apparently, the pendulum still swings in favour of a judge who presides over his case despite all odds. This typifies the recent invasion of Libya by some Western Forces. This article evaluates the invasion of Libya and concludes that their action fits perfectly in the realm of plundering universal ethical norm and standards. Paradoxically humanitarian mayhem was perpetrated on Libya, under the guise of humanitarian mission. The ulterior motive for the invasions was to consolidate and actualize economic and geo-strategic imperial interests on weak Third World states. The article recommends that war should be a last recourse a step taken after exhaustive negotiations, arbitration and conciliation. This would forestall plunging the international system back to the era when humanity confronted brazen imperialistic barbarism.

### INTRODUCTION

Humanity is gradually been plunged into the era when it confronted brazen imperialistic barbarism. This explains recent events in international relations with particular reference to Operation Odyssey Dawn on Libya where humanitarian mission beclouded the humanitarian mayhem perpetrated against Libya. As was the case in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when British and French imperialist justified their scramble and conquest of Africa and Asia on the deceitful propaganda of liberation and enlightenment; Western forces are intervening in Third World countries to consolidate and actualize economic and geo-strategic imperial interests under the guise of humanitarian mission and other altruistic reasons.

You would recall that the crisis in Libya was part of the trend of agitations and revolts for reforms which engulfed Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Libya, Syria and Bahrain. Western forces decided to intervene in Libya and committed serious humanitarian mayhem under the guise of humanitarian mission. There was relative silence and inaction on President Ali Abdullah Saleh of Yemen despite the fact that her forces have been killing the masses protesting and agitating for reforms as was

in Libya. The same was the case with Bashar al-Assad of Syria who has been quelling the turmoil and crisis for reforms in Syria in the same manner that Gaddafi did. In the case of Tunisia and Egypt the reforms took its natural course, without external intervention. Ben Ali of Tunisia and Mubarak of Egypt stepped down because of the enormity of popular uprisings against their regimes. It throws light on the interventionist proclivities of powerful states for imperialistic motives under the guise of humanitarian and other ethically acceptable criterion.

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Under the guise of humanitarian intervention Western Forces are now actualizing their imperialistic ambitions of controlling the oil and other economic resources of Third-World states thereby causing untold humanitarian crisis and mayhem. The crisis in Libya began like an irredentist rebellion which is common in Third World states. It recently took its natural course in Tunisia and Egypt and is presently taking its course in Yemen and Syria. The process was also unfolding in Libya but was prematurely thwarted in the altar of humanitarian catastrophe.



The Libyan crisis started with pockets of protest for a feel of democracy in the Benghazi region with few rebels. Abetted and cajoled by Western Forces they eventually formed the Transition National Council (TNC) and launched an armed insurrection against the government of Gaddafi. According to Cogan (28 Jul 2011) “Operations by the Libyan armed forces to suppress their small-scale uprising were exaggerated by the major powers into genocidal blood-letting against civilians that could be prevented only by foreign military intervention.”

It is common knowledge that the world over to counter insurgency requires freehand, enough time and use of force. According to Ayoob (1996:40) “World states makers need above all two things: lots of time and a relatively free hand to persuade, cajole and coerce the disparate populating...” History is replete with cases of internal turbulence or rebellion which was effectively and most decisively managed by the state apparatus without the undue interference of external forces who seek to achieve their imperialistic goals under the guise of humanitarian mission. The major players of the Western Forces (USA, France and Britain) that invaded Libya had similar experiences and managed it internally. This is because internal turbulence has often naturally led to drastic changes which eventually resulted in a refined and stable political system.

This was the case in USA where the dynamics of the American Civil War turmoil naturally fashioned out the democratic ideals and blueprint of the country. It was also the case for France where 1789 Revolution without undue external interference, naturally shaped their destiny. Britain also had her fair share of internal turbulence like the Oliver Cromwell issue and the rebellion of Gerry Adams Irish Republican Army but managed the situation with freehand and enough time. Also the recent crisis in England may have taken a more disastrous dimension if the international community were supporting the actions of the dissidents. Unfortunately Western Forces took advantage of the rebellion against the government of Libya to achieve

their imperialistic agenda under the guise of humanitarian intervention.

Fair enough the issue of humanitarian intervention to save the population of Libya from the slaughter of Muammar Gaddafi was presented to the United Nations. This gave birth to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973. The terms of this resolution was clearly spelt out... it was passed to enforce a no-fly zone and protect Libyan civilians. It is meant to enforce peace and not to take sides with rebels to overthrow a legitimate government of a sovereign state. Unfortunately the military intervention (Operation Odyssey Dawn) on Libya which began on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2011 came under the guise of humanitarian gesture and suddenly usurped other nefarious roles that have aggravated the humanitarian crisis in that country to the detriment of international rule of law.

A situation where the Western forces were arming the rebels to fight and destroy a greater majority of people who are loyal to the regime of Muammar Gaddafi in contravention of a United Nations arms embargo not only augmented civil war in Libya but would eventually serve as recipe for other rebels in Third World countries to emulate. Writing in the Guardian UK, Kucinich (6-July-2011) noted that “France has confirmed it has been arming Libyan rebels, in contravention of a UN arms embargo”. France supplied weapons to oppositionists fighting Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s forces in Libya. Le Figaro of France said that “the consignment consisted of rocket launchers, assault rifles, machine guns, and anti-tank missiles. The weapons were dropped by parachute to opposition fighters—mainly Berbers—in the Nafusa Mountains, western Libya on the border with Tunisia.” Hyland (2 Jul 2011). This move obviously exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Libya.

Oblivious of the motives and implications Russia, China, and India opposed the moves. Russia’s NATO envoy Dmitry Rogozin said it meant that “individual NATO countries have basically started giving direct military aid to one of the warring sides,” and that it constituted “direct interference in an internal conflict.”



Also as reported by Hyland (2 Jul 2011) Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said it represented a “flagrant violation” of United National Security Council Resolution 1970, which imposed an arms embargo on Libya in February.

The Western Forces ignored the African Union by intervening in Libya without seeking the consent of the African Union. Speaking in an interview with BBC the African Union Chairman, Jean Ping lamented that “Nobody talk to us; no body consult us” [BBC 9436093] and that the AU is totally ignored. It goes to buttress the fact that United Nations Resolutions are now been used by advanced countries to meddle in the internal affairs of Third World states thereby posing enormous security challenges. In evaluating the trend, Maathai (Aug 12, 2011) noted that If such conflicts were taking place in Europe, surely the EU would be central to a resolution”.

There is no doubt that the March 17, 2011 UN Security Council Resolution 1973, which imposed a no-fly zone and sanctioned war based on the claim that its purpose was protecting civilians. The pretext for the intervention was that Gaddafi was at the verge of committing a massacre in Benghazi and that a humanitarian mission was necessary to counter undue loss of lives. The irony is that they eventually armed the people of Benghazi and other rebels to perpetrate massacre, destruction and heinous bloodbath on the supporters and loyalist of Gaddafi in general and the city of Sirte, the home town of Gaddafi in particular.

Under the guise of humanitarian intervention the Western Forces bombed essential infrastructure in Tripoli and other areas held by pro-Gaddafi forces. According to Cogan (28 Jul 2011) this “has killed at least 1,108 civilians and wounded over 4,500. Evidence is mounting that NATO has stepped-up deliberate attacks on civilian targets in order to terrorise the population into turning against the regime.”

The Western forces carried out repeated air strikes on Gaddafi’s compounds in Tripoli and other homes where they suspected he was hiding since shortly after the brutal air war against Libya was launched last March.

One of these strikes at the end of last April claimed the lives of his youngest son and three young grandchildren. This was apparently in an effort to assassinate Gaddafi and his loyalist. “Sheer criminality has characterised the efforts of the major powers to achieve this end. Gaddafi has been the target of numerous assassination attempts, one of which murdered his son and three of his grandchildren.” [ibid] From the beginning of the operation on Libya, the Western forces carried out repeated air strikes against Gaddafi and his supporters. Several air strikes bombarded his official and residential estates in Tripoli and other building. Daily systematic bombardments aimed at assassinating Gaddafi and his family. According to Hyland (2 Jul 2011) “Hundreds of sorties daily are being conducted to assist various rebel forces, under the umbrella of the Transitional National Council, with the aim of obliterating Gaddafi’s forces and intimidating the population.”

It eventually facilitated the gruesome murder of Muammar Gaddafi and several numbers of his top aides and his two sons. Muammar Gaddafi was brutally murdered on his way out of his home town of Sirte on Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2011. This barbaric killings and the wanton destruction of property worth billions of dollars, served to underscore the parody of the humanitarian mission in Libya.

For more than seven months the Western forces laid siege on Sirte the Libyan coastal city because it was the home town of Gaddafi. The city has a population of over 100,000 people but the Western assault did not spare any building in its massacre of lives and properties. The casualty rate increased as a result of deprivation of food, water, electric light, shelter, medication and other essential services necessary for human welfare thereby leaving a large portion of the country in ruins. According to Auken (21 Oct 2011) “virtually every building was smashed, with untold numbers of civilians dead, wounded and stricken by disease, as they were deprived of food, water, medical care and other basic necessities.” According to Mount (7 Oct 2011) “Through such terror, the western powers



aim to seize control of Libya's oil reserves and establish a strategic base in North Africa.”

The Western Forces have been committing terrible war crimes by unleashing inordinate military force on loyalist in a frenzied quest to destroy the population and infrastructure that support the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. It was a catastrophe as rockets, mortar, and missiles were indiscriminately fired into towns and villages supporting and showing loyalty to Gaddafi. According to Hyland (2 Jul 2011) “The Army Times reported that, since March 31, the US “has flown a total of 3,475 sorties in support of OUP [Operation Unified Protector]. Of those, 801 were strike sorties, 132 of which actually dropped ordnance”.

The rebellion committed deliberate aggression against innocent civilians, children, women, elderly and other vulnerable people further fuelling the humanitarian crisis. In the case of Sirte, O'Connor (3 Oct 2011) reported that “Air raids are now taking place around the clock. Anti-Gaddafi militiamen are firing rockets, mortar rounds and tank shells, without even pretending that they are aiming at any particular targets within the city of 100,000 people.” These indiscriminate and random air strikes have caused thousands of deaths and numerous injuries. The Western Forces “has attacked an unarmed people, killing 1,108 civilians and wounding 4,537 others in bombardments of Tripoli and other cities and villages.” *ibid*

The bombardments have reduced the towns to ruins and the surviving inhabitants to homeless refugees. Fleeing residents of Sirte and Bani Walid are straining the resources of neighbouring communities thereby creating a refugee crisis. The operation also witnessed terrible brutality and war crimes as it involved a prolonged blockade. This blockade as was the wanton destruction of property denied residents, access to amenities and facilities needed for survival. As reported by Marsden (18 Oct 2011) a Sirte resident said that “They envy and hate us because Muammar is from here. But we are just civilians. The revolutionaries are coming here for revenge and destruction.”

The question here is what is the logic of killing thousands of civilians who are supporting the Leader they admire because they want to protect the lives of civilians that may be wounded or killed for rebelling against a Leader they don't admire and want their own Leader? This picture becomes clearer if we have at the back of our minds the fact that whenever you intervene in a country, whatever your intentions, you are intervening on someone's side. In the case of the Western Forces, there bias against Gaddafi and support for the rebels was orchestrated glaringly and gruesomely.

The lynching of former Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi, ultimately reveals the real motive of the invasion of Libya. It was for this same ulterior motive that the Western Forces provided arms and supported the “Benghazi Rebels” to attack, destroy and plunder towns and cities loyal to Gaddafi. Perpetrating exactly the kind of bloody assault on civilian population centres that the operation was purportedly designed to counter. This is buttressed by a New York-based Human Rights Watch who on Monday 23 October, 2011 discovered several decomposing bodies of Muammar Gaddafi's loyalist executed by the opposition forces. According to Laub and Gamel (24 Oct 2011) the discovery in Gadhafi's hometown of Sirte "seems part of a trend of killings, looting and other abuses committed by anti-Gadhafi fighters who consider themselves above the law."

The crux of the issue is that the Western Forces took advantage of Gaddafi's quest to suppress the social unrest and rebellion which extended to his country from Tunisia as was the case in Egypt, Syria and Yemen; to forcefully change his regime and impose a puppet regime. The real motive is not humanitarian as was trumpeted but to consolidate and actualize economic and geo-strategic imperial interests in Libya and other weak Third World states. This debacle raises moral and ethical questions that may undermine international norms and rule of as well as plunge the international system back to the colonial era when humanity confronted brazen imperialistic barbarism



## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

There is no action that fits perfectly in the realm of humanitarian disaster and the plundering of universal ethical norms and standards than the recent invasion of Libya Western Forces. Ironically, humanitarian mission beclouded the humanitarian mayhem perpetrated against Libya. The ulterior motive was to consolidate and actualize economic and geo-strategic imperial interests in weak Third World states.

The crux of the issue is that the Western Forces took advantage of Gaddafi's quest to suppress the social unrest and rebellion which extended to his country from Tunisia as was the case in Egypt, Syria and Yemen; to forcefully change his regime and impose a puppet regime that would be subservient .

This debacle raises moral and ethical questions that have exposed the interventionist proclivities of powerful states for imperialistic motives under the guise of humanitarian and other ethically acceptable criterion. It has also called to question the universal applicability of international norms, ethos and standards. If not nipped from the bud this has the potentials of undermining international norms and rule of law as well as plunge the international system back to the colonial era when humanity confronted brazen imperialistic barbarism

The article recommends that the use of force should be viewed as a last resort, appropriate only when it is inevitable and all reasonable diplomatic efforts are exhausted. Conscientious and painstaking negotiations, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and judicial settlements should be adopted to make peace. They may also resort to regional agencies or other peaceful means of their own choice as recommended by the United Nations Charter; instead of blatantly declaring war on other sovereign states.

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