



International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV433sup March 2011



**Down with the  
Gaddafi regime!**

**Stop the  
imperialist  
intervention  
now!**

**Support the Libyan  
Revolution!**

**Special Supplement on the  
Arab Revolutions**

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**International Viewpoint**, the monthly English-language magazine of the Fourth International, is a window to radical alternatives world-wide, carrying reports, analysis and debates from all corners of the globe. Correspondents in over 50 countries report on popular struggles, and the debates that are shaping the left of tomorrow.

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# INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

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## Tunisia - The Founding Statement of the January 14th Front



Affirming our engagement in the revolution of our people which fought for its right to freedom and national dignity and made great sacrifices, including dozens of martyrs and thousands of wounded and prisoners, and in order to complete the victory against interior and external enemies and to oppose any attempts to crush the fruits of these sacrifices, we constituted "the 14th of January Front" as a political framework which will apply itself to the advancement of the revolution of our people towards the achievement of its objectives and to oppose the forces of counter-revolution.

The Front consists of national democratic and progressive parties, forces, and organizations.

The urgent tasks of this Front are:

1. To bring down the current Ghannouchi government or any government containing symbols of the old regime which applies an anti-national and anti-popular policy and serves the interests of the deposed president.
2. To dissolve the RCD and to confiscate its headquarters, its property, its financial assets and funds, since they belong to the people.
3. To form an interim government which enjoys the confidence of the people, of the militant progressive political, social, and trade-union forces, and of the youth.
4. To dissolve the House of Representatives and the Senate, all the existing artificial bodies, and the High Council of the Judiciary; to dismantle the political structure of the old regime; and to prepare

the election of a constituent assembly within a maximum of one year in order to formulate a new democratic constitution and to found a new legal system to frame the public life which guarantees the political, economic, and cultural rights of the people.

5. To dissolve the political police and to adopt a new policy of security based on respect for human rights and the rule of the law.
6. To bring to justice all those who are guilty of stealing the people's money, all those who committed crimes against the people like repression, imprisonment, torture, and humiliation, whether in the decision-making or in the execution, and finally all those who are convicted of corruption and diversion of public goods.
7. To expropriate the former ruling family, their close relations and associates, and all the civil servants who used their positions to grow rich at the expense of the people.
8. To create jobs for the unemployed; to take urgent measures to grant unemployment benefits and provide greater social security and health care coverage; and to improve the purchasing power for the employed.
9. To build a national economy in the service of the people where the vital and strategic sectors are under the supervision of the State; to renationalize those institutions which have been privatized; and to formulate an economic and social policy which breaks with the liberal capitalist approach.
10. To guarantee public and individual freedoms, especially freedom of expression, freedom of association, freedom of the press, information, and thought; and to release prisoners and to promulgate a law of amnesty.
11. The Front hails the support of the popular masses and the progressive forces in the Arab world and the whole world for the revolution in Tunisia and invites them to continue their support by all possible means.
12. Resistance to normalization with the Zionist entity, its penalization, and the support for the national liberation movements in the Arab world and the whole world.



13. The Front calls on all the popular masses and nationalist forces and progressives to continue the mobilization and the struggle in all forms of legitimate protest, particularly in the streets, until the proposed objectives are achieved.

14. The Front hails all the committees, associations, and forms of popular self-organization and invites them to widen their sphere of intervention to all that concerns the conduct of public affairs and various aspects of everyday life.

Glory to the martyrs of the Intifada, and Victory to the revolutionary masses of our people!

League of the Labor Left

Movement of Nasserist Unionists

Movement of Democratic Nationalists

Democratic Nationalists (Al-Watad)

Baasist Current

Independent Left

Tunisian Communist Workers Party

Patriotic and Democratic Labour Party

*Tunisia, 20 January 2011*

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## Egypt - An overview of the January 25th revolution

“For Dignity, Democracy and Social Justice”  
*Alaa Shukrallah*



Under these slogans the January 25th revolution erupted. The revolution, reflected both older grievances which had been growing particularly during the past 10 years and the rising protest movement against them. Amongst the major milestones of this movement which took on a social rather than a nationalist dimension was the famous workers' movement of Elmejala textile workers in 2006. However, this movement was preceded by the rise in the solidarity movement with the Palestinian people in their second intifada El Aqsa uprising as well as against the occupation of Iraq by the American troops in 2003.

However, one can trace certain events which could be seen as sparks of the movement. I would say there were probably four major events which played an important role. The first was the murder of a young man by the police on June 7, 2010, when a 28 year old man named Khalid Said was beaten to death by police in an internet café in Alexandria. His friends started a Facebook group named « We are all Khalid Said », which soon

gathered more than 300,000 members. The murder of this young man was like throwing a match in an oil field. The majority of these young people had never been involved in politics of any kind before, but this time they had an issue they could all identify with: Khalid Said could have been any of them!

They formed discussion groups and moved from demanding justice for their friend to protesting emergency law, repression, corruption and unemployment. In short, they decided to take their destiny in their own hands and to go for real change.

The second event in my opinion was the return of Dr. Elbaradei a Noble prize winner who challenged Mubarak's leadership of the state and the constitutional articles which gave him the ability to monopolize it for thirty years. I think that this gave hope to many people, particularly many middle class youth who saw nobody but Mubarak since their birth, that a change in the system which has been growingly alienating them could take place. Again the Baradei movement inspired a nearly quarter of a million supporters on facebook.

The third event was the scandalous rigging of all the elected councils during the past year, particularly the rigging of the parliamentary elections which was done in the most blatant unsophisticated way reflecting the arrogance of the ruling clique and its contempt of the people.

However, the final push came from the Tunisian revolution, where the Dictator Ben Ali was overthrown on January 14. The youth said, it is doable if the Tunisians can do it, maybe we can.

Immediately in the aftermath of the removal of Ben Ali in Tunisia, some bloggers and facebook youth from the 6 of April movement for change, the Khalid Said group and the Baradei group called for demonstrations demanding "dignity, democracy and social justice". An inspiring speech was given by a young woman who called on all citizens and youth to join her and to leave fear behind for they are betraying their country as well as their brothers and sisters.

Its important to note the role that facebook and the bloggers played in organizing these youth through enabling them to contact each other and discuss issues and articulate their demands. This was particularly essential in the absence of strong political parties which could have connected people and played any leading role.

However, the deeper rooted causes can only be understood in the context of the changes that took place in the Egyptian society during the past thirty years and even before i.e. since the mid seventies.

Under the rule of Sadat in the mid-seventies the economy of Egypt was suddenly transformed from a state provided and subsidised one to an open market economy where foreign and local capital ruthlessly seized control over all assets of the country.

A new ruling oligarchy was gradually formed under Sadat to flourish and take absolute control under Mubarak.

This new ruling oligarchy was born from the intermarriage of state power with business and in the absence of any type of transparency, corruption became a major intrinsic method for the accumulation of both wealth and state power.

Corruption ranged from selling state assets such as companies, or real estate for peanuts to business men who in turn sold them in days for huge fortunes. Billions of dollars could be made as a profit over night. This was in addition to money-laundering, commissions on all sorts of deals, including arms deals, as well as on foreign donations to the government of Egypt. Corruption and state power represented by internal security and the police produced the web which connected the top echelons of the oligarchy to its lowest ones working on the level of the local councils and local communities.

However, it is important to see the development of this Egyptian oligarchy within the broader global context. For it was the dominant neo-liberal policies guided and pushed by the USAID, the International Monetary Fund Bank and the World Bank and later joined by the European Union. The IMF called for the alleviation of state subsidies and state protection tariffs as part of its demand for "adjustment of the fiscal budgetary deficit" while the USAID and World Bank pushed for and guided the hegemony of a completely open market economy and the receding role of the state as a provider of goods and services.

The results of these policies adopted by the Egyptian ruling oligarchy and formed in its own fashion led to several catastrophic consequences for the Egyptian Economy as a whole, as well as for the majority of the the Egyptian people.

Egypt's economy increasingly changed from being a productive semi-independent economy to dependent one built mainly on the service sector. In the meantime, people's lives changed for the worse. Unemployment reached unprecedented level "some claim that its level can reach as much as 25%", most of those employed had no permanent contracts and hence no social protection, employment conditions also became worse in the lack of both state protection and or independent trade unions, nearly 60% of the Egyptian people lived in slums.

Meanwhile, oppression of the wider sector of the people by the police and internal security ranging from police brutality to torture became a daily routine to get fast confessions even if they were false to ensure control and even exercise sadism which became an inherent character and a part of the police training.

It is all these grievances that started to come to the surface particularly in the past five years where daily protests by different sectors of the population became the norm. These protests included a wide

variety of the population that never before took part in any political or even economic movements. As people became more desperate, fear of the police decreased and protesting became infectious.

Hence, when the youth of "facebook" called for the demonstrations to change the ruling regime, to the surprise of the ruling clique and its security forces and even to the protestors themselves, not only a few thousands showed up but increasingly millions of Egyptian from nearly every part of the country came to the fore.

As everyone now knows, as the movement gained momentum and regimes concessions pace was slow to follow, the demands of the protestors heightened from political reforms to the overthrow of Mubarak to more radical political change as well as social ones. With the death of demonstrators in the city of Suez the demonstrations took a new leap to reach million over all Egypt. Police brutality and sniper shots leaving some 400s death behind and organized terror of the population did not deter the people but made them more determined.

At the final days that preceded Mubarak's final declaration of his resignation, the workers of nearly all sectors joined the movement with strikes in their workplaces and a state of what can be called civil disobedience became a reality. The army would not or could not interfere without a blood bath whose consequences on the army itself could not be calculated. The regime had to concede and Mubarak had to go.

To date many success have been achieved. An unprecedented space for democratic practices has been won by the people. The ruling oligarchy's party, its internal security and police have been dealt strong blows, some articles of the constitution opened more space to break the monopoly over the presidency. However, probably the most important gain in this revolution is the change that took place in many of the Egyptian people themselves. The demonstrations and sit-ins, particularly the Tahrir square ( now called by some Liberty square and by other Martyrs square) represented one of the most fascinating historical dramas in Egypt's modern history. Aside from the high degree of politicization that took place in the square, the stories of heroism, solidarity and sense of community that was built up will always stay in the minds and souls of the people.

For the first time and after a long history of increasing sectarianism, Muslims and Christians struggled together under the slogans "Muslims and Christians we are all Egyptian" we are all one hand" many held each other and raised the victory sign with their hands to the media and onlookers. Men and women, veiled and nor veiled stood side by side to protect each other and struggle on equal grounds without friction or harassment. "Together we struggle together we are willing to die", the crowds shouted. To Mubarak they said, "we will not go but you will go."

Yet real institutionalized democratic reform had not yet taken place. The old power still continues to rule and the same socio-economic policies continue to dominate.

Accordingly, this phase is an extremely delicate one and the strategies that will be adopted by the genuine democratic and progressive forces can mean success or failure of the revolution.

Although the street demonstrations have and continue to play an important role, they cannot and will not continue forever. Other strategies and tactics have to be adopted to consolidate the gains of the revolution and widen them.

In my opinion organisation and coalition building and prioritizing the demands come to the fore at this stage.

In this respect much has been achieved but much more has to be achieved if a critical mass of the forces for genuine change is to be successful.

A new trade union of the workers has been established. The youth movements have been able to form a coalition and a new party for the left has been established. Many different types of attempts at coalitions are in the formation and the critical demands of the movement are becoming clearer.

The process of organization should continue with the establishment of other independent workers unions in all the different workplaces while other community level popular committees which have been established and are being established should be strengthened. They should take a wider role in developing true mass participation in political decisions, in their representation in local and national elections as well as in their supervision of local institutions starting from local councils to police stations as well as service providers.

However, the most vital step required is the calling of a national conference which should involve all the sectors which joined and genuinely supported the 25th January revolution. A delegation representing these demands should be established to dialogue with the Army representing these demands. The conference should be supported by a critical mass can then dialogue from a power base which is accountable to the people who made this revolution and are willing to continue to protect it to the end.

Finally, it maybe good to end this article by a song made by the youth in Tahrir square which says:

*"our voices will build not destroy....our voices will lead to change*

never say there is no hope.... for your voice will bring on change

take the sleep off your eyes... get up and shout with the loudest voice

defeat your fear, for between us.... that who shouts will not die".

, Alaa Shulrallah is an independent activist in Egypt in the Development Support Centre. He is Chair

*of the Association for Health and Environmental Development.*

## **Arab Revolutions - Revolutionary Hope and Change Across the 'Arab World'**

10 Questions with Gilbert Achcar  
*Ali Mustafa, Gilbert Achcar*

Ali Mustafa: The Middle East has long been considered among the least likely places to see anything like a popular revolution. Arabs in particular have been traditionally understood as politically weak, apathetic, and now "not ready" for democracy. What do you believe these characterizations suggest about our basic understanding of the region and its people?

Gilbert Achcar: I think that the answer has now become obvious. The ongoing events shattered all theories claiming that democracy is not part of the 'cultural values' of Arabs or Muslims, and that the latter are instead culturally addicted to despotic regimes, and all such stupidities--there has been a lot of them indeed. Most of the time they are plainly racist, Orientalist, or Islamophobic; they may also be expressed by Western rulers as pretexts for catering to despotic regimes, their best friends. The uprisings, however, are no surprise for anybody who did not subscribe to these 'culturalist' views and knew that the longing for democracy and freedom is universal. People all over the world are willing to pay a high price in their fight for democracy when circumstances reach a point when they feel it is the right time to act.

AM: The uprisings that have occurred all across the 'Arab World' in Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and beyond have largely been popular, secular, and cut across all sectors of society. Are we potentially witnessing the rise of a new type of Pan-Arabism, or just the same underlying causes at play? If so, how does this new Pan-Arabism break with the previous incarnation of the Nasser era?

GA: No, I don't think this is anything resembling the kind of Arab nationalism that existed in the 1950s and 60s. These are very different times. Of course, the Arab national feeling has been 'reloaded,' if one could say so, by the way in which this wave has spread over the whole region; it strengthened tremendously the sense of belonging to the same geopolitical and cultural area. In that sense, the consciousness of belonging to an Arab cultural-national sphere has been very much increased by the ongoing events, but it's not comparable to the aspirations to Arab unity that existed in the 50s and 60s when the belief in the possibility of unifying the Arab peoples into a single state was quite strong, behind Nasser in particular.

Now, what we have is again a sense of belonging to the same geopolitical and cultural area, but the movement is coming from below, and if ever people are to contemplate the perspective of

unity, it would be closer to the European kind of unification than to that of the 50s and 60s; this would take, first of all, changing Arab regimes into democratic ones, and then having a democratic process between different Arab countries forming gradually a united federative or confederative political entity. Of course, this is something to contemplate for the future. For the time being, what people are concerned with is democratic change, and what we are seeing is only the beginning; it's far from being completed yet.

AM: There has been so much speculation to date about the Egyptian revolution's long-term implications for Egypt/Israel diplomatic relations, but what do you believe these events will mean for the Palestinians specifically?

GA: They can only mean good things for the Palestinian cause. Since you said 'Palestinians' in the plural, we have to specify which Palestinians we mean: are we speaking of the Palestinian Authority (PA) of Mahmoud Abbas and Salam Fayyad, or Hamas, or the Palestinian people as a whole? These are quite different perspectives. For the Palestinian people and the Palestinian cause in general, like for any Arab people, what is happening all over the region is the best that could happen. The surge of the mass movement in Egypt makes conditions potentially much better for the Palestinian people. The Egyptian regime-- which was colluding with Israel in the oppression of the Palestinian people, especially in Gaza-- has been very much weakened by the mass protests, and there's no doubt that the Egyptian popular movement feels a strong affinity and solidarity with the Palestinian people, especially the people in Gaza who have many ties with Egypt; this can only benefit them in the long run.

AM: What does this revolutionary wave in the Arab world ultimately mean for American foreign policy in the Middle East? Are we potentially seeing the end of a long legacy of US hegemony in the region?

GA: Results will be contrasted: Washington's clients will be more than ever dependent on US protection, and that goes especially for the Gulf Cooperation Council states - that is, the oil monarchies in the Gulf area. They are scared to death now with this wave of struggles, which has even reached two of them, Bahrain and Oman, and started affecting the Saudi kingdom. These regimes will rely on US protection, even more so than before. Among the other countries where the movement has been proceeding--and that includes Egypt, the second largest recipient of US foreign aid in the world after the Israeli state--everything will depend on the outcome of the ongoing struggle between the military regime on the one hand, and the mass movement on the other. The military are very much dependent on Washington, of course, whereas the mass movement is very hostile to this dependency and to US foreign policy in the region. At any rate, the ongoing events represent a severe blow to US strategic interests in the Middle East

in the very fact that they destabilize Washington's protégés and clients in a most vital region of the world; that much is absolutely clear.

AM: Egypt has operated as a de facto military dictatorship since 1952 and its army is now acting as a caretaker government until free and fair elections can take place in September. What role is the military playing right now, and can they be trusted to ultimately cede power or have they merely sacrificed the dictator to save the dictatorship?

GA: They have indeed a certain number of fuses that they can replace in trying to defuse the mass movement. It started with Mubarak himself dismissing the government and designating another Prime Minister who formed a new cabinet; then, the leadership of the ruling party was made to resign; then, Mubarak himself had to leave the scene under the pressure of the mass movement; and now the military have reshuffled the cabinet. But all this is not convincing enough for the mass movement, which is demanding much more: they want a complete change of government with no figures from the previous regime involved.

Beyond that, they are demanding that a presidential committee oversee the transitional period, a committee composed of a majority of civilians, with only one representative of the military. They were also demanding the election of a constituent assembly, whereas the military short-circuited this demand by creating a committee to draw up some revisions to the constitution that will be submitted to a referendum--a completely different scheme, even though they promise that the next parliament will draft a new constitution. An important issue is the date of the next parliamentary elections: the military backed by the Muslim Brotherhood want to hold them in June, whereas the young leaders of the uprising want them to be postponed for a few more months until the new political forces manage to organize and get ready. Very obviously what the military are trying to implement is what in Washington they call an 'orderly transition,' with the military remaining firmly in control. Since the young leaders do not subscribe to this perspective, we are witnessing a tug-of-war between the military junta and the popular movement.

AM: The Egyptian revolution's early mass protests were orchestrated largely by the youth it now seems clear, but what has been the role of the workers and working-class to date, and what do you see as its role looking forward?

GA: If you are referring to the way in which the mass protest started on the 25th of January, the key role there was played indeed by liberal and left-wing opposition groups like the April 6 Youth Movement, which is related to the National Association for Change formed around Mohamed ElBaradei. All these people played a decisive role in organizing the movement this time. But the April 6 Youth Movement itself was born in solidarity with the workers' strikes that unfolded from the

year 2006 onward. The movement is named after the day in 2008 when they tried to organize a general national strike in support of the workers' movement.

Now the reverse transmission is taking place: April 6 and other political forces were instrumental in launching the protests on the 25th of January, but then after a few days of protest, a little before Mubarak left the scene, workers started joining the movement not only as demonstrators as they did from day one, but as strikers. The wave of strikes actually reached very large proportions before Mubarak resigned, and it is plausible that this played a role in precipitating his final gesture of leaving the scene and handing power to the military. The strikes--along with the formulation of demands by various categories of workers, the process of forming independent unions, and the central demand that the state-controlled unions be dissolved--are continuing despite threats by the military, or calls to their cessation by parts of the opposition like the Muslim Brotherhood. All of this is still going on and shows that the workers are a very powerful part of the movement.

AM: With so much emphasis on Mubarak's ouster, what is the fear that now that he's gone and calls for 'stability' and 'order' grow louder, the Egyptian revolution may lose its early momentum and only solidify the status quo?

GA: One could have feared that it might lose its momentum when Mubarak left the scene, but what we have seen until now doesn't point in that direction at all. The Friday mobilizations are still very large and the movement is not willing to stop the fight. Further mobilizations are planned, and we will see, I'm sure, a lot more in the coming period. This confirms basically what I was saying: that this revolutionary process is not a completed revolution in any sense of the term; it is still going on and different outcomes are still possible.

Either the military manage to control the situation and impose their own and Washington's kind of 'orderly transition,' or the mass movement succeeds in imposing more radical change. We will see, but for the time being, in light of what we have seen until now, there are more reasons for optimism than for pessimism.

AM: We have seen a lot of cross-sector unity in the early stages of the Egyptian revolution - young/old, men/women, Muslim/Christian, for example. What are the prospects for this type of dynamic holding up in the post-Mubarak era, and what challenges will it face going forward?

GA: I can't see any split along lines of young/old, men/women, or even Muslim/Christian in the near future. I am not saying that nothing of that can happen in the future, but based on what we have seen until now there seems to be little risk. The only real threat among those you mentioned would be a revival of Muslim/Christian tensions because these existed before the beginning of the events. But on that score, the mobilization

proved a wonderful healer of division. We have seen expressions of fraternity among people of Muslim and Christian backgrounds, and even a fundamentalist force like the Muslim Brotherhood was quite clear in repealing sectarianism within the movement.

At this stage, the key point of unity or disunity is not along such 'identity' lines but political lines, as well as class lines; it is the unity of the opposition forces that is threatened, in political terms. The military are trying to buy part of the opposition into collaborating with them; they have already brought into the government a few representatives of the legal opposition, and they are seeking to secure the Muslim Brotherhood's support and get them involved in the 'orderly transition.'

The military are trying to break the opposition's unity, and, of course, we can't bet on this unity going on indefinitely. For the time being the radical democratic and left-wing forces in the movement are still able to lead the way and mobilize for more radical change.

AM: We have seen the revolutionary uprisings in the Middle East grow far beyond what we all imagined possible, spreading rapidly now to Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. Do you see any exceptions where such mass protests are not likely to occur, including Lebanon, Syria, or Saudi Arabia?

GA: The mass protests are strongest where you have despotic regimes. Lebanon is a country where you have regular, relatively fair elections, and where the political majority is presently dominated by Hezbollah, so this creates very different conditions. Nevertheless, a demonstration has been organized recently in Beirut against sectarianism and in favor of secularism. When you look at the other despotic regimes in the Arab region, two of them are countries where popular protest is simmering but is being held back by fiercely repressive regimes: the Saudi kingdom on the one hand, and Syria on the other. In my talk in Toronto on 13 February, I said that in countries like Syria and Libya the likelihood of the explosion was less than in other countries of the region, due to the particularly ruthless character of the regimes; I added, however, that if an uprising were to happen, events would turn much bloodier than in Tunisia and Egypt, and that's exactly what is happening now in Libya.

The same can be said about Syria and the Saudi kingdom. In such countries, mass protests may start unfolding, especially if the Libyan uprising proves successful--a fact that will certainly embolden the protest movement. Regimes there and elsewhere in the Arab world are making all sorts of preventative concessions now, raising wages and promising other social policies, because they are scared to death that the wave of democratic uprisings might reach their own countries. No one in the Arab world can feel immune--even in countries like Lebanon and Iraq where you have some possible alternation in power through elections. Iraq has seen a mass protest



unfolding, not about free elections but for social and economic demands.

AM: We have some indication about what the Egyptian revolution and all the other uprisings across the 'Arab World' may mean for those respective countries, and to some extent US hegemony in the region, but what do you see as the wider global implications, if any? Do these events in any way present a challenge to the prevailing neoliberal order overall?

GA: The ongoing uprisings are a result of the social and economic changes brought in by neoliberalism, to be sure, but they are not yet posing a major challenge to the global and even local neoliberal order. Although we are seeing within the protests--like in Egypt with the workers' mobilization--dynamics that go right against the neoliberal prescriptions, it is the democratic dimension of the struggle that has been prevailing until now. The global dimension of this shockwave is at present, therefore, more related to democracy than to social demands; its impact is even now reaching China. It is wherever the demand for democracy is still to be satisfied that the impact of what we are seeing is proving strongest at this stage. For the future, we will have to wait and see.

The powers that be in the Arab countries are trying to keep the movement within the limits of political democracy and prevent it from developing beyond that into a social and economic stage. There is an important potential here, however, and, to repeat my point, we are still in the midst of the process and the fight continues to go on; it may well turn eventually into a big challenge to the neoliberal economic order, especially in Tunisia and Egypt where the working class is a major factor in the process.

This interview was originally published in the Canadian magazine [New Socialist](#).

, *Ali Mustafa is a freelance journalist, writer, and media activist. He is also an editor of the New Socialist webzine. He resides in Toronto. His writing can be found at: <http://frombeyondthemargins.blogspot.com/>*

, *Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon and teaches political science at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. His best-selling book 'The Clash of Barbarisms' came out in a second expanded edition in 2006, alongside a book of his dialogues with Noam Chomsky on the Middle East, "Perilous Power". He is co-author of "The 33-Day War: Israel's War on Hezbollah in Lebanon and Its Consequences". His most recent book is "The Arabs and the Holocaust: the Arab-Israeli War of Narratives", Metropolitan Books, New York, 2010.*

## **Arab revolution/Libya - Latin America and the Arab revolution: the bankruptcy of Chavism?**

In Europe, governments are trying to prevent contagion and solidarity between European workers and the Arab masses in revolt by brandishing the scarecrow of Islamism. In Latin America, it is the Venezuelan and Cuban progressive leaders themselves who are trying to isolate these rising revolutions by affirming the supposedly "anti-imperialist" character of the despotic Libyan, Syrian and Iranian regimes, which are also being destabilized by the rising wave of peoples in struggle.

The Arab revolution constitutes a litmus test for imperialism, but also for the Cuban and Chavist leaderships. However, if the latter were also were completely taken by surprise by the upsurge of the Arab masses, they seem at present to be still unable to grasp the nature, the depth and the unity of the revolutionary process that is underway in the entire region. They do not seem to understand at all the powerful thirst for real democracy, for social justice, for independence and sovereignty which motivate the Arab masses and the formidable opportunity that their struggles offer to profoundly modify the relationships of forces between capital and labour on a world scale, and with imperialism.

The attitude of Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez concerning the events in Libya is particularly shocking. In a manner that is less pronounced in the case of the first and pretty consistent in the case of the second, they imply that the revolt of the Libyan people is the result of manipulation, of an imperialist plot aimed at overthrowing an enemy regime. Curiously, this "thesis" does not take up the official version of the Libyan regime itself, according to which it is on the contrary Al-Qaeda which is behind the "riots"! However, far from all these delirious conspiracy theories, there is nothing "singular" or "particular" about the revolution in Libya, no foreign plot directed by the CIA or Bin Laden; on the contrary, it is an integral part of the process of the Arab revolution which is breaking out throughout the region. Furthermore, this is not happening by chance, since the dictatorial Libyan regime is precisely geographically wedged between the Tunisian revolution and the Egyptian revolution.

In spite of everything, Fidel Castro has declared that it "will be necessary to wait as long as we have to in order to really know what is truth and what is lies or half-truths in what we are being told about the chaotic situation (sic) in Libya". However, he draws an immediate conclusion from it: "The worst thing now would be to be silent about the crime that NATO is on the point of committing against the Libyan people. For the leaders of this warmongering organization, it is urgent. It must be denounced." The difficulty is that, as Santiago

Alba Rico and Alma Allende point out, it is not the planes of NATO which are today machine-gunning the Libyan people, it is the planes of the Gaddafi regime! Thus, according to Fidel, it is not urgent to denounce the carnage committed by Gaddafi against his people and to choose the camp of the popular uprising, it is urgent to demonstrate against the future and hypothetical intervention of NATO. So in the name of the threat of a crime that remains a vague possibility, we should "be silent" about a real crime that is actually taking place.

Still according to this purely "campist" conception ("the enemies of my enemies are my friends"), on February 25 President Hugo Chavez has just, like Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega, given his "support to the Libyan government", at the moment when it is massacring its people with heavy weapons. Admittedly, there is no doubt that imperialism is lying in wait and hopes to take advantage of the slightest opportunity. Admittedly, we have to denounce the double morality of imperialism, which condemns civilian victims in Libya, but not in Iraq, Afghanistan or Palestine. But that does not at all justify support for a bloody tyrant, who is precisely giving imperialism a wonderful opportunity to regain its balance and who, in spite of his verbal outpourings about the so-called "green revolution", is at the head of a system of exploitation and a corrupt regime which is part and parcel of the imperialist network for plundering of the area and its resources.

In Venezuela, revolutionary organizations such as Marea Socialista have taken a clear decision in favour of the Libyan people and against the dictator Gaddafi. We can only hope that the Venezuelan and Cuban workers will be more capable of understanding what is at stake than their leaders are. But, even if he comes to his senses and corrects his position, there is no doubt that the catastrophic declarations of Chavez will immediately and lastingly ruin the immense prestige which he has up to now enjoyed among the Arab masses. This popularity came from his declared opposition to the war and the occupation of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, as well as Israel's aggression against Lebanon in 2006. It reached its culminating point in January 2009, when he decided to expel the Israeli ambassador part of the embassy staff to protest against the massacre perpetrated by the Zionist state against the population of Gaza, thus marking his "unqualified solidarity with the heroic Palestinian people". What is most serious is that, in the person of Chavez, it is the prestige of an alternative that is identified as progressive and seeking to build the "socialism of the twenty-first century" which is in danger of being deeply discredited in the Arab world.

This attitude constitutes a godsend for the reactionary and imperialist forces who, at present disorientated by the scale of what is happening, are trying at all costs to take the situation in hand, to control or to stop the Arab revolution. Moreover, by lining up shamefully alongside the

Libyan tyrant, the Chavist leadership is shooting itself in the foot by offering ammunition to its own adversaries and detractors, who constantly make unfounded accusations about its "dictatorial" nature.

In Europe, in Latin America, in the United States and in Asia, the Arab people – who are today in the vanguard of the anti-imperialist struggle – must receive the unreserved support of the progressive forces of the world. This is the only way to effectively contest the hypocritical claim of imperialism to represent the democratic interests of peoples and to counter effectively any threat, real or intentionally brandished, of a military intervention.

*This article was first published in French on the website of the LCR\_SAP, belgian section of the Fourth International : [www.lcr-lagauche.be](http://www.lcr-lagauche.be)*

*Ataulfo Riera is member of the national leadership of the LCR-SAP (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire-Socialistische Arbeiderspartij), Belgian section of the Fourth International.*

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## **Arab revolutions - The Oil-Food Price Shock**

When future historians attempt to trace the origins of the current turmoil in the Middle East, they will find that one of the earliest of the many explosions of rage occurred in Algeria and was triggered by the rising price of food. On January 5, young protesters in Algiers, Oran and other major cities blocked roads, attacked police stations and burned stores in demonstrations against soaring food prices. Other concerns—high unemployment, pervasive corruption, lack of housing—also aroused their ire, but food costs provided the original impulse.

As the epicenter of youthful protest moved elsewhere, first to Tunisia and then to Egypt and other countries, the food price issue was subordinated to more explicitly political demands, but it never disappeared. Indeed, the rising cost of food has been a major theme of antigovernment demonstrations in Jordan, Sudan and Yemen. With the price of most staples still climbing—spurred in part by a parallel surge in oil costs—more such protests are bound to occur.

Rising food prices matter so much in these countries because the vast majority of the people have been excluded from the conspicuous wealth enjoyed by relatives and cronies of the despots who monopolized power all these years, and because food accounts for such a large share of the family budget. When food costs increase sharply—as they have in the past six months, by as much as 50 percent for some staples—families that were just barely able to survive are plunged into crisis and penury. "The government is humiliating us," said one young protester in Algiers. "They are raising the price of sugar. We have to pay the rent,

the electricity, water, sugar and oil. We are all poor.”

The great irony is that many of these countries are oil producers, and with the recent spike in oil prices they have enjoyed a significant boost in national income. But putting aside for a moment the fact that few inhabitants of these countries enjoy tangible benefits from oil revenues—which tend to disappear into the foreign bank accounts of the ruling family—rising petroleum prices actually make things worse for most ordinary citizens, since every increase in the price of oil is followed by a comparable rise in the price of basic foodstuffs.

What explains the close relationship between oil and food prices? In their efforts to increase harvests to feed an ever-growing world population, farmers have come to rely on oil for more and more essential tasks. This trend began with the mechanization of agriculture after World War II and the Green Revolution of the 1960s and '70s. It has continued with the introduction of genetically modified organisms and the proliferation of corporate-run, factorylike farms. Oil fuels farm machinery as well as the vehicles that carry crops to market (sometimes over thousands of miles). It is also employed as the chemical precursor, or “feedstock,” for many of the pesticides, herbicides and artificial fertilizers used in high-tech agriculture. Hence, any increase in the price of oil translates into a rise in the costs of producing food.

The correlation became particularly evident in 2007–08, when the prices of oil and food reached record levels and helped fuel the Great Recession. Between July 2007 and June 2008, crude oil rose from \$75 per barrel to \$140, an increase of 87 percent; during the same period, basic food prices also shot up, from about \$160 to \$225 on the “Food Price Index” (with \$100 representing the average cost of the same staples in 2002–04) calculated by the UN’s Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). That the price of oil and food rose in tandem at this time is hardly surprising, the World Bank concluded in 2009, as “agricultural production is fairly energy intensive.” Rising oil prices “raised the price of fuels to power machinery and irrigation systems; it also raised the price of fertilizer and other chemicals that are energy intensive to produce.”

To make matters worse, the rising price of oil—combined with government efforts to address global warming—has increased the incentives to grow plants for biofuels instead of food, inevitably driving up food prices. Whenever oil prices rise above \$50 per barrel, the World Bank has determined, a 1 percent increase in the price of oil results in a 0.9 percent increase in the price of maize, “because every dollar increase in the price of oil increases the profitability of ethanol and hence biofuel demand for maize.” It is no surprise, then, that two-thirds of the increase in world maize production since 2004 went to meet increased biofuel demand in the United States, leaving little

to satisfy the world’s growing need for food and animal feed.

The sharp jump in food prices in 2008 led to riots in more than a dozen countries, including Egypt, Haiti and Pakistan [[See Walden Bello, “Manufacturing a Food Crisis,” on *The Nation* (<http://www.thenation.com/article/ma...>) and on ESSF: How to manufacture a global food crisis: lessons from the World Bank, IMF and WTO and Reed Lindsay, “Haiti on the ‘Death Plan,’” (<http://www.thenation.com/article/ha...>) June 2, 2008]. In an effort to avert more such turbulence, the G-8 group of wealthy nations, at their 2009 meeting in L’Aquila, Italy, promised to donate \$20 billion over the following three years for agricultural advancement in the developing world. By the beginning of 2011, however, less than one-twentieth of that amount had been contributed, and there had been little progress in boosting global food output. Now, with oil prices again on the rise, the price of food is likely to surpass all previous records and spark additional upheavals around the world.

What we are seeing, in effect, is a vicious cycle in which rising oil prices drive up the cost of food, which triggers political disorder in the oil-producing countries, which in turn pushes oil to still higher prices, propelling food costs even higher, and so forth—with no end in sight.

This deadly cycle is being augmented, moreover, by the accelerating effects of climate change. While it is nearly impossible to attribute any particular weather event to global warming, the growing frequency and intensity of severe events—including the punishing drought last summer in Russia and Ukraine, the recent floods in Australia and the drought that recently gripped northern China—are consistent with climate change models. These events have all occurred in critical wheat-producing areas, stoking fears of inadequate grain supplies ahead and further spurring the upward climb in food prices.

The rage produced by rising food prices may have been superseded by political concerns in the more recent outbursts in North Africa and the Middle East, but it has hardly disappeared. Global prices are now higher than at any time since the FAO began compiling its Food Price Index two decades ago, and they are expected to keep climbing as oil costs rise. This suggests that the G-8 pledges made in 2009 to enhance agriculture in the developing world are more urgent than ever, as are other steps to increase the availability and affordability of basic foodstuffs. But everything, in the end, hinges on oil, so we must sharply curtail consumption of petroleum products in order to bring down the cost of food and fuel, slow the pace of global warming. We must also put a permanent end to the practice of propping up foreign oil dictators.

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## Libya - Support the Libyan revolution!



Gaddafi out  
*FI Bureau*

The shock waves of the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions continue to spread throughout the Arab world and beyond. For several days, it has been Libya which is at the centre of the revolutionary upheaval. Events are evolving from day to day, from hour to hour, but everything depends today on the extraordinary mobilization of the Libyan people. Hundreds of thousands of Libyans have risen up to attack the dictatorship of Gaddafi, often with their bare hands. Whole cities and regions have fallen into the hands of the insurgent people. The answer of the dictatorship has been ruthless: pitiless repression, massacres, bombardment of populations with heavy arms and air strikes.



Today, it is a fight to the death between the people and the dictatorship. One of the characteristics of the Libyan revolution, compared to the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, is the splintering of the police and military apparatuses. There are confrontations within the army itself, a territorial division, with confrontation between regions and cities controlled by the insurgents and the area of Tripoli based on the military force of the dictatorship. The Libyan dictatorship represents too many social and democratic injustices and, too

much repression, too many attacks on elementary liberties and rights. It must be driven out.

The Libyan revolution is part of a whole process which covers the whole Arab world, and beyond, in Iran and China. The revolutionary processes in Tunisia and Egypt are radicalizing. In Tunisia, governments fall one after the other. Youth and the workers' movement are pushing their movement still further. All the forms of continuity with the old regime are called into question. The demand for a constituent assembly, opposed to all the rescue operations of the regime, is becoming increasingly strong.

In both countries, Tunisia and Egypt, the workers' movement is reorganizing itself in the fire of a wave of strikes for the satisfaction of vital social demands. This revolutionary rise takes forms that are particular and unequal, according to the countries: violent confrontations in Yemen and Bahrain, demonstrations in Jordan, Morocco and Algeria. Iran is also once again affected by an outbreak of struggles and demonstrations against the regime of Ahmadinejad and for democracy.

It is in this context that the situation in Libya takes on strategic importance. This new rise already carries within it historical changes, but its development may depend on the battle of Libya. If Gaddafi takes control of the situation again, with thousands of deaths, the process will be slowed down, contained or even blocked. If Gaddafi is overthrown, the whole movement will as a result be stimulated and amplified. For this reason, all the ruling classes, all the governments, all the reactionary regimes of the Arab world are more or less supporting the Libyan dictatorship.

It is also in this context that US imperialism, the European Union and NATO are multiplying operations to try to control the process that is underway. The revolutions that are in progress weaken, over and above what the imperialists say in their speeches, the positions of the Western imperialist powers. So, as is often the case, imperialism uses the pretext of a "situation of chaos", as it calls it, or of "humanitarian catastrophe" to prepare an intervention and to take control of the situation again.

No one should be fooled about the aims of the NATO powers: they want to confiscate the revolutions in progress from the peoples of the region, and even to take advantage of the situation to occupy new positions, in particular concerning control of the oil regions. It is for this fundamental reason that it is necessary to reject any military intervention by American imperialism. It is up to the Libyan people, who have begun the job, to finish it, with the support of the peoples of the region, and all progressive forces on the international level must contribute to that by their solidarity and their support.

From this point of view, we are in total disagreement with the positions adopted by Hugo Chavez, Daniel Ortéga, and Fidel Castro. Fidel

Castro has denounced the risk of an intervention by American imperialism instead of supporting the struggle of the Libyan people. As for Hugo Chavez, he has reiterated his support for the dictator Gaddafi. These positions are unacceptable for the revolutionary, progressive and anti-imperialist forces of the whole world. You do not oppose imperialism by supporting dictators who massacre their people who are making a revolution. That can only reinforce imperialism. The fundamental task of the revolutionary movement on an international level is to defend these revolutions and to oppose imperialism by supporting these revolutions, not the dictators.

We are on the side of the Libyan people and the Arab revolutions that are in progress. We must express our unconditional solidarity, for the civil, democratic and social rights which are emerging in this revolution. One of the priorities consists of supporting all aid to the Libyan people - medical aid coming from Egypt or Tunisia, the food aid which is needed -, demanding the cancellation of all commercial contracts with Libya and the suspension of all delivery of arms. We have to prevent the massacre of the Libyan people.

Solidarity with the Arab revolutions!

Support the Libyan people!

No imperialist intervention in Libya!

Hands off Libya!

March 3 2011

*„ The executive bureau is a subcommittee of the Fourth International's international committee. It is mandated to organise the implementation of the decisions of the IC, the good management of the International's practical components (press, education, regional and sectoral co-ordinating bodies), the preparation of meetings of the IC and the work of the International staff.*

**Fourth International/Libya - Down with the Gaddafi regime! Stop the imperialist intervention now! Support the Libyan revolution!**



Statement by the Fourth International  
*Fourth International*

The intervention of the western powers in Libya constitutes a turning point in the situation in the Arab region. Since the beginning of the social and political shock wave which covers almost all the countries of the Arab region, the Fourth International has stood on the side of the democratic and social interests of the Arab people against their tyrants. This has led us to full support for the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions alongside the revolutionary socialist militants of these countries. This is why we supported all the democratic demands - right to free expression, trade-union and political organization, pluralism, freedom of the press; and social ones such as job creation, wage increases, fight against high cost of living - of these popular mobilizations, supported the overthrowing of the dictatorships, and the demand for a real break with the former regimes in a democratic and socialist perspective.

In Libya, this policy led us, from the beginning, to support the mobilizations and then the popular insurrection to overthrow the Gaddafi dictatorship. In Libya, solidarity with the popular mobilizations means doing everything to help the people against Gaddafi: total embargo on arms sales to the dictatorship, freezing the assets of the Libyan regime abroad, organization of medical, food and humane aid for the hundreds of thousands of Libyans persecuted by the regime... Supporting the Libyan people and protecting the civilians, means giving them the means to defend themselves against the massacres by Gaddafi's mercenaries freeing themselves from the dictatorship. The Arab peoples and armies, starting with the Tunisians and Egyptians, can play a decisive part in this military aid.

The French, English and American bombardments do not aim to "protect the civilian population", as is claimed in the UN Resolution Security Council 1973 establishing a « no-fly zone » on Libya. As the hours and the days pass, the goals of this UN resolution appear more and more "vague". Is it really a question of protecting the civil populations? Then why risk bombarding other civilians? Is it rather a question of finishing with Gaddafi or of imposing an agreement on his regime, even a partition of Libya? The risk of escalation that could lead to one or more ground interventions cannot be ignored, contrary to what the resolution says. In fact, for the imperialist coalition it is a question of re-establishing itself in the area, trying to confiscate the revolutionary process in progress by installing governments in its pay, or by putting pressure on the processes underway. And their strategic oil interests should not be forgotten. Lastly, how can anyone believe these hypocritical governments, who are occupying Iraq and Afghanistan and say they want "to protect the civil populations" but leave the populations in Bahrain, in Yemen, in Syria or in Gaza to be massacred.



Support for the Libyan revolution and overthrowing the Gaddafi dictatorship means today humanitarian and military aid to the insurrectionists and an end to the imperialist intervention. The Libyan people are not alone. Their fight is part of the current revolutionary rise that is shaking the Arab world. It is more than ever for the Arab peoples to take control over their destiny without neocolonialist intervention by the western powers.

*Secretariat of the Fourth International Bureau  
March 23rd, 2011*

*, The Fourth International - an international organisation struggling for the socialist revolution - is composed of sections, of militants who accept and apply its principles and programme. Organised in separate national sections, they are united in a single worldwide organisation acting together on the main political questions, and discussing freely while respecting the rules of democracy.*

## **Libya - What's happening in Libya?**

Gilbert Achcar was interviewed by Stephen R. Shalom. This interview was originally published on ZNet on Saturday March 19th.

Who is the Libyan opposition? Some have noted the presence of the old monarchist flag in rebel ranks.

This flag is not used as a symbol of the monarchy, but as the flag that the Libyan state adopted after it won independence from Italy. It is used by the uprising in order to reject the Green Flag imposed by Gaddafi along with his Green Book, when he was aping Mao Zedong and his Little Red Book. In no way does the tricolor flag indicate nostalgia for the monarchy. In the most common interpretation, it symbolizes the three historic regions of Libya, and the crescent and star are the same symbols you see on the flags of the Algerian, Tunisian and Turkish republics, not symbols of monarchism.

So who is the opposition? The composition of the opposition is — as in all the other revolts shaking the region — very heterogeneous. What unites all the disparate forces is a rejection of the dictatorship and a longing for democracy and human rights. Beyond that, there are many different perspectives. In Libya, more particularly, there is a mixture of human rights activists, democracy advocates, intellectuals, tribal elements, and Islamic forces — a very broad collection. The most prominent political force in the Libyan uprising is the "Youth of the 17th of February Revolution," which has a democratic platform, calling for the rule of law, political freedoms, and free elections. The Libyan movement also includes sections of the government and the armed forces that have broken away and joined the opposition — which you didn't have in Tunisia or Egypt.

So the Libyan opposition represents a mixture of forces, and the bottom line is that there is no

reason for any different attitude toward them than to any other of the mass uprisings in the region.

Is Gaddafi — or was Gaddafi — a progressive figure?

When Gaddafi came to power in 1969 he was a late manifestation of the wave of Arab nationalism that followed World War II and the 1948 Nakba. He tried to imitate Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, who he regarded as his model and inspiration. So he replaced the monarchy with a republic, championed Arab unity, forced the withdrawal of the U.S.'s Wheelus Airbase from Libyan territory, and initiated a program of social change.

Then the regime moved in its own way, along the path of radicalization, inspired by an Islamized Maoism. There were sweeping nationalizations in the late 1970s — almost everything was nationalized. Gaddafi claimed to have instituted direct democracy — and formally changed the name of the country from Republic to State of the Masses (Jamahiriya). He pretended that he had turned the country into the fulfillment of socialist utopia with direct democracy, but few were fooled. The "revolutionary committees" were actually acting as a ruling apparatus along with the security services in controlling the country. At the same time, Gaddafi also played an especially reactionary role in reinvigorating tribalism as a tool for his own power. His foreign policy became increasingly foolhardy, and most Arabs came to consider him crazy.

With the Soviet Union in crisis, Gaddafi shifted away from his socialist pretensions and re-opened his economy to Western business. He asserted that his economic liberalization would be accompanied by a political one, aping Gorbachev's perestroika after having aped Mao Zedong's "cultural revolution," but the political claim was an empty one. When the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 under the pretext of searching for "weapons of mass destruction," Gaddafi, worried that he might be next, implemented a sudden and surprising turnabout in foreign policy, earning himself a spectacular upgrade from the status of "rogue state" to that of close collaborator of Western states. A collaborator in particular of the United States, which he helped in its so-called war on terror, and Italy, for which he did the dirty job of turning back would-be immigrants trying to get from Africa to Europe.

Throughout these metamorphoses, Gaddafi's regime was always a dictatorship. Whatever early progressive measures Gaddafi may have enacted, there was nothing left of progressivism or anti-imperialism in his regime in the last phase. Its dictatorial character showed itself in the way he reacted to the protests: immediately deciding to quell them by force. There was no attempt to offer any kind of democratic outlet for the population. He warned the protesters in a now famous tragic-comic speech: "We will come inch by inch, home by home, alley by alley ... We will find you in your

closets. We will have no mercy and no pity." Not a surprise, knowing that Gaddafi was the only Arab ruler who publicly blamed the Tunisian people for having toppled their own dictator Ben Ali, whom he described as the best ruler the Tunisians would find.

Gaddafi resorted to threats and violent repression, claiming that the protesters had been turned into drug addicts by Al Qaeda, who poured hallucinogens in their coffees. Blaming Al Qaeda for the uprising was his way of trying to get the support of the West. Had there been any offer of help from Washington or Rome, you can be sure that Gaddafi would have gladly welcomed it. He actually expressed his bitter disappointment at the attitude of his buddy Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian prime minister, with whom he enjoyed partying, and complained that his other European "friends" also betrayed him. In the last few years, Gaddafi had indeed become a friend of several Western rulers and other establishment figures who, for a fistful of dollars, have been willing to ridicule themselves exchanging hugs with him. Anthony Giddens himself, the distinguished theoretician of Tony Blair's Third Way, followed in his disciple's steps by paying a visit to Gaddafi in 2007 and writing in the Guardian how Libya was on the path of reform and on its way to becoming the Norway of the Middle East.

What is your assessment of UN Security Council resolution 1973 adopted on March 17?

The resolution itself is phrased in a way that takes into consideration — and appears to respond to — the request by the uprising for a no-fly zone. The opposition has indeed explicitly called for a no-fly zone, on the condition that no foreign troops be deployed on Libyan territory. Gaddafi has the bulk of the elite armed forces, with aircraft and tanks, and the no-fly zone would indeed neutralize his main military advantage. This request of the uprising is reflected in the text of the resolution, which authorizes UN member states "to take all necessary measures ... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory." The resolution establishes "a ban on all flights in the airspace of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in order to help protect civilians."

Now there are not enough safeguards in the wording of the resolution to bar its use for imperialist purposes. Although the purpose of any action is supposed to be the protection of civilians, and not "regime change," the determination of whether an action meets this purpose or not is left up to the intervening powers and not to the uprising, or even the Security Council. The resolution is amazingly confused. But given the urgency of preventing the massacre that would have inevitably 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. One can understand the abstentions; some of the five states who abstained in the UNSC vote wanted to express their defiance and/or unhappiness with the lack of adequate oversight, but without taking the responsibility for an impending massacre.

The Western response, of course, smacks of oil. The West fears a long drawn out conflict. If there is a major massacre, they would have to impose an embargo on Libyan oil, thus keeping oil prices at a high level at a time when, given the current state of the global economy, this would have major adverse consequences. Some countries, including the United States, acted reluctantly. Only France emerged as very much in favor of strong action, which might well be connected to the fact that France — unlike Germany (which abstained in the UNSC vote), Britain, and, above all, Italy — does not have a major stake in Libyan oil, and certainly hopes to get a greater share post-Gaddafi.

We all know about the Western powers' pretexts and double standards. For example, their alleged concern about harm to civilians bombarded from the air did not seem to apply in Gaza in 2008-09, when hundreds of noncombatants were being killed by Israeli warplanes in furtherance of an illegal occupation. Or the fact that the US allows its client regime in Bahrain, where it has a major naval base, to violently repress the local uprising, with the help of other regional vassals of Washington.

The fact remains, nevertheless, that if Gaddafi were permitted to continue his military offensive and take Benghazi, there would be a major massacre. Here is a case where a population is truly in danger, and where there is no plausible alternative that could protect it. The attack by Gaddafi's forces was hours or at most days away. You can't in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians. In the same way, even though we know well the nature and double standards of cops in the bourgeois state, you can't in the name of anti-capitalist principles blame anybody for calling them when someone is on the point of being raped and there is no alternative way of stopping the rapists.

This said, without coming out against the no-fly zone, we must express defiance and advocate full vigilance in monitoring the actions of those states carrying it out, to make sure that they don't go beyond protecting civilians as mandated by the UNSC resolution. In watching on TV the crowds in Benghazi cheering the passage of the resolution, I saw a big billboard in their middle that said in Arabic "No to foreign intervention." People there make a distinction between "foreign intervention" by which they mean troops on the ground, and a protective no-fly zone. They oppose foreign troops. They are aware of the dangers and wisely don't trust Western powers.

So, to sum up, I believe that from an anti-imperialist perspective one cannot and should not oppose the no-fly zone, given that there is no plausible alternative for protecting the endangered

population. The Egyptians are reported to be providing weapons to the Libyan opposition — and that's fine — but on its own it couldn't have made a difference that would have saved Benghazi in time. But again, one must maintain a very critical attitude toward what the Western powers might do.

What's going to happen now?

It's difficult to tell what will happen now. The UN Security Council resolution did not call for regime change; it's about protecting civilians. The future of the Gaddafi regime is uncertain. The key question is whether we will see the resumption of the uprising in western Libya, including Tripoli, leading to a disintegration of the regime's armed forces. If that occurs, then Gaddafi may be ousted soon. But if the regime manages to remain firmly in control in the west, then there will be a de facto division of the country — even though the resolution affirms the territorial integrity and national unity of Libya. This may be what the regime has chosen, as it has just announced its compliance with the UN resolution and proclaimed a ceasefire. What we might then have is a prolonged stalemate, with Gaddafi controlling the west and the opposition the east. It will obviously take time before the opposition can incorporate the weapons it is receiving from and through Egypt to the point of becoming able to inflict military defeat on Gaddafi's forces. Given the nature of the Libyan territory, this can only be a regular war rather than a popular one, a war of movement over vast stretches of territory. That's why the outcome is hard to predict. The bottom line here again is that we should support the victory of the Libyan democratic uprising. Its defeat at the hands of Gaddafi would be a severe backlash negatively affecting the revolutionary wave that is currently shaking the Middle East and North Africa.

› *Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon and teaches political science at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. His best-selling book 'The Clash of Barbarisms' came out in a second expanded edition in 2006, alongside a book of his dialogues with Noam Chomsky on the Middle East, 'Perilous Power'. He is co-author of 'The 33-Day War: Israel's War on Hezbollah in Lebanon and Its Consequences'. His most recent book is 'The Arabs and the Holocaust: the Arab-Israeli War of Narratives', Metropolitan Books, New York, 2010.*

## **Libya/USA - US Hands off Libya!**

Victory to the Workers' and Peasants' Uprising  
Against Qaddafi!  
*Andrew Pollack*

In late February the masses of Libya revolted against the regime of Muammar el-Qaddafi. As we go to press, the opposition controls the country's second largest city, Benghazi, and other cities in

the oil-rich eastern part of the country as well as many towns in the west. Qaddafi maintains control in the capital, Tripoli, and is trying to retake other cities. Pro-Qaddafi army, militia, and mercenary units have inflicted high casualties on the civilian population—often using tanks and warplanes in their strikes.

The political character of the opposition seems to be as mixed, as in other Arab countries in revolt. But whereas in Egypt and Tunisia the military forced out the dictators before a full-scale confrontation with enraged masses could begin—a confrontation that could have meant a split in the army and defection of soldiers to the revolution—in Libya significant sections of the military (and diplomatic) hierarchy split from Qaddafi almost immediately, sensing correctly that Qaddafi would not go so quietly.

In towns liberated from Qaddafi's regime, the same kind of self-organization by the masses seen in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, and elsewhere is taking place, as people's committees have taken over provision of basic services and maintenance of order, including keeping oil flowing. A layer of middle-class professionals—doctors, lawyers, academics, etc.—appear to have appointed themselves heads of these committees and of a coordinating group called the Libyan National Council. Alongside them are military committees created by defecting officers.

Smelling a chance to intervene and set up a new puppet government, world powers got the UN Security Council to vote for sanctions against the regime, arranged for the International Criminal Court to indict Qaddafi (the same Court which has repeatedly refused to indict Zionist war criminals), and began threatening use of military force.

Within the resistance, defectors from Qaddafi's regime and the middle-class forces who have appointed themselves leaders are calling for Western intervention, most commonly in the form of "no-fly zones," while claiming to be opposed to the introduction of ground troops. The rank and file of these committees, in contrast, appears willing and eager to use their mass armed power to finish the battle with Qaddafi.

It is important to stand with the workers, peasants, and youth of Libya in their fight to finish off the tyrannical, capitalist Qaddafi regime. We must also give them our political support in their fight against the quislings who would turn over Libya to imperialist intervention. Such pleas are sometimes made for "humanitarian" reasons (protecting refugees or preventing mass slaughter) and sometimes out of supposed military necessity—ignoring the ability of the armed masses to do the job.

Proof of the need to mobilize against intervention is manifold. U.S. warships are on the way, and Obama has declared that "all options are on the table." U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said Washington was "reaching out" to opposition

groups and was prepared to offer “any kind of assistance.” Meanwhile, the British have already sent military “advisers” to work with opposition military leaders, NATO has instructed its member countries’ military leaders to prepare for “all eventualities,” and several European countries have already used their militaries for “rescue missions.”

Of course, there is hypocrisy in calling for a no-fly zone against Libya without asking why one is not imposed against the U.S. in Iraq and Afghanistan to prevent murderous bombings like the one that slaughtered nine children the first week of March, one of hundreds of such atrocities.

Moreover, National Public Radio quoted a number of Benghazi residents saying they did not want foreign intervention, their correspondent reporting their desire to “get rid of Qaddafi finally themselves.” Numerous similar quotes have appeared in the media.

Evidence of the masses’ willingness to fight can be seen in the long lines of volunteers in Benghazi waiting to sign up, as well as the pitched battles, often victorious, fought by citizen militias to take and retake cities. Their courage and determination could be seen on March 4 when, despite the reign of terror, several hundred demonstrators gathered in Tajura, an area east of the capital still under Qaddafi’s control, and braved tear gas and live ammunition.

U.S. military officials themselves note that a no-fly zone would mean shooting down Libyan planes, bombing anti-aircraft sites, and putting ships and thousands of personnel in place as support. And such a zone would, as in Iraq, likely be a prelude to the introduction of ground troops who would—again, as in Iraq—guard oil fields while ignoring (or even taking part in) the massacres of civilians.

While the masses have expressed a desire to march on Tripoli—and residents in that city are awaiting a force that would give them the slightest window of opportunity to rise up and crush Qaddafi’s murderous forces—the defecting military officers hope to postpone a final confrontation with Qaddafi. Their plea for aid from the U.S. and Europe is a signal that they are ready to collaborate in setting up a new pro-Western regime, and that they dread the kind of radical demands being put forward by the masses throughout the Arab world.

A coalition of over 200 Arab non-governmental organizations and intellectuals has called for “immediate contingency plans for international intervention ... including a no-fly zone. ... The window of opportunity to prevent further atrocities from occurring is closing fast.” Some liberals in the West, such as Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies, are counterposing to no-fly zones calls for armed UN “humanitarian missions”—despite the murderous, repressive record of just such a mission in recent years in Haiti.

In contrast, the United National Antiwar Committee issued a “Statement on U.S. Non-Intervention in

Libya and Other Countries,” which declared: “UNAC calls for an immediate halt to U.S. intervention in regions and countries where mass mobilizations are challenging oppressive regimes. ... We therefore oppose any form of U.S. military or economic intervention in Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia and other countries where movements are rising in opposition to dictatorships and military rule.”

Radical activist and author Arundhati Roy has noted that “those who really want to support the popular movement have to resolutely oppose sanctions (let’s not forget the slow genocides in Iraq in the name of ‘democracy’ and in Gaza right now); of course, we also have to fight any military intervention.

Roy pointed out that “there are forces in Libya—as well as in Egypt and in Tunisia—who seek salvation in the West, but the main forces of the rebellion are the middle and lower classes, and they combine democratic demands with social and anti-imperialist demands. ... An alternative power seems to take shape in and around Benghazi. ... There is a chance to experiment with people’s power, and we have to support that.

“The Western media are hoping for a color revolution like those staged in eastern Europe, but the Arab world has been the victim of 150 years of brutal colonialism and neo-colonialism, permanent Israeli aggression, numerous U.S.-led wars, neoliberal pillage. ... A few rabid liberal democracy criers won’t be enough to turn around the legitimate hatred of the masses against the West which has been nurtured for generations.”

Such clarity is not universal, however, where some still have illusions fostered by Qaddafi’s anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist bombast. Numerous writers, both mainstream and alternative, have pointed to Qaddafi’s turn toward imperialism in recent years, his opening of the country’s economy to foreign capital and to IMF-dictated austerity programs and privatization, and his joining in the “War on Terror,” all accompanied by harsher repression to stifle dissent against this turn.

It must be noted, however, that even at the height of his supposed anti-imperialist policies, Libya remained a capitalist state. The rhetoric against imperialism, the money donated to Arab and other liberation groups, and the services granted to the masses from the country’s oil revenue were all doled out under conditions decided by Qaddafi and his regime, with no input from workers and peasants. Qaddafi’s nationalizations of foreign banks and oil companies no more made Libya a workers’ state than did similar measures in Egypt under Nasser or Iraq under Hussein.

Unfortunately, much of the left fell for his rhetoric, as they had—and still do—for other bourgeois populists in neocolonial countries.

Particularly disappointing is the role of Hugo Chavez, Daniel Ortega, and Fidel Castro in their one-sided, if correct, denunciation of imperialism’s

interests and intentions in this affair, while denying or ignoring Qaddafi's repression and murders. Chavez even offered to mediate the dispute—an offer immediately rejected by the resistance. Numerous Latin American revolutionaries reacted with horror to the stances of these three leaders, worrying that the potential for solidarity between the masses of the Arab world and Latin America was being destroyed.

But the masses of Libya, as throughout the Arab world, have shown they no longer want or need help from condescending saviors (to borrow a phrase from "The Internationale"). Beside their willingness to fight arms in hand, the other major weapon the insurgents have is the deepening of their revolution, the development of a program that would make clear to the population in Tripoli that a mass rising against Qaddafi is worth risking, as it would bring political freedom, social justice, and far better economic conditions.

Such a program would necessarily seek to replace the capitalist economic system with one that serves the needs of the working people of Libya, and is controlled by them. And it would raise the call for a pan-Arab "Socialist United States" spanning the artificial borders that the colonialists erected throughout the Middle East.

Real News Network quoted Benghazi residents celebrating "a new-found unity with Arab nations. They raised the flags of Egypt, Tunisia, and Palestine." Said one: "I'm proud to be an Arab. Lift your head up high! We are Arabs!" This is very significant for the rebels' chance of success—and for the chance of victory in all the blossoming struggles.

Egyptians and Tunisians have been assisting the uprising, ferrying food and other aid across the borders, providing health care, helping the resistance get around the internet blackout, and sharing tactical advice on confronting repression.

This pan-Arab solidarity should serve as inspiration for an even more urgently needed type of solidarity—that with the hundreds of thousands of super-exploited workers and peasants of Chad and other African countries now in Libya. Used for years by Qaddafi as cheap labor and cannon fodder, they are now reportedly the victims of harassment and even murder by backward forces within the resistance, supposedly because they are being mistaken for mercenaries imported by Qaddafi.

These tragic events too can be traced back to Qaddafi's divide-and-rule tactics, done at the behest of his new imperialist friends. Author Machetera of the Tlaxcala translation service noted that "in order to normalize relations with the European Union, Qaddafi became the guardian of concentration camps where thousands of Africans headed for Europe are held."

Such Arab-African solidarity is especially possible given that revolts are happening right now in several sub-Saharan African countries. A revolutionary leadership must be forged in Libya

that protects African workers in Libya, and at the same time fosters a unity of the Arab and African revolutions—the kind of unity demonstrated in theory and practice by the best of the Algerian revolutionaries in their struggle against French colonization.

The mass antiwar demonstrations on April 9 in New York City and April 10 in San Francisco are an opportunity to loudly raise the call against U.S. intervention in Libya and for self-determination by the Libyan people. "U.S. hands off Libya and the entire Middle East!"

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Andrew Pollack is a computer instructor in Brooklyn and author of "Information Technology and Socialist Self-Management," in *Capitalism and the Information Age: The Political Economy of the Global Communication Revolution*, edited by Robert W. McChesney, Ellen Meiksins Wood, and John Bellamy Foster, *Monthly Review*, 1997.

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## Libya - Not in our name!

The war in Libya, foreign military occupation in Bahrain and the destruction of the Arab revolutions.

*Mogniss H. Abdallah*

Thus, the difficult debate on the introduction of a "no fly zone" in Libya has led to a UN resolution that constitutes a green light for an international military intervention in Libya. Without terrestrial military "occupation", it is specified. At the same time, the Saudi army and the emirate's police are disembarking in Bahrain to take part in the crushing of a democratic and peaceful revolution: a military attack was made Wednesday, March 16, 2011 to dismantle the camp in Pearl Square, re-named Tahrir Square in explicit reference to the Egyptian revolution. Helicopters shot at the people: there have deaths, dozens of wounded who cannot reach Manama hospital under siege by the Saudi army and armoured tanks. The regime has decreed martial law and arrested figures from the democratic opposition, both Shiite and Sunni. In Bahrain a protest movement for civil rights has been met by repression under foreign military occupation... and under the surveillance of U.S. 5th fleet which already has a naval base there.

Certain countries, like the United Arab Emirates, which are openly taking part in the military-police occupation of Bahrain, were also volunteers for the international intervention in Libya. Thus, regimes directly involved in repression in one Arab country, claim to act against repression and massacres in another Arab country? What hypocrisy! International solidarity militants cannot accept under any pretext this duplicity that threatens the future of the democratic revolutions in progress in the whole of the Arab, Arabo-Berber and African world.



In any case, and beyond the necessary evaluation of the complex geostrategic interests concerned, we should seriously question our role in the current situation. How could we be pleased with increasing militarization in Libya and elsewhere?

I would like to say frankly to sincere Libyan friends in their aspirations with freedom: we unconditionally condemn the massacres of the population in Libya by Kadhafi and his regime. But I am outraged by the slogans "One, two, three, Viva Sarkozy" shouted in Benghazi, and by the association of the National Council of Transition with the saber-rattling Bernard Henri Levy.

Libyan friends, I would like also to intend you to clearly condemn the racist exactions and the threats on a large scale against the African, Egyptian and different black migrants, who compose a quarter of the population of the country. I would like to see you supporting all the people in struggle, starting with those of Bahrain and of Yemen, today victims of a terrible repression carried out with the direct complicity of those who in addition claim to be coming to your rescue.

International solidarity friends, when we support the Libyan people, let us not hide our solidarity with the fights of all the Arab people. And let us not be afraid of debates between us, including with our Libyan comrades. No to unity on a minimal basis! Let us not be an accessory to the balkanization of Libya and the countries in the area. Also let us remember the precedent of Somalia dismantled under the auspices of an international militaro-humanitarian intervention under the pretty name of "Restore hope".

Paris, March 18th, 2011

, Mogniss H. Abdallah, is an Egyptian writer and film-maker living in France. He has published "J'y suis, j'y reste ! Les luttes de l'immigration en France depuis les années soixante", with Reflex, 2001 and has made several documentaries : *Minguettes 83 : paix sociale ou pacification ?* (1983) ; *Douce France, la saga du mouvement "beur"* (1992) ; *La Ballade des sans-papiers* (1996/97).

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## Libya - Bombs over Libya

Is the military action against Libya necessary and helpful in order to stop Gaddafi's regime's onslaught on its opponents or is it an imperialist aggression driven by strategical self-interest, which only will make things worse for the Libyan people? The international left is split on this question. And the question is truly complex and cannot be answered by ready made slogans about always being opposed to imperialist aggressions or unconditional support to the rebels. A serious response must be based on a concrete assessment

of the situation in Libya, and not on abstract principles or revolutionary rhetoric.

This weekend the bombs started falling over Libya, after the UN Security Council gave green light for imposing a no-fly zone.

The double standards of the West are conspicuous. How can we trust leaders who defended Mubarak till the last and who still even refuse to condemn the Bahraini kingdoms' use of lethal force against peaceful protesters in being genuinely moved by the human rights situation in Libya?

Equally, the responsibility of the West in creating the monster of Gaddafi is obvious. There have certainly been ups and downs in the relations between Tripoli and Western capitals reflected by the global power balance. But on the bottom line, it is true that Gaddafi has been supported and armed by the Western powers for decades.

Both these points make it clear that we should be extremely sceptical about the former colonial powers sudden manifestation of goodwill towards the Libyan people. But none of these points are, by themselves, arguments for opposing the no-fly zone over Libya.

Rejecting Western military intervention in Libya requires a better analysis of the risks and possible scenarios on the ground. And we do need to address some rather difficult objections – namely the fact that the leaders of the opposition forces have been calling for a no-fly zone and that we have to come with better alternatives than posting blogs of solidarity and anti-imperialism.

The fact that the leadership of the Libyan rebel forces over the last days have asked for the West to impose a no-fly zone cannot be neglected. If the left in the West does not address this, we will seem very patronising towards the people who are risking their lives in a very difficult struggle against a ruthless dictator. First of all, nobody can really assess to which extent these leaders represent a popular – and nation wide - will. Second, we should remember that it had no resonance among the rebels when the idea of a no-fly zone was expressed in the West about a month ago. At the time it seemed that the rebels were heading towards victory, and its leaders argued convincingly against a no-fly zone: a no fly zone is a military intervention and Gaddafi can certainly use this to portray his regime as the ones resisting imperialist aggression and hereby alienating the rebels, who also indicated distrust in the true intentions of the Western powers. As the pro-Gaddafi forces have gained momentum during the last 1-2 weeks, the change of position among the rebel leaders must be seen as a (perfectly understandable) sign of frustration and desperation. The initial arguments of the rebels are still convincing, even if the situation seems much more difficult today after Gaddafi forces having taken over most of the country.

It is true that opposing military intervention puts the left in a difficult position, where we seem to be

unwilling to deal with real life problems, and where our principles thus prevent us from saving lives. We have to come up with better answers than vague statements and long articles about solidarity with Libya and continued anti-imperialist struggle.

First of all, very concretely, we can and should argue for sending anti-aircraft defences and other weaponry to the rebels - so they get a better chance of confronting the Gaddafi forces, who have been armed by the West for decades. Luckily, the current interim administration in Egypt (which border is near to Benghazi) is shipping arms over the border.

Secondly, and more difficult, we have to face that what can be done from outside Libya is very limited- especially by the Western regimes, who have very little legitimacy among Arabs and who have a responsibility for the current situation by supporting and arming Gaddafi's regime. An important point is to demand our governments to stop their support for other dictatorships - to which there will be resistance and similar situations can be foreseen in the future.

Thirdly, the risks of a military intervention are very high. Once the war machine starts it does not stop easily - this can turn in to a big scale war, the foreign troops might very well bomb scores of civilians by accident and turning the population against them - giving an impetus for Gaddafi. And of course we all know that France, UK and the US are not driven by some sudden kindness - but by strategic interest in the oil rich region.

The risks of only making matters worse by a Western military intervention are high. Already on the first day of the attack, international media outlets report that citizens of Tripoli turned themselves against the attacks - and that more people rallied behind Gaddafi. There is no doubt that the colonel himself is using the attacks to represent himself as the defender of the nation against foreign 'barbaric crusaders' and thus alienating the opposition forces. This will be further strengthened the moment that Western bombs hit the wrong target and cause substantial 'collateral damage' - something that is bound to happen in the event of prolonged military actions.

*, Bertil Videt is an international political scientist with a background in journalism and a record of two decades as an activist in the Global Justice Movement. He is editor and co-author of "Living our internationalism", the history of the International Institute for Research and Education, of which he was appointed director in January 2007. He is a member of the Socialistische Alternatieve Politiek, the Fourth International's section in The Netherlands, and a contributor to its magazine Grenzeloos.*

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## **Libya/Brazil - Full support for the Libyan people's resistance! Down with Gaddafi! No to imperialist intervention!**

Statement by the PSol  
*PSol*

The dictator Gaddafi is resisting the heroic rebellious struggle of the people with bombs, bullets and mercenaries. His past confrontations with imperialism are nothing but ancient history. Almost 20 years ago Khadafi became a staunch ally of the interests of multinational oil companies, U.S. and European imperialism. His dictatorship prohibits the organisation of political parties, trade unions and students movements, with prison and torture for anyone who tries to express disagreement.

As part of the wave of insurrections in North Africa, in which the peoples of Egypt and Tunisia managed to overthrow their pro-imperialist dictators Mubarak and Ben Ali, the people of Libya rose up against the cruel dictator Khadafi and in a matter of a few weeks liberated cities as large sectors of the population joined the fight against the dictator.

The PSOL expresses its full solidarity with the Libyan people and its complete support for their brave resistance in their attempt to defeat the genocidal dictator Khadafi. In this sense, every possible effort must be made to provide material and political solidarity to ensure the victory of the Libyan resistance.

However, we must be aware that imperialism, with its attitude of hypocrisy, is not acting to defend the resistance. The U.S. and European policy is not about helping the Libyan people in their fight to overthrow Khadafi. Their decision to intervene through the means of the no-fly zone - as Khadafi advanced on the positions held by the rebel forces - was intended to increase their capacity to influence the political resolution of the crisis by agreeing a new government that will keep intact imperialist interests in the region, thereby serving as a basis for recovery according to the interests of the intervening powers.

Therefore, PSOL calls for support for the Libyan people's resistance! Down with Gaddafi! No to imperialist intervention!

*Sao Paulo, March 19, PSOL Executive Committee*

*, The Partido Socialismo e Liberdade was formed by currents from the Brazilian PT who rejected participation in the Lula government. The members of the Fourth International in Brazil are members of the PSol.*

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## Debate - From the Left: Is U.S. intervention justified in Libya?

Debate : Libya, the resistance, the no-fly zone

SocialistWorker.org columnist Lance Selfa, editor of *The Struggle for Palestine*, critiques calls to support Western military intervention in Libya from several left-wing writers.

THE WHITE House-massaged media spin portrays President Barack Obama's decision to go to war in Libya as a triumph for a triumvirate of liberals—Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, UN Ambassador Susan Rice, and Obama adviser Samantha Power—who have well-established records of advocating the use of U.S. military force for "humanitarian" purposes.

As Stewart Patrick, director of the Program on International Institutions and Global Governance at the Council on Foreign Relations, wrote in *Foreign Affairs*:

*"The United States and its coalition partners' decision to launch Operation Odyssey Dawn to enforce a no-fly zone in Libya on March 19 was a vindication of the fragile "responsibility to protect" (RtoP) norm. The diplomatic process to build a consensus about intervention was messy, involving protracted negotiations among multiple parties, and the military outcome in Libya remains uncertain. Still, the Obama administration was correct to champion RtoP's basic principle: state sovereignty is not a license for a dictator to murder his citizens."*

It's no surprise that many of the most vocal supporters of a military action launched by a Democratic president would hail from the Democratic sector of the foreign policy establishment—and that a number of these were also critics of the ham-fisted and unilateralist strategies of the Bush administration.

But supporters of one form or another of Western military intervention extend to important figures on the left and the antiwar movement.

Gilbert Achcar, the veteran socialist and respected scholar—who has published numerous articles, interviews and books on the struggle in the Middle East, including at SocialistWorker.org—contended in an interview and a subsequent article published on ZNet:

*"Can anyone claiming to belong to the left just ignore [the Libyan] popular movement's plea for protection, even by means of imperialist bandit-cops, when the type of protection requested is not one through which control over their country could be exerted? Certainly not, by my understanding of the left."*

Likewise, Middle East expert Juan Cole added his voice to the chorus in support of the UN-sponsored "no-fly zone" over Libya with an "Open Letter to the Left on Libya" on March 27. It begins:

*"As I expected, now that Qaddafi's advantage in armor and heavy weapons is being neutralized by the UN allies' air campaign, the liberation movement is regaining lost territory...I am unabashedly cheering the liberation movement on, and glad that the UNSC-authorized intervention has saved them from being crushed."*

Achcar and Cole have made the case for Western intervention in Libya, however limited, for "humanitarian" aims, and they criticize those on the left who oppose it. But their arguments ignore the context in which the attack on Qaddafi's forces took place—as well as the long and sordid record of such military actions in the past.

The U.S. and its European allies began the year with the Qaddafi regime as an ally in the "war on terror" and Libya a fertile ground for Western investment. Until this month, they were prepared to accept Qaddafi's continued rule in Libya, even at the cost of the rebellion against him being crushed. Only when the threat to regional stability and oil supplies became alarming to the West did they act.

The excuse for intervention has been the call by Qaddafi's opponents—one call, carefully selected from among others that were rejected by the U.S. and its allies—for a no-fly zone and other military action.

But even if the intervention plays some role in Qaddafi's downfall—which is by no means certain—any regime that comes to power in Libya will be compromised from the start by its dependence on Western powers that aren't concerned at all about democracy and justice, but about maintaining stability and reasserting their dominance in a region that has seen two victorious revolutions against U.S.-backed dictators, and the possibility of more to come.

The history of "humanitarian intervention" by the U.S. government and European powers has produced only greater violence and more injustice—in Somalia, in Haiti, in the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo, in Iraq—but with a seemingly progressive cover of opposition to dictators who were once supported by the West.

Achcar and Cole are wrong to disregard that history by drawing the conclusion that a U.S.-led military intervention in Libya will produce a different result this time around.

BEFORE ADDRESSING current arguments on the left, it might be worthwhile to recall just what "humanitarian intervention" is—and how it developed as an ideological support for imperialist military action in the post-Cold War era.

The rise of "humanitarian intervention" coincided with the end of the Cold War, when the U.S., with its unparalleled military power, was seeking new justifications for its use. The George Bush Sr. administration and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chair Colin Powell staked out the ideological territory with Operation Restore Hope, the euphemistic title for their 1992 invasion of Somalia.

But what Bush Sr. and Powell started haltingly, liberals turned into a full-fledged case for Western intervention to prevent humanitarian disasters in a number of countries—from Somalia to Haiti to the Balkans.

With the threat of military intervention escalating into superpower confrontations removed, the U.S. felt less constrained about intervening. In Somalia, Washington invaded under the guise of feeding starving Somalians. The mission morphed quickly into a war with Somali warlords to impose a U.S.-friendly government. In 1993, forces loyal to the Somali president succeeded in repelling a U.S. attack and killing 18 U.S. soldiers. Within a few more months, the U.S. withdrew.

Today, the Somalia invasion, memorialized in the film *Black Hawk Down*, is remembered as a failure. But in its initial stages, the *Wall Street Journal* hailed it for restoring the U.S. military's "moral credibility." The Journal added, "There is a word for this: colonialism." The Somalia invasion provided a template for the U.S. and its European allies to justify unilateral intervention in Bosnia (to set up "safe havens") and in Kosovo (to save Kosovar Albanians from attack by the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav government led by Slobodan Milosevic).

Of course, liberal champions of humanitarian intervention don't call what they advocate "colonialism." Rather, they invent euphemisms like "the responsibility to protect," the term of choice for a Canadian government-appointed International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) that drew up procedures that the "international community" might invoke to intervene to prevent genocide or other human rights abuses. Under these guidelines, which most world governments agreed to in 2005, a state forfeits its right to sovereign control over its territory if it commits human rights abuses against its own population.

But the experience of so-called humanitarian intervention is anything but the rosy picture its liberal architects claim for it.

During the Balkan wars of the mid-1990s, NATO established a no-fly zone over the Bosnian town of Srebrenica. That didn't prevent the massacre of thousands of civilians at the hands of the Bosnian Serb military and fascist gangs associated with it.

NATO used the tragedy of Srebrenica as justification when it launched its 78-day bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999. Ostensibly, the NATO war was aimed at protecting Kosovar civilians who faced massacre at the hands of Milosevic's forces.

Yet it was apparent at the time—and has since been verified by the research of University of Arizona professor David Gibbs—that the bombing actually prompted Serb forces to step up their massacres. And this is not to mention the hundreds—or thousands, we may never know—of Serbian and Kosovar civilians killed by NATO bombs.

More than a decade later, Kosovo exists as a ward of NATO and is home to Camp Bondsteel, a huge U.S. base whose 7,000 soldiers support the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although it declared its independence in 2008, its real government is a combination of what remains of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission to Kosovo and the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo. These have presided over a massive privatization campaign that sold off formerly state-run firms to European Union investors.

Meanwhile, unemployment hovers around 40 percent while the International Monetary Fund and World Bank collect Kosovo's share of the debt it contracted as a member of the former Yugoslavia. Large swathes of infrastructure remain un-repaired since the war, and electric power supply is spotty. Government corruption is rampant. Foreign forces in charge of maintaining "security" stood by while Albanian extremists harassed and murdered ethnic Serbs. As a result, almost all Serbs who lived in Kosovo have fled to Serbia or live in a northern Kosovo enclave effectively partitioned from the rest of the province by Western troops.

This is the "success" that today's liberal interventionists want NATO to replicate in Libya.

THIS HISTORICAL background may mean nothing to the cruise missile liberals, whose only references to "lessons of history" aren't based on real experiences of what "humanitarian" invasion and occupation have produced.

Unfortunately, in situations like present-day Libya, the liberal hawks are being echoed by people who would normally oppose U.S. intervention in other circumstances.

Many well-intentioned people who consider themselves sympathetic to the Arab revolution see no alternative to the Western attack on Libya, on the grounds that "something had to be done" to prevent Qaddafi and his loyalists from murdering oppositionists in Benghazi. This is the hook on which people who would normally be skeptical of intervention are pulled into support for the action.

Pro-intervention liberals accuse those who oppose Western military action of indifference to mass slaughter or to the fate of the Arab revolution. Writing in the *New Republic*, John Judis asked how would opponents of Western intervention react to slaughter and the short-circuiting of the Arab revolution: "If you answer 'Who cares?'...I have no counter-arguments to offer, but if you worry about two or three of these prospects, then I think you have to reconsider whether Barack Obama did the right thing in lending American support to this intervention."

Besides being a caricature of the left's anti-intervention position, Judis' contention that intervention in Libya will stop massacres and aid the Arab revolution isn't even true. Against those who argued that failure to act against Qaddafi "would send a devastating message to other Arab dictators: Use enough military force, and you will

keep your job," the long-time Middle East analyst Phyllis Bennis, pointed out:

*"Instead, it turns out that just the opposite may be the result: It was after the UN passed its no-fly zone and use-of-force resolution, and just as U.S., British, French and other warplanes and warships launched their attacks against Libya, that other Arab regimes escalated their crackdown on their own democratic movements."*

Bennis rightly captures the hypocrisy of supposed U.S. concern with democracy and human rights in Libya while it abets the repression of the opposition by its allies in Bahrain and Yemen.

But Judis' insinuation that those who oppose Western intervention are indifferent to the fate of the Arab masses has other supporters.

For example, the Israeli peace activist Uri Avneri, likening the situation in Libya to allied indifference to the Nazi Holocaust or Western enforcement of an arms embargo against the Republicans in the 1930s Spanish Civil War, fully endorsed the Libyan intervention. "[I]n order to prevent genocide, I am ready to make a pact even with the devil."

Avneri's position has no qualification. Except for references to the anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s, it's hard to see what's "left" about it.

By contrast, Gilbert Achcar makes a more serious case for the no-fly zone as "a legitimate and necessary" position "for those who share an anti-imperialist position." In his article on ZNet, he writes:

*"No real progressive could just ignore the [Libyan] uprising's request for protection—unless, as is too frequent among the Western left, they just ignore the circumstances and the imminent threat of mass slaughter, paying attention to the whole situation only once their own government got involved, thus setting off their (normally healthy, I should add) reflex of opposing the involvement."*

Achcar's qualified support for the no-fly zone rests on positions that separate him from Avneri and liberal supporters of the intervention: First, that the Libyan opposition requested the no-fly zone; and second, that the UN resolution should be criticized. "Does it mean," Achcar writes, "that we had and have to support UNSC resolution 1973? Not at all. This was a very bad and dangerous resolution, precisely because it didn't define enough safeguards against transgressing the mandate of protecting the Libyan civilians."

So do the demands of the Libyan opposition, or sections of it, justify support on the left for the no-fly zone? As Gary Younge wrote in the *Nation*, "Those who are resisting Qaddafi deserve our support. But they don't single-handedly determine the nature of it. Solidarity is not a process by which you unquestioningly forfeit responsibility for your own actions to another; it involves an assessment of what is prudent and what is possible."

AS THIS publication has always maintained, Muammar el-Qaddafi is a brutal dictator who deserves to be deposed. In fact, until recently, Qaddafi was a friend to the U.S. and Europe, an ally in the "war on terror" and a client for Western military aid. There is nothing "progressive" about the Qaddafi dictatorship.

However, while standing in solidarity with the resistance to Qaddafi and hoping that it will succeed in establishing a post-Qaddafi democratic regime, we also recognize that it is composed of heterogeneous elements, including genuine opponents of dictatorship and imperialism, as well as former Qaddafi regime members who would happily welcome the West's meddling in Libyan affairs.

So any evaluation of the call for the no-fly zone from the Libyan opposition has to take this into account. Even if we assume, as Achcar does, that all of the Libyan opposition is skeptical of imperialism's designs and will guard against them, we know from history that imperialism will do what it can to corrupt it—and will almost certainly succeed with at least sections of it.

The international left has a responsibility to consider whether Western intervention in Libya will actually strengthen the hand of imperialism in the region. This certainly wouldn't aid the Arab revolution.

Both Achcar and Cole proceed from the assumption that a Western no-fly zone was the only option available for the Libyan opposition. But they should recognize that the interplay between imperialism and the Arab revolution constrains what choices are on offer.

Reportedly, the Libyan National Transition Council appealed to European governments with a list of demands, including the handing over of sequestered Qaddafi funds to the rebel government. The European governments chose to ignore most of the demands, but to accept the proposal for a no-fly zone.

In other words, the notion that "there was no other choice" but a no-fly zone already accepts a compromise of the Libyan movement's independence. In the coming weeks, we may learn if the West extracted other concessions from the Libyan opposition in exchange for support for its action—for example, honoring the Qaddafi government's debts or giving preferential oil contracts to particular Western interests.

As SocialistWorker.org has argued, Western intervention has many other motivations besides the "humanitarian" claims in support of Resolution 1973: preserving the flow of Libyan oil; preventing mass migrations of Libyans to Europe; getting rid of a "failed state" in Libya; and stopping the Arab revolution from overthrowing another dictator through its own efforts.

But even for those who accept the humanitarian pretexts for intervention, accepting the no-fly zone



cedes the initiative from the Libyan opposition or solidarity activists to NATO and the Pentagon.

Achcar notes that, unlike the Kosovar opposition in 1999, the Libyan opposition has opposed the introduction of foreign troops on Libyan soil. The UN resolution bars this as well. But Bennis, an expert on the United Nations, warns: "What you ask for ain't always what you get." As she writes:

*"[W]hat they got was probably way more than even the Libyan opposition itself anticipated. And despite the exultation over the first downed tanks, questions loom. What if some kind of stalemate leaves Libya divided and military attacks continuing? What if the opposition realizes that negotiations (perhaps under the auspices of newly democratizing Egypt and Tunisia) are urgently needed, but cannot be convened because the U.S. and French presidents have announced that the Libyan leader has no legitimacy and cannot be trusted?"*

What then, indeed? Nevertheless, according to Cole, "Assuming that NATO's UN-authorized mission in Libya really is limited (it is hoping for 90 days), and that a foreign military occupation is avoided, the intervention is probably a good thing on the whole."

But these are huge assumptions to make, as Cole, a trenchant critic of the U.S. disaster in Iraq, should know.

Bennis notes that Resolution 1973 requires continuous updates to the Security Council — lending credence to the idea that the UN is "preparing for another long war." In that eventuality, Achcar's worry that Western militaries will be "transgressing the mandate of protecting the Libyan civilians" is almost guaranteed to become a reality.

The British socialist and antiwar activist Mike Marqusee draws out the endgame:

*"The current intervention ensures that if Qaddafi falls, his replacement will be chosen by the West. The new regime will be born dependent on the Western powers, which will direct its economic and foreign policies accordingly. The liberal interventionists will say that's not what they want, but their policy makes it inevitable."*

In the pressure to respond to events, the left does itself no favors if it helps to set in motion a chain of events that could end up producing the opposite of what we all want: an end to the Qaddafi dictatorship, a free Libya and self-determination for the peoples of the Middle East.

That's why, however unpopular a position it appears to be today, the left is right to oppose the UN no-fly zone over Libya and the Western military intervention.

, Lance Selfa is a columnist for SocialistWorker.org and editor of "The Struggle for Palestine"

## **Libya - Libya: a legitimate and necessary debate from an anti-imperialist perspective**

Debate : Libya, the resistance, the no-fly zone

The call of the Libyan insurrectionists in Benghazi for a "no-fly zone" and the adoption of the UN Security Council resolution 1973 that claimed to implement such a zone in order to "protect the civilian population" provoked a sharp discussion among anti-imperialists on what attitude to adopt. Here Gilbert Achcar responds to the debate following his remarks in an interview published in [International Viewpoint](#) and elsewhere arguing that it was not possible to oppose the UN motion. The Fourth International has adopted its own position "[Down with the Gaddafi regime! Stop the imperialist intervention now! Support the Libyan revolution!](#)"

*"The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was indeed a compromise with the imperialists, but it was a compromise which, under the circumstances, had to be made. ... To reject compromises 'on principle', to reject the permissibility of compromises in general, no matter of what kind, is childishness, which it is difficult even to consider seriously ... One must be able to analyze the situation and the concrete conditions of each compromise, or of each variety of compromise. One must learn to distinguish between a man who has given up his money and fire-arms to bandits so as to lessen the evil they can do and to facilitate their capture and execution, and a man who gives his money and fire-arms to bandits so as to share in the loot."*

Vladimir I. Lenin

The interview I gave to my good friend Steve Shalom the day after the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1973 and which was published on ZNet on March 19 provoked a storm of discussions and statements of all kinds — friendly, unfriendly, strongly supportive, mildly supportive, politely critical or frenziedly hostile — far larger than anything I could have expected, all the larger because it was translated and circulated into several languages. If this is an indication of anything, it is that people felt there was a real issue at stake. So let's discuss it.

The debate on the Libyan case is a legitimate and necessary one for those who share an anti-imperialist position, lest one believes that holding a principle spares us the need to analyze concretely each specific situation and determine our position in light of our factual assessment. Every general rule admits of exceptions. This includes the general rule that UN-authorized military interventions by imperialist powers are purely reactionary ones, and can never achieve a humanitarian or positive purpose. Just for the sake of argument: if we could turn back the wheel of history and go back to the period immediately preceding the Rwandan

genocide, would we oppose an UN-authorized Western-led military intervention deployed in order to prevent it? Of course, many would say that the intervention by imperialist/foreign forces risks making a lot of victims. But can anyone in their right mind believe that Western powers would have massacred between half a million and a million human beings in 100 days?

This is not to claim that Libya is Rwanda: I'll explain in a moment why Western powers didn't bother about Rwanda, or don't bother about the death toll of genocidal proportions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but intervene in Libya. Reference to the Rwandan case is given here only to show that there is room for discussion of concrete cases, even though one adheres to firm anti-imperialist principles. The argument that Western intervention in Libya is bound to make civilian victims (I'd actually care even for Gaddafi's soldiers from a humanitarian perspective) is not determinative. What is decisive is the comparison between the human cost of this intervention and the cost that would have been incurred had it not happened.

To take another extreme analogy for the sake of showing the full range of discussion: could Nazism be defeated through non-violent means? Were not the means used by the Allied forces themselves cruel? Did they not savagely bomb Dresden, Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing huge numbers of civilians? In hindsight, would we now say that the anti-imperialist movement in Britain and the United States should have campaigned against their states' involvement in the world war? Or do we still believe that the anti-imperialist movement was right in not opposing the war against the Axis (as it was right indeed in opposing the previous one, the 1914-18 world war), but that it should have campaigned against any massive harm purposely inflicted upon civilian populations with no evident rationale of a necessity in order to defeat the enemy?

Enough now with analogies. They are always subject to endless debates, even though they serve the useful purpose of showing that there can be situations where there can be a debate, situations where you have to give up to bandits, or call the cops, etc. They show that the belief that any such attitudes should be automatically rejected as a "breach of principles," without taking the trouble of assessing the concrete circumstances, is just unsustainable. Otherwise, the anti-imperialist movement in Western countries would appear as only concerned with opposing their own governments without giving a damn about the fate of other populations. This is no longer anti-imperialism, but right-wing isolationism: the "let them all go to hell, and leave us in peace" attitude à la Patrick Buchanan. So let us calmly assess the concrete situation that we're dealing with these days.

We shall begin with the nature of Gaddafi's regime. The facts here leave little room for legitimate

disagreement. It is only for the attention of those who believe, in good faith and out of sheer ignorance, that Gaddafi is a progressive and an anti-imperialist that I discuss it. True, Gaddafi started as a relatively progressive anti-imperialist populist dictator, who led a military coup against the Libyan monarchy in 1969 imitating the Egyptian coup that toppled the monarchy there in 1952. His first hero was Gamal Abdel-Nasser, although his regime was initially more right-wing ideologically, with much more emphasis on religion (later, Gaddafi pretended to give a new interpretation of Islam). He started very early on recruiting people from poorer countries as mercenaries in his armed forces, initially for the Islamic Legion that he set up.

He proclaimed the replacement of existing laws with the Sharia in the early 1970s, just before embarking on an imitation of the Chinese "cultural revolution," with his own Islamic version of Mao's Little Red Book: the Green Book. He also imitated the pretense of the "cultural revolution" of instituting "direct democracy," through the creation of a system of "popular committees" supposedly turning Libya into a "state of the masses" — actually one with a record proportion of people on the payroll of the security services. More than 10% of the Libyan population were "informants" paid for exerting surveillance over the rest of the society. Gaddafi extensively jailed or executed opponents to his regime, including several of the officers who had taken part along with him in the overthrow of the monarchy. In the late 1970s, he decided to turn the Libyan economy into a combination of state capitalism in large enterprises and private capitalism with workers' "partnership" in smaller ones and abolish rents and retail trade (even hairdressers were nationalized!). He also devoted part of the state's oil revenue to improving the living conditions of Libya's citizens, a "revolutionary" version of the way in which some of the Gulf monarchies with high per capita oil income cater to the needs of their own citizens in order to buy themselves a social constituency — while, as in Libya, mistreating the immigrant workers who constitute a major part of their labor force and their population.

In the next decade, faced with the disastrous results of his erratic policies and the crisis of the USSR, upon which he depended for his arms purchases, Gaddafi pretended to imitate Gorbachev's perestroika, liberalizing Libya's economy, but hardly its political life. His next major political turnabout took place in 2003. In December of that year, he came to the political rescue of Bush & Blair, announcing that he had decided to renounce his weapons of mass destruction programs. This was badly needed boost for the credibility of the invasion of Iraq as a way of halting WMD proliferation. Gaddafi was suddenly turned into a respectable leader and was warmly congratulated, with Condoleezza Rice citing him as a model. One after the other, Western leaders flocked to Libya paying him visits in his tent and

concluding juicy contracts. The one who built the closest relation with him is Italian hard-right and racist prime minister Silvio Berlusconi: his friendship with Gaddafi was not only very fruitful economically. In 2008 they concluded one of the dirtiest deals of recent times, agreeing that poor boat people from the African continent intercepted by Italian naval forces while trying to reach European shores would be delivered directly to Libya instead of being taken to Italian territory, where they would have to be screened for asylum. This deal was so effective that it reduced the number of such asylum-seekers in Italy from 36,000 in 2008 to 4,300 in 2010. It was condemned by the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, to no avail.

The idea that Western powers are intervening in Libya because they want to topple a regime hostile to their interests is just preposterous. Equally preposterous is the idea that what they are after is laying their hands on Libyan oil. In fact, the whole range of Western oil and gas companies is active in Libya: Italy's ENI, Germany's Wintershall, Britain's BP, France's Total and GDF Suez, US companies ConocoPhillips, Hess, and Occidental, British-Dutch Shell, Spain's Repsol, Canada's Suncor, Norway's Statoil, etc. Why then are Western powers intervening in Libya today, and not in Rwanda yesterday and Congo yesterday and today? As one of those who have energetically argued that the invasion of Iraq was "about oil" against those who tried to outsmart us by saying that we were "reductionists," don't expect me to argue that this one is not about oil. It definitely is. But how?

My take on that is the following. After watching for a few weeks Gaddafi conducting his terribly brutal and bloody suppression of the uprising that started in mid-February — estimates of the number of people killed in early March ranged from 1000 to 10,000, the latter figure by the International Criminal Court, with the Libyan opposition's estimates ranging between 6,000 and 8,000 — Western governments, like everybody else for that matter, became convinced that with Gaddafi set on a counter-revolutionary offensive and reaching the outskirts of Libya's second largest city of Benghazi (over 600,000 inhabitants), a mass-scale slaughter was imminent. To give an indication of what such repressive governments can perpetrate, just think of the fact that the Syrian regime's 1982 repression of the uprising in the city of Hama, with less than one third of Benghazi's population, resulted in over 25,000 deaths. Had a massacre on a similar scale occurred with Gaddafi's rule consolidating as a result, Western governments would have had no choice but to impose sanctions and an oil embargo on his regime.

The conditions of the oil market that prevailed in the 1990s were characterized by a depression in prices, at a time when the US was going through its longest economic expansion ever, the bubble-sustained boom of the Clinton years. It was very comfortable for Washington and its allies to

maintain an embargo on Iraq during that decade (at a quasi-genocidal cost). It is only at the end of the decade that the oil market started moving out of depression into a rise of prices that everything indicated to be of a structural nature, i.e. a long-term rising tendency. And it is no coincidence that George W. Bush and his cronies came out then in favour of "regime change" in Iraq. For it was the condition without which Washington wouldn't tolerate lifting the embargo on a country whose major oil deals had been granted to French, Russian and Chinese interests (the three leading opponents of the invasion at the UN Security Council — surprise, surprise!).

The present conditions of the world oil market are indeed conditions where oil prices, after falling briefly under the shock of the global crisis, have resumed their upward movement, several months before the revolutionary wave in North Africa and the Middle East. This, in a condition of unresolved global economic crisis, with an extremely fragile fake recovery. Under such conditions, an oil embargo on Libya is simply not an option. The massacre had to be prevented. The best scenario for Western powers became the fall of the regime, thus relieving them of the problem of coping with it. A lesser evil option for them would be a lasting stalemate and de facto division of the country between West and East, with oil exports resumed from both provinces, or exclusively from the main fields located in the East under rebel control.

To these considerations one should add the following: it is nonsensical, and an instance of very crude "materialism," to dismiss as irrelevant the weight of public opinion on Western governments, especially in this case on nearby European governments. At a time when the Libyan insurgents were urging the world more and more insistently to provide them with a no-fly zone in order to neutralize the main advantage of Gaddafi's forces, and with the Western public watching the events on television — making it impossible that a mass-scale slaughter in Benghazi would go unseen, as it was so often the case in other places (like the above-mentioned Hama, for instance, or the Democratic Republic of the Congo) — Western governments would not only have incurred the wrath of their citizens, but they would have completely jeopardized their ability to invoke humanitarian pretexts for further imperialist wars like the ones in the Balkans or Iraq. Not only their economic interests, but also the credibility of their own ideology was at stake. And the pressure of Arab public opinion certainly played a role in the call by the Arab League of States for a no-fly zone over Libya, even though there can be no doubt that most Arab regimes were wishing that Gaddafi could put down the uprising, and thus reverse the revolutionary wave that has been sweeping the whole region and shaking their own regimes since the beginning of this year.

Now, what do we do with that? A mass uprising, facing an all-too-real threat of large-scale massacre was requesting a no-fly zone in order to

help them resist the criminal regime's offensive. Unlike the anti-Milosevic forces in Kosovo, they were not calling for foreign troops to occupy their land. On the contrary, they had good reason for having no confidence in any such deployment: their awareness, in light of Iraq, Palestine, etc., that world powers have imperialist agendas, as well as their own experience of the way the same world powers cozied up to the tyrant oppressing them. They very explicitly rejected any foreign intervention on the ground, only asking for an air cover. And the UNSC resolution excluded explicitly upon their request "a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory."

I won't dwell on the unacceptable arguments of those who try to shed doubt on the nature of the uprising's leadership. They are most often the same as those who believe Gaddafi is a progressive. The leaders of the uprising are a mix of political and intellectual democratic and human rights dissidents, some of whom have spent long years in Gaddafi's jails, men who broke with the regime in order to join the rebellion, and representatives of the regional and tribal diversity of the Libyan population. The program they are united on is one of democratic change — political freedoms, human rights, and free elections — exactly like all other uprisings in the region. And if there is no clarity about what a post-Gaddafi Libya might look like, two things are certain: it can't be worse than Gaddafi's regime, and it can't be worse than the quite more obvious likely scenario of a crucial role of the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood in post-Mubarak Egypt, given by some as an argument for supporting the Egyptian dictator.

Can anyone claiming to belong to the left just ignore a popular movement's plea for protection, even by means of imperialist bandit-cops, when the type of protection requested is not one through which control over their country could be exerted? Certainly not, by my understanding of the left. No real progressive could just ignore the uprising's request for protection — unless, as is too frequent among the Western left, they just ignore the circumstances and the imminent threat of mass slaughter, paying attention to the whole situation only once their own government got involved, thus setting off their (normally healthy, I should add) reflex of opposing the involvement. In every situation when anti-imperialists opposed Western-led military interventions using massacre prevention as their rationale, they pointed to alternatives showing that the Western governments' choice of resorting to force only stemmed from imperialist designs.

There was a non-violent solution out of the Kosovo crisis: for one, the offer made by Yeltsin's Russian government in August 1998 of an international force to implement a political settlement jointly imposed by Moscow and Washington. It was relayed by then US ambassador to NATO Alexander Vershbow, and just ignored in Washington. The same could be added about February 1999.

The Serbian and NATO positions were different, but negotiable, as was shown after 78 days of bombing, when the UN resolution was a compromise between them. There was a non-violent solution to get Saddam Hussein to withdraw his troops from Kuwait in 1990: aside from the fact that he could not have withstood for long the tight sanctions that were imposed on his regime in order to force him out, he was offering to negotiate his withdrawal. Washington preferred to destroy the country's infrastructure and send it "back to the stone age," as the reporter for the UNSC described the country's situation after the war in 1991.

What then was the alternative to the no-fly zone in the Libyan case? None is convincing. The day when the UNSC voted its resolution, Gaddafi's forces were already on the outskirts of Benghazi, and his air force attacking the city. A few days more, they might have taken Benghazi. Those who are confronted with this question give very unconvincing answers. A political solution could have been contemplated had Gaddafi been willing to allow free elections, but he wasn't. He and his son Saif gave the uprising no choice other than surrender (promising them an amnesty that nobody could have trusted), or "civil war." I'll ignore those who say that the population of Benghazi could have fled to Egypt and taken refuge there! It is not worthy of comment. I'll also ignore those who say that Arab armies only should have intervened, as if an intervention by the likes of the Egyptian and Saudi armed forces would have caused fewer casualties, and represented less imperialist influence on the process in Libya. The answer that sounds more convincing is the one advocating arms delivery to the insurgents; but it was not a plausible alternative.

Arms delivery could not be organized and become effective — especially if we're thinking of sophisticated anti-aircraft missiles — in 24 hours! This could not have been an alternative to a massacre foretold. Under such conditions, in the absence of any other plausible solution, it was just morally and politically wrong for anyone on the left to oppose the no-fly zone; or in other words, to oppose the uprising's request for a no-fly zone. And it remains morally and politically wrong to demand the lifting of the no-fly zone — unless Gaddafi is no longer able to use his air force. Short of that, lifting the no-fly zone would mean a victory for Gaddafi, who would then resume using his planes and crush the uprising even more ferociously than what he was prepared to do beforehand. On the other hand, we should definitely demand that bombings stop after Gaddafi's air means have been neutralized. We should demand clarity on what air potential is left with Gaddafi, and, if any is still at his disposal, what it takes to neutralize it. And we should oppose NATO turning into a full participant of the ground war beyond the initial blows to Gaddafi's armor needed to halt his troops' offensive against rebel cities in the Western province — even were

the insurgents to invite NATO's participation or welcome it.

Does it mean that we had and have to support UNSC resolution 1973? Not at all. This was a very bad and dangerous resolution, precisely because it didn't define enough safeguards against transgressing the mandate of protecting the Libyan civilians. The resolution leaves too much room for interpretation, and could be used to push forward an imperialist agenda going beyond protection into meddling into Libya's political future. It could not be supported, but must be criticized for its ambiguities. But neither could it be opposed, in the sense of opposing the no-fly zone and giving the impression that one doesn't care about the civilians and the uprising. We could only express our strong reservations. Once intervention started, the role of anti-imperialist forces should have consisted in monitoring it closely, and condemning all actions hitting at civilians where measures to avoid such killings have not been observed, as well as all actions by the coalition that are devoid of a civilian protection rationale. One article of the UNSC resolution should definitely be opposed though: it is the one confirming the arms embargo on Libya, if this means the country and not the Gaddafi regime alone. We should on the contrary demand that arms be delivered openly and massively to the insurgents, so that they no longer need direct foreign military support as soon as possible.

A final comment: for so many years, we have been denouncing the hypocrisy and double standard of imperialist powers, pointing to the fact that they didn't prevent the all-too-real genocide in Rwanda while they intervened in order to stop the fictitious "genocide" in Kosovo. This implied that we thought that international intervention should have been deployed in order to prevent or stop the genocide in Rwanda. The left should certainly not proclaim such absolute "principles" as "We are against Western powers' military intervention whatever the circumstances." This is not a political position, but a religious taboo. One can safely bet that the present intervention in Libya will prove most embarrassing for imperialist powers in the future. As those members of the US establishment who opposed their country's intervention rightly warned, the next time Israel's air force bombs one of its neighbours, whether Gaza or Lebanon, people will demand a no-fly zone. I, for one, definitely will. Pickets should be organized at the UN in New York demanding it. We should all be prepared to do so, with now a powerful argument.

The left should learn how to expose imperialist hypocrisy by using against it the very same moral weapons that it cynically exploits, instead of rendering this hypocrisy more effective by appearing as not caring about moral considerations. They are the ones with double standards, not us.

, Gilbert Achcar grew up in Lebanon and teaches political science at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. His best-selling book *The Clash*

*of Barbarisms' came out in a second expanded edition in 2006, alongside a book of his dialogues with Noam Chomsky on the Middle East, "Perilous Power". He is co-author of "The 33-Day War: Israel's War on Hezbollah in Lebanon and It's Consequences". His most recent book is "The Arabs and the Holocaust: the Arab-Israeli War of Narratives", Metropolitan Books, New York, 2010.*

## **Debate - The Arab revolution must stay in Arab hands - a reply to Gilbert Achcar**

Debate : Libya, the resistance, the no-fly zone

The Arab revolution has widened the left's horizons. In the region itself there is now a historic possibility of a new radical politics: successful resistance to the hegemonic Western powers and to Israel fused with the movement of the young and propertyless masses against the corrupt and complicit elites.

The fall of Ben Ali and Mubarak shattered decades of Western policy, rocking them onto the back foot. They are now moving onto the front foot, as the regional despots raid their political and military arsenals to cling on.

Thus the developing Arab movements and the left face new political challenges and strategic choices. That is the context of the legitimate debate Gilbert Achcar has framed over the Western military intervention in Libya.

Gilbert outlines a case for qualified political support for the soon to be Nato-commanded air and naval operations in Libya (no one on the international left is in a position to do anything materially/militarily themselves).

He writes as a well known Marxist and opponent of the Afghan and Iraq wars, a supporter of the Palestinian struggle and a genuine friend of the most radical edge of the Arab revolutions.

Gilbert Achcar is no part of the liberal attack pack, who in natural alliance with the neoconservatives brought us the disasters of Afghanistan and Iraq. But he argues that over Libya the left should support the action of powers who occupy those two countries, albeit with many caveats and with vigilant suspicion.

It is a badly mistaken position over Libya. When its logic is generalised - as Gilbert does - it plays dangerously into the hands of the reactionary forces which he and the left hope the Arab revolutions will eventually eradicate.

### **Western intervention across the region**

Gilbert introduces two analogies to make the point that socialist principles are not articles of religious faith and are no substitute for providing concrete answers based on a "factual assessment" of concrete situations.

The point is helpful: the analogies, not. As he acknowledges, proceeding by analogy tends to generate confusing polemics over what is common

between unique events, each of which is itself the subject of considerable controversy and of radically different factual assessments.

The Rwandan genocide, one of his examples, is arguably (at the very least) more a horrific lesson in the consequences of actual Western intervention, in its totality up to and including the eve of the slaughter, than it is a counter-example for those Gilbert takes to task for a "religious" opposition to all Western military action.

In any case, even the Western leaders who have driven the Libya bombing have not suggested that the events they say they forestalled were analogous to the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide - though the most rabid tabloids and the bomberatti have. It is self-defeating for the left to insert those connotations ourselves. It is even more damaging if we at the same time fail to foreground the most salient and distinctive feature of which the uprising in Libya is an expression - the wider Arab revolutionary upheaval.

That regional process, and what it means both for the Western powers and for those who have risen up in Libya, barely features in Gilbert's analysis. Instead, he largely accepts the question as Nicolas Sarkozy, David Cameron and Barack Obama frame it: a particular, Libyan moral dilemma confronting their publics and states, whose wider actions are cropped out.

But their military action is not some singular response to a potential humanitarian crisis. It is more even than the latest chapter in a history of wars attended by specious humanitarian claims. That said, history alone - recent and ongoing in Iraq and Afghanistan - should cause anyone who hopes for a progressive outcome to this bombing or who invests it with moral worth to pause and reflect.

The bloody past and present also contribute to the rational underpinning of a far from "religious" anti-war sentiment, which goes beyond the left to embrace an unprecedentedly large section of public opinion - a testament to the international movement against the Iraq war.

The context, however, is not merely historical. The same actors who are launching missile strikes over Libya are intervening at the same time and with the same objectives across the rest of the same region. (Unless we are unfeasibly to imagine that their motives, interests and aims are fundamentally different in Libya and in the Gulf - an unsustainable moral-political atomism, certainly for a Marxist.)

The same European Union mandarin - civilising-colonialist Robert Cooper - is briefing about bringing democracy to Libya and also writing apologies for the Saudi-orchestrated murder of democrats in Bahrain.

The same President Obama who said that attacks on hospitals were a *casus belli* against Tripoli is standing by his allies in Riyadh and Manama, who

spent many days... attacking hospitals under the noses of the US Fifth Fleet.

The same Treasury revenue going up in smoke as missiles explode in Libya is subsidising Israel's missiles blowing up people in Gaza - not two years ago, but today, now, with the threat of much more imminently.

The same Qatar that is belatedly providing air support for the attacks in Libya is simultaneously sending troops to attack democrats in the Persian Gulf.

For sure, there are great fractures and differences of emphasis as the US with its European and Arab allies seeks to cohere a response to the challenge posed by the Arab revolutions.

The US would like more palliative reforms from the Kings of Arabia; the Saudis want to give none. Hillary Clinton has cleaved as long as possible to the autocrat in Yemen; Alain Juppe, stung by the political crisis wrought by his predecessors' intense relationship with Ben Ali, called earlier for Ali Abdullah Saleh to go.

But the overall aim is the same: to corral the revolutionary process and ensure it is steered along a path which is stable and compatible with the interests of the Western powers and whichever safe pairs of hands they can identify in each state.

### **Oil and Western policy**

Those interests do ultimately come down to the control of Middle Eastern and North African hydrocarbons. Is the West's policy about oil? On one level it is always about oil. When Silvio Berlusconi and Sarkozy embraced Muammar Gaddafi, the unspoken interest was oil. When they find themselves intervening to overthrow him, the underlying interest remains oil - just as it was when the West supported Saddam Hussein in his attack on revolutionary Iran and then, a decade later, drove him out of Kuwait, embargoed Iraq for 12 years, finally invading a second time and executing him.

The same imperial, capitalist objectives in the region can be served by different politiques d'Etat; to paraphrase Lord Palmerston, imperial chancelleries have no eternal friends and no eternal enemies, only eternal interests - as Hosni Mubarak discovered at the eleventh hour.

So why the change in policy towards Gaddafi? There are those who serially tell us that this time it's different, this time the Western governments are subordinating self-interest to humanitarianism. Gilbert is not one of them. But his argument lends them credibility - and if adopted by the left would encourage them to go further.

Gaddafi managed neither to fall on his sword, like Mubarak, nor to crush the opposition, like the Al Khalifa kleptocrats in Bahrain - but only after the intervention of the US's oldest ally in the region, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.



He did succeed through vicious repression and playing on sectional divisions in Libyan society in displacing the dynamic of the youth-led revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt (which has also been central in Sanaa, Yemen, for six weeks) with an armed conflict more resembling a civil war.

In those circumstances he became a liability for the West. On the eve of the bombing campaign Obama said that the instability in Libya threatened "vital US allies in the region".

Gaddafi himself had already proven that he had no intention of posing such a threat. Those who think that he is some kind of anti-imperialist now would do well to reflect that even as he denounced the Western bombardment as "crusader aggression" he was proclaiming himself as the only possible Libyan leader to maintain peace with Israel and to prevent African migrants from entering Europe.

It is preposterous, as Gilbert says, to claim that Gaddafi has been hostile to Western interests over the last decade and that that is why the West want to topple him. But equally, it is evident over two last weeks that the flaking-rule of this recently acquired, flakey ally no longer served them well.

The wrangling in Western capitals over how to respond and bring a return to stability more plausibly reflects the uncertainty that has beset their attempts to rally a riposte to the Arab revolution than it does some dawning recognition of a hitherto absent moral sensibility. Unlike in Egypt, there was no army high command to switch allegiance to smoothly and safely.

The same hesitancy marked the Arab despots. They want an end to the revolutionary wave, but they have no loyalty to, still less liking for, Gaddafi - or necessarily for each other; the Qataris long campaigned for the toppling of Mubarak. The West's actions are a single axe to fell a two-headed monster, they hope.

Gilbert says we should not "dismiss the weight of public opinion on Western governments" in deciding their actions, justified as preventing a slaughter in Benghazi.

Now, only the self-appointed and deluded leaders of "global civil society" would claim that public opinion in Europe and north America is what drove the decision to go to war. Britain and the US went to war on Iraq despite public opinion.

There is little enthusiasm for this war - that much is clear from the conflicting opinion polls. So we are left with the observation that public outrage at a predicted massacre was just one factor among many in Sarkozy's and Cameron's drive to get the missiles launched and bombs dropped.

### **Morality and Western bombs**

Let us put to one side that it was the dire warnings of the very politicians who pushed for bombing - Juppe and William Hague preeminently - which informed the public discussion about a possible slaughter. Let us also return shortly to whether

their warnings were right and what might have been done.

In a limited sense public compassion was significant. It determined the ideological register in which London, Paris and Washington have chosen to re-legitimise their roles in the Arab region after the battering they have taken from Iraq and the fall of their allies in Tunisia and Egypt.

Gilbert touches on it when he identifies the West's concern to ensure a continued "ability to invoke humanitarian pretexts for further imperialist wars like the ones in the Balkans or Iraq". But that means that giving any credence to their current humanitarian pretext simply makes it easier for them to construct exactly the narrative for more Iraqs.

Emboldened Western powers make further wars more likely. Supporting their military actions contributes to that.

Unless we are to detach Libya from what the Western powers are doing and will do in the region and elsewhere, that consequence surely weighs on one side of the moral balance Gilbert enjoins us to strike: "what is decisive is the comparison between the human cost of this intervention and the cost that would have been incurred had it not happened". The dead in Bahrain and Yemen deserve to be counted too.

The first cost we will come to know as events unfold in North Africa, the Middle East and beyond. The second, we can never know with certainty.

It has become largely accepted that Gaddafi was about to take Benghazi and would have killed thousands. The success and scale of Gaddafi's repression do not for a second decide our opposition to it. But they are crucial to Gilbert's test for whether we should support what the Western powers are doing.

So let's assume that Juppe, Hague and others were right: Gaddafi was about to win and kill thousands. "Can anyone claiming to belong to the left just ignore a popular movement's plea for protection... when the type of protection requested is not one through which control over their country could be exerted?" asks Gilbert.

Up to then, however, the rebels' requests had been ignored, not by the left, but by those to whom they were addressed. They asked the great powers who now pose as their protectors for access to weapons days into the uprising. They were refused.

At the time, Berlusconi's Foreign Minister Franco Frattini voiced most clearly the West's suspicions about the Benghazi rebels: they were an unknown quantity but some were definitely Islamist (he warned ominously of the proclamation of an "Islamic Emirate" on the southern Mediterranean) and a banner opposing Western interference was prominently displayed.

So intelligence had to be gathered (special forces and spies were dispatched), guarantees had to be sought (commitments to Libya's commercial

treaties were swiftly obtained), the picture allowed to clarify and nothing be done which would enable any agency independent from the interests of the Western corporations and states which had got along famously with Gaddafi over the previous 10 years.

The condition that intervention would not amount to exerting control over the country was breached before the words in the UN resolution ruling out an occupation were typed up. What else might Sarkozy and Clinton in Paris three days before the UN vote have bargained over from a position of strength with the former regime figures who they plucked as representatives of the Benghazi opposition?

Gilbert does not address the baleful effects of the West's embrace on the opposition itself. Nor does he consider how intervention led by the former North African colonial powers allows Gaddafi, of all people, to wrap himself in the shroud of Omar Mukhtar, the hero of the devastating Libyan war of independence against fascist Italy, thus giving him another weapon to shore up support.

The opposition may well have started as an admixture of forces comparable with the Tunisian and Egyptian movements. But the former regime elements, appointing themselves as leaders, and reliably pro-Western figures have unsurprisingly been promoted as the rebellion becomes more dependent on Western military force.

If war is an extension of political conflict by other means, then military conflict extends its own political logic. In a position of military weakness the Benghazi council has called for greater and greater Western military action.

Rebels complained early on that they were not in a position to call in Western air strikes. They may want US, French and British planes to be the opposition air arm, but they are under US/Nato command. It calls the shots. It isn't the rebels' airforce; they are now more Nato's ground force.

The Benghazi council has not yet called for ground troops - which are not ruled out by the UN resolution - but if a stalemate sets in... what then? Perhaps some more on-the-ground "specialists" to guide in the missiles or some more "advisors" (special forces, ie highly trained killers, are already there)?

Should the left ignore the call for further help, even if a "popular movement" warns of massacres and, as the Pentagon has said, air action alone is not certain to achieve victory on the ground? Shouldn't we support steps to make the missile strikes more accurate, to reduce "collateral damage"? Wouldn't it be immoral not to?

Should we seek to expose the insincerity of the West by demanding more militarily action on behalf of the rebels if they don't succeed quickly? Should we greet any move towards de facto partition with demands that the West "finishes the job" and removes the butcher Gaddafi?

Surely it would be immoral, having prevented the fall of Benghazi, to watch the fighting drag on and Gaddafi remain in control of most of the country? It is the rebels' requests, after all, which authenticate the moral case for supporting the bombing, according to Gilbert. And they want more bombing.

The war has already gone further than the restricted no-fly-zone Gilbert says it would be immoral to oppose. The UN resolution went well beyond that. The opening attacks were not against aircraft but on ground forces and Gaddafi's compound - they had the coordinates from Ronald Reagan's assassination attempt in 1986. Given the results of every other Western air war, is there any doubt that the cruise missiles and "smart bombs" have caused civilian casualties? (At the time of writing Western warplanes are fully engaged in bombing Ajdabiya so the rebels can take it.)

Herein lies the essential unreality of Gilbert's position. He wants to scalpel out from the UN resolution and Nato bombing a humanitarian kernel that we must support. We should oppose the rest. We should monitor the course of an inherently chaotic war to ensure that military action doesn't go beyond the humanitarian aims we have imputed.

But means and ends were always wider. That's why the vaunted international consensus collapsed within 24 hours. There was no actual demarcation between a supposed humanitarian mission and the wider objectives of the belligerents - especially of Sarkozy and Cameron, who openly proclaimed a doctrine of regime change.

The political futility of Gilbert's position is apparent when he writes, "... we should definitely demand that bombings stop after Gaddafi's air means have been neutralised". The Pentagon declared them neutralised the day before his article appeared, but the bombing continued.

### **Alternatives to Nato action**

So what is left of the argument that we should have supported a no-fly-zone which was superseded before the Security Council vote? Only that Benghazi was about to fall, there would be a massacre and there was no alternative to supporting Western action which, whatever its wider ambitions and methods, did prevent it. Let's accept the claim of an imminent massacre and look at whether there was any alternative.

Gilbert dismisses the idea of the rebels arming as impractical: there were only "24 hours" for them to get the weapons and learn to use them. But any impracticality is a result of the political priorities of the Western powers.

For two weeks they refused weapons and imposed an embargo to stop any shipment while they sought guarantees that the Benghazi rebels would not use them against their vested interests in Libya, established under Gaddafi over the last decade. They blackmailed the genuinely

revolutionary elements and suborned others of the Benghazi leadership as Gaddafi's armour moved in. The left everywhere should say so clearly, not accept the fait accompli of coercion.

Gilbert argues that the left could oppose war against Serbia and Iraq because we were able to point to diplomatic alternatives, but that over Libya there were none. Now, I don't know how realistic Vladimir Putin's diplomacy was in relation to Slobodan Milosevic or how credible was Saddam Hussein's offer to withdraw from Kuwait. But neither do I remember those being necessary conditions for the movements against the wars of 1991 and 1999.

Following Gilbert's thesis nonetheless, there was a high level African Union delegation on its way to Tripoli to seek a diplomatic settlement when the Western bombing started. Gilbert suggests that Gaddafi is too irrational to be a party to a mediated solution. But we were told that Milosevic and Saddam were also mad dogs, genocidal dictators who would never accept a mediated solution. These are hardly strong grounds for opposing the Balkan and Iraq wars yet giving the West the benefit of the doubt over Libya.

Gilbert argues that any Arab-organised intervention would cause just as many civilian casualties and lead to just as much imperialist influence over Libya. He cites Saudi Arabia and Egypt as two possible interveners. A few moments' factual assessment shows that such an intervention would likely open up very different possibilities.

It was almost certainly impossible for Saudi Arabia to lead an intervention perceived as supporting the Arab revolution. It was leading the suppression of the revolution in Bahrain at the same time. It is the most brittle and ancient of ancient regimes, which has rejected all calls for it to broaden its social base through serious reform. The tensions would have exposed it utterly and opened a breach for the Saudi opposition movement - much more so than in tiny Qatar. That's why the House of Saud voted for the West to do it.

Egypt is different. Mubarak is gone. The army remains. But it presides over a society in which an actual revolution is still being fought out. It's currently Washington's biggest regional concern. An intervention led by Egypt would not have simply been a cat's paw of London, Paris and Washington. Its reflex within Egypt would not have been of the "bomb the new Hitler" variety that is dredged up on these occasions in the imperialist countries. It would have been conditioned by the new found activism of the Egyptian people.

Egyptian socialists have issued a statement opposing the West's military action in Libya and agitating for popular pressure to come to the aid of the rebellion in their western neighbour. You only have to picture Egyptian flags, of the kind that fluttered in Tahrir Square, being waved in

Benghazi rather than the Tricolor and Union Jack to appreciate what the difference would be.

There were alternatives to supporting the West's bombing. Of course, they were not ones Sarkozy, Cameron and Obama would freely choose. They had to be argued and fought for against the line of the Western governments. In that sense they were not as immediate as the willing decisions of those who control powerful states. But if the left were to accept that the only realistic solutions are those that the US, EU and Nato want to entertain, then we too succumb to blackmail and there seems little point in building an independent left. We face strategic choices.

### **Democracy and the Islamist scarecrow**

The left wing of the Egyptian revolution - the most important in the region thus far - has rejected that blackmail. They are not people who can be dismissed as armchair critics sitting in comfort. And the mass forces that were ranged against Mubarak remain independent of Western tutelage.

Gilbert, however, privileges the Libyan rebels, who are now dependent on Paris and London, acting on Washington's dime - Pentagon spending was 50 percent of the Nato total 10 years ago, now it is 75 percent.

In a deeply worrying aside, he asserts that whatever regime the Libyan rebels might form now would automatically be better than "the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood" playing a "crucial role" in post-Mubarak Egypt. That makes a terrible concession not merely to the Western powers' military action, but to their politics and ideology as they try to reshape the Arab region under rejuvenated hegemony.

They want the public East and West to believe that regimes dependent on Western force of arms and constructed at conferences in Paris or London - like Nouri Al-Maliki's in Iraq - are a priori better than long suppressed Islamic movements playing an independent, prominent role. The Arabs, they maintain, are not ready for unguided democracy. Israel's Tzipi Livni is promulgating bespoke criteria for Arab parties to be admitted to the democratic club; they include recognising Israel.

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood does not fit the Islamophobic demonology and in any case is an organic part of Egyptian society - a vital point for anyone who truly believes in national self-determination. As the political space has opened up so have the divisions in an organisation that was always more of a coalition than a monolithic party. There is a widening crack between a politically conservative old guard and a youth imbued with revolutionary aspirations. In fact, several parties look set to emerge from the Brotherhood's ranks. They include those who emphasise radical democratic and social change as opposed to the imposition of restrictive mores.

The most popular model among the mainstream of the Brotherhood and among many other Islamists

in the region is now the AKP government in Turkey. It is far from a socialist administration. But it beggars belief that on account of its Islamic roots it and those who emulate it must be by definition worse than the forces who hope to come to power in Libya under Western bombs and licence.

The Turkish government's position over Libya is to call for Gaddafi to go, to limit action strictly to humanitarian objectives, to criticise military "excesses" and to oppose Western politicking. In those respects, it's a position not unlike Gilbert's. But he cedes the pass to those who are waving the Islamist scarecrow.

Events since the appearance of Gilbert's article have made bald assertions of the superior progressive credentials of the now Western-dependent opposition in Benghazi untenable. Serious media organisations such as the LA Times - not conspiracist supporters of Gaddafi - have carried first hand reports of grizzly treatment of black migrant workers at the hands of Benghazi's new security section. They are also rounding up those they say are "Gaddafi loyalists". What fate lies in store?

We have been here before. We have seen other sectional movements prove incapable of transcending the divisions fostered or exploited by the regime they oppose, and thus failing to unite the bulk of society behind them. We have seen how in a bitter military conflict some have ended up playing on those divisions themselves. Some have even taken a portion of the brutality they have faced and hurled it back in kind.

In Benghazi under Western oversight we are not seeing the kind of sloughing off of the muck of ages that lit up Cairo's Tahrir Square when Muslims and Christians linked arms against divide and rule and pressed the most radical revolutionary path.

For several reasons, among them Gaddafi's repression, that process was marginal to the Libyan uprising. The Western powers certainly do not want to see it emerge now in Benghazi, or in Tripoli if Gaddafi falls. They won't want the voices in Misrata that are skeptical of the West's role to grow louder. And they are now in a stronger position to stop all that happening.

### **Imperial hypocrisies**

Gilbert, of course, points out US and European hypocrisies. The apparent contradiction on which the hypocrisy rests is not incidental. It is rooted in a consistent set of deep interests which are far from contradictory: their hands on the spigot of the world's energy economy against competitors from without and the mass of the people within.

But with Libya as his point of departure Gilbert's resolution of the seeming inconsistencies of the West takes us in exactly the wrong direction. If followed, it would lead to a strategic divergence on the left and inadvertent relief to the hypocrites.

Gilbert spells out his approach by pondering the prospect of major Israeli air strikes against Gaza

and a hypothetical call for a Western no-fly-zone in response: "Pickets should be organized at the UN in New York demanding it. We should all be prepared to do so, with now a powerful argument" - the argument that you did it over Libya so do it over Gaza.

In fact, while the deputy prime minister of Israel has mooted an imminent repeat of Operation Cast Lead, more limited air strikes are already happening, and more intensely than at any time in the last two years.

So this isn't a question for the future. It is now. What is the response, and what ought it be?

In the region, the reaction among the left and progressives has been overwhelmingly to point to continuing Western - crucially US - backing for the state of Israel, the latest egregious example being yet another US veto of a Security Council resolution opposing illegal settlement building.

It's been to highlight Tel Aviv's request for a further \$20 billion subvention from Washington. It has been to focus attention on the transitional government in Egypt to demand it reflect popular sentiment, break fully with the Mubarak/Sadat years, open the Rafah border, cut off gas supplies to Israel and declare for the Palestinian struggle. (It has already felt sufficient pressure to caution Israel against an all-out Gaza war.)

Similar arguments are being raised by the radical left and the now considerable pro-Palestinian movement in Europe and the US.

Their direction of travel is not for further Western military engagement in the Middle East following Libya - intervention that may come in Syria if events follow a similar pattern. It is for ending that engagement - direct and through Western support for the military machines of Israel and Saudi Arabia.

It is not to demand European and US diplomats descend in greater number to "help" bring peace and justice. It is to tell the likes of latter day Prince Metternich, the State Department's Jeffrey Feldman, to get back to Washington and take with him his schemes for manipulating opposition forces which he perfected in the sectarian labyrinth of Lebanon.

It is not for the West to do more; it is for them to stop doing what they are doing.

This isn't a semantic game. The movement that emerged in Tunis and Cairo shows the potential for a new agency in the Arab region - a radical force that is independent of elites, big and small, Western and domestic.

Sidi Bouzid and Tahrir Square restored Arabs themselves as the agents of progress in their region after the catastrophe of the neocon experiment with Iraq and all that went before. The West wants to reinsert itself, forcibly if necessary, as the principal actor, the arbiter of progress for the natives.

It might be objected that it is an uphill struggle for popular Arab movements to force a retreat in Western policy, and to frustrate their and the regional rulers' interests. That's true.

But it is far more preferable, and infinitely more realistic, than lobbying for the imperial powers to become something which they cannot be: a force for progress, if only they could be persuaded to resolve their supposed mixed motives and conflicted thinking in the right way.

This strategic choice is being fought out now in Yemen. The most dynamic elements in the society - the young people who gather outside Sanaa's university - are choosing the Cairo of Tahrir Square over the Benghazi of Western suzerainty. But there are other powerful, sectarian or sectional political actors too. Some toy with Western or Saudi backing to compensate for a failure to pull decisive force behind their own bids to be the replacement for Saleh's regime.

A similar political battle is starting in Syria, where the West does have a vital interest in toppling the regime - but not for one that would be even more of a problem for it and Israel. It doesn't want a Tahrir Square in Damascus; it would like a Benghazi or Baghdad - and it will act accordingly.

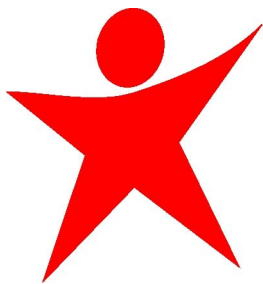
The first phase of the Arab rising of 2011 carried echoes of the European revolutions of 1848. They made flesh the truly progressive modern force which Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels identified in the Communist Manifesto published that year as "the independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority".

Such independence in the matured global capitalist system of today depends upon many things. Above all it cannot happen without spurning the embrace of the biggest capitalist powers and consistently opposing their ideologies, their political machinations and their killing machines.

*Kevin Ounden is a member of the executive of the Respect Party in Britain, an officer of the Stop the War Coalition and a leading Palestine solidarity activist.*

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## Libya/Portugal - Portuguese Left Bloc condemns attacks on Libya



Francisco Louçã states that "the left which stands against military aggression can never accept the kind of violence which is being visited upon Libya".

The coordinator of the political committee of the Left Bloc has spoken out against the bombing

of Libya on the grounds that "bombing an Arab country will have an incendiary effect in the Arab world", and has called for Portugal to adopt a policy of peace.

According to the news agency Lusa, Francisco Louçã recalled the basic idea of Futurism, a movement "created by a group of right-wing artists, who argued that war is beautiful, that the machinery of war is beautiful and the destruction of War is the greatest beauty of all time". According to Louçã it is remarkable that after all the drama of the wars that marked the past century and despite all that we know about the legacy of destruction left behind by these wars we continue to see "beautiful" cruise missiles being used to attack a country.

The leader of the bloc said that "war can never be a solution" and recalled that those who are now attacking Libya previously supported despots like Gaddafi, Ben-Ali and Mubarak.

In relation to the position of Portugal, Louçã also recalled that the Portuguese Air Force participated in the recent celebrations of 40 years of Gaddafi's regime in Tripoli and that Foreign Minister Luís Amado went into Gaddafi's tent to greet the dictator. Louçã argued that Portugal should act with "sensitivity" in relation to Libya:

"We have to have the wisdom of the politics of peace, to abandon the incendiary politics of the EU and the US", he said.

*Francisco Louçã is an economist and a Left Bloc member of the Portuguese parliament. He was the candidate of the Left Bloc in the presidential election of January 2005 (where he won 5.3% of the votes).*

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## Libya/Italy - Gaddafi out! No to imperialist military intervention!

Statement from Sinistra Critica (Critical Left)  
Sinistra Critica (Critical Left)



The Libyan dictatorship's brutal repression against the people's revolution provides the best excuse for imperialist military intervention which has the effect of holding back the unfolding revolutionary process throughout the Arab world. The 'no-fly' zone decided by the UN Security Council has come after Gaddafi had been allowed to re-take a large part of the liberated area.

The rebels in Benghazi and Tobruk, after having explicitly rejected the poisoned chalice of external Western help for weeks, were now understandably

constrained to ask for any sort of international help that would allow them to escape from the regime's iron fist. These are the cynical calculations that the Western powers have made to the cost of the Libyan people and of all the other peoples in revolt in this region of the world. The West wants to regain a margin of control on the geopolitical situation and on the oil/gas resources. This control has been put into question by the overthrow of the dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt. Those people who up to now have talked about revolutions manipulated by the United States have ended up by sabotaging one of the biggest democratic uprisings in the history of the Arab world. An uprising triggered by the capitalist crisis which has overthrown regimes allied to the West and Israel. A different sort of mobilisation was possible in Europe and it would have resulted today in the Libyan dictator suffering the same fate as Ben Ali and Mubarak.

We are completely against any military intervention in Libya, because there is no such thing as a humanitarian war and this aid will not help the liberation struggle. The strongest support we can give is that of mass mobilisations in all countries which unequivocally call for the removal of the colonel and are against imperialist attempts to intervene in Libya – there is no alternative. The left and the workers movement have an enormous responsibility on this question. Up to now they have been passive and ambiguous. Any support – however critical – for the NATO countries' intervention would be disastrous.

No to the military intervention! No to the use of Italian bases for the military intervention!

We demand that the regime's armed forces end repression and aggression!

Gaddafi must go and the people must freely decide their own future as in Egypt and Tunisia!

Unconditional, total support to the struggles of the Libyan people!

The revolution can suffer setbacks, but the dynamic that exists in many Arab countries can overcome them!

20th March 2011

↳ *The Sinistra Critica (Critical Left) was set up in January 2007 by the minority of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) which refused the participation of the party in the Prodi government. It includes the comrades of Bandiera Rossa, Italian section of the Fourth International.*

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## **Libya/France - Support for the Libyan people against the dictatorship.**

Statement of the NPA  
*Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA)*



The Libyan population which rose against Gaddafi faces today an outburst of fatal violence. The dictator would like to drown the revolt in a blood bath. Our full and total solidarity goes to the Libyan people who should be given the means to defend themselves, the weapons which it needs to drive out the dictator, to conquer freedom and democracy.

This is not the goal of the decisions of UN and the military coalition led by France and Britain which is on the point of intervening in Libya. The same governments did not say anything against the intervention of the Saudi troops against the revolt in Bahrain. The great powers want to seize the opportunity that the dictator's madness gives them to try to take back control over the area, rich in oil, while giving each other the beautiful role of defender of the people.

How can we give any credit for sincerity to the French government which for three months has not expressed any solidarity with popular risings and the revolutions in progress in the Mashreq and Maghreb countries? How can we forget a half-century of support of the great powers for the bloodiest dictatorships. From Kosovo and Afghanistan via Iraq, the list is long of so-called "humanitarian" imperialist interventions that did nothing but worsen the local situations.

Military intervention is not the solution and the NPA warns against a new military escalation which is taking shape, against the imperialist goal of control of the area and against interference in the revolutionary processes underway. It reaffirms its support for the Libyan insurrectionists against the dictatorship as with the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions

March 18th, 2011

↳ *The Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste was founded in February 2009, on the proposal of the LCR, French section of the Fourth International. As a broad anti-capitalist party it is not itself linked to any international current. The members in France of the Fourth International are in the NPA.*

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## **Libya - Support the Arab peoples in struggle – No to the bombardment of Libya!**





From Tunisia and Egypt, to the Yemen and Syria, passing through Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, the people are rising up en masse to bring down authoritarian dictatorial regimes. For more than a month now, hundreds of thousands of Libyans peacefully have been taking to the streets calling for the end of the Gaddafi regime.

Gaddafi was deaf to these calls and opted for the worst case scenario. The responsibility for the deaths and the blood shed in Libya lies on his shoulders. By choosing to bombard villages and massacre civilian populations, the regime itself has provided the opportunity Western Imperialism has been waiting for to try to regain the upper hand in the region.

Today, France, the United States, Canada and Great Britain are engaged in an operation to invade Libya. After weeks of watching the Libyan people being massacred and carefully avoiding organizing the international pressure that would have been necessary to escape the deadlock, they now pass themselves off as the saviors.

The first bombardments of Libyan infrastructure in Tripoli and elsewhere have already begun. The Western bombers will continue until they can either prepare an occupation of Libya under the banner of the UN, or, even better, choose and impose the members of the opposition who will be most favorable to Western interests.

This military operation in Libya, also serves as a distraction, as the repression continues in the Yemen, Bahrain and beyond.

Via Campesina calls for the will of the people to be respected.

Via Campesina calls for an immediate halt to Western military intervention.

Via Campesina calls on everyone to mobilize for a peaceful solution to the crisis in Libya.

*, An international movement of peasants, small- and medium-sized producers, landless, rural women, indigenous people, rural youth and agricultural workeres.*

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## **Libya - End the US-led armed intervention in Libya**

Statement by Focus on the Global South  
*Focus on the Global South*



Focus on the Global South supports the democratic opposition in Libya that seeks to end the 43-year-old dictatorship of Muammar Gaddafi. Focus shares the Libyan people's desire to be free of a corrupt and repressive ruler who does not hesitate to employ massive force against his own people to hang on to power.

Focus cannot, however, support the massive armed intervention launched by the United States, France, and Britain on Sunday, March 20.

A "No Fly Zone" to protect civilians is one thing. An armed assault aimed at regime change is another thing altogether. The latter is the intent of the US/UK/French-led intervention, which, although displaying the figleaf of a United Nations Security Council resolution, goes far beyond the defensive aims of a no-fly zone to cross over into aggression against Libya.

Firing on ground troops and preemptively and indiscriminately destroying anti-aircraft installations will bring about precisely that loss of life that the intervention ostensibly seeks to prevent. Civilians are being killed by the western assault when civilians were supposedly the very people the action was supposed to protect.

The fight for democracy waged by the Libyan people must be supported, but not by western military action that is an instrument of regime change. This action may ostensibly have humanitarian objectives, but its main objective is to reassert western hegemony in a region that is caught up in the winds of democratic change.

Owing to its support for authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, the US has lost much of its credibility among the Arab peoples. Indeed, the US may be said to be one of the targets of the Arab democratic revolution. In this context, the intervention in Libya for regime change is Washington's belated attempt to appear as a pro-democratic force, shore up its tattered legitimacy, and remind the Arab nations of its strategic hegemony in the region. Yet the world will not miss the hypocrisy of a hegemon which shouts that it is supporting democracy in Libya while it stands on the side as a reactionary regime it has armed and supported, Saudi Arabia, has invaded and is crushing democratic forces in Bahrain.

The West's "armed intervention for democracy" will not advance the cause of democracy. Indeed, it will discredit it by associating democracy with a western show of force. The intervention in Libya risks stoking forces as powerful as the democratic movement: Arab nationalism and Islamic solidarity. It will end up creating conflicts among movements

which should be complementary, and the only victor will be western hegemony.

We in Focus on the Global South call for an immediate end to the US/UK/French-led war on Libya.

We call on global civil society and on governments throughout the world to support the Libyan people's struggle for democracy against Gaddafi.

We ask especially the democratic movements in Tunisia and Egypt to come to the aid of the Libyan people.

We call for an end to all efforts to maintain or reassert US hegemony in the Middle East.

*March 22, 2011*

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# Antinuclear solidarity, financial solidarity...

*Pierre Rousset, Danielle Sabai*

**Unlike France, Japan is not a military nuclear power, and its population suffered the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki - the most serious of war crimes. However, in the post-war period, it has been like France the victim of a pro-nuclear consensus among the elites that has marginalized and prohibited any form of democratic choice over the issue. Japan has, like France, been held hostage by the nuclear industry.**

Chernobyl showed in 1986 what happens when a nuclear state is in crisis. Today, Fukushima shows where the thousand small and big lies of nuclear management lead on the day the unexpected happens. However, all states one time or another face crises, and the unexpected is inevitable. If we do not put the kibosh on the nuclear industry, Chernobyl and Fukushima are our future.

Faced with such a test, international solidarity is a common struggle against a common danger, to break the grip of the elite pro-nuclear consensus. That is what our Japanese comrades argue.

Millions of people living in areas affected by the earthquake, the tsunami disaster and Fukushima are surviving in extremely precarious conditions. In this too, they need our support. Major NGOs in France have ruled there was no need to raise funds for solidarity; Japan is a rich country. Financial assistance would only be justified as a remedy for third world failed states. They have apparently learned nothing from the social drama of New Orleans, which was hit by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Even in "developed" countries, the poorest are the least rescued, and workers must pay the bill for the crisis. Who can leave the risk areas or receive fuel or medicine? Who will be able to find a job tomorrow among those whose businesses have been destroyed - and under what conditions?

We want to send a little material assistance in a situation where the needs are immense. We want this aid to go primarily to "those from below". We want these contributions to help to strengthen activists and social movements so they can play a role in the crisis and defend the interests of the powerless during the time of reconstruction. In this way we want to link emergency humanitarian action with the ongoing social struggle.

With this in mind the association Europe Solidaire Sans Frontières has launched an international appeal for financial solidarity. The ESSF has links with various groups in Japan. For now, the money collected will be sent primarily to an independent trade union coordination active in the particularly affected region of Miyagi / Sendai and Fukushima: the Zenrokyo (National Trade Unions Council, NTUC). This particular centre has established links in France with Solidaires (in particular South-PTT, for its postal federation). We want to work with other initiatives engaged in the same type of work, with Via Campesina and Attac, for example.

## **You can send donations via Europe solidaire sans frontières (ESSF), Europe in Solidarity Without Borders**

*Pierre Rousset is a member of the leadership of the Fourth International particularly involved in solidarity with Asia. He is a member of the NPA in France.*

*Danielle Sabai is one of IV's correspondents for Asia.*

### **Cheques to ESSF in euros only to be sent to:**

ESSF 2, rue Richard-Lenoir  
93100 Montreuil  
France

### **Bank Account:**

Crédit Lyonnais  
Agence de la Croix-de-Chavaux (00525)  
10 boulevard Chanzy  
93100 Montreuil, France  
ESSF, account number 445757C  
International bank account details :  
IBAN : FR85 3000 2005 2500 0044 5757 C12  
BIC / SWIFT : CRLYFRPP  
Account holder : ESSF

