

LIBYA: ANTI-NATO CLASSES

AS SCHNEWS ANALYSES THE NEW GREAT GAME SHAPING THE LIBYA CONFLICT

"The Euro-American attack on Libya has nothing to do with protecting anyone; only the terminally naive believe such nonsense. It is the West's response to popular uprisings in strategic, resource-rich regions of the world and the beginning of a war of attrition against the new imperial rival, China." - John Pilger - award-winning journalist and lefty fire-brand

The bombs are still falling on Tripoli in yet another British intervention on behalf of Arab human rights in the Middle East (the 46th since 1945). What started out as a U.N backed campaign supposedly to protect anti-Gaddafi elements from a massacre has turned into reckless use of air-power to oust Gaddafi from power. And yet the UK peace movement is virtually nowhere to be seen. It was only in May that UK troops were supposed to be withdrawing from Iraq and the end of the battle in Afghanistan has just been signalled - yet here we are, at it again.

The same justifications for war as ever have been rolled out - accusations of war crimes against Gaddafi's forces - including allegations of systematic rape which have been made by senior US politicians and publicised throughout the western media. However while both Amnesty and Human Rights Watch have found evidence of multiple war crimes by both sides, neither organisation has found any evidence for the claims. When the dust settles will these allegations end up in the dustbin of history, next to the stories of Iraqi troops pulling babies out of incubators in Kuwait in the 1991 Gulf War? Those stories, pushed by senior U.S politicians to justify military action turned out to have been crafted by P.R agency Hill Knowlton. And then of course we have the lies used to drag us into the disastrous Iraq conflict - and yet nothing seems to have been learned. The very same journals that were determinedly 'anti-war' in 2003 are now swallowing the propaganda whole and pondering 'the sensitive politics of humanitarian intervention'.

Does SchNEWS really need to hammer home the real nature of this conflict?...It's the oil, dummies. Oil reserves in Libya are the largest in Africa and the ninth largest in the world with 41.5 billion barrels as of 2007. Libya is considered a highly attractive oil area due to its low cost of oil production (as low as \$1 per barrel at some fields), and proximity to European markets. Also due to the country's erratic political course large chunks of the country remain unexplored. As an independent actor Gaddafi could be courted, hence Tony Blairs rather smarmy visit in ?. However as ever with dictators he was showing worrying signs of waywardness - Prior to the uprising China was the third-largest buyer of Libyan crude behind Italy and France, a month into the uprising and Gaddafi was promising to re-negotiate all contracts away from western corporations.

Nato is now into the third month of its bombing campaign - which includes aerial attacks on cities and the use of unmanned drones. Effectively the coalition has placed itself as the air arm of the 'rebels'. Interestingly, this time, although the U.S is still heavily involved, it is taking a backseat to the British and French. It was S.A.S troops who were caught on the ground back in May - and only this week it was confirmed that the French have been dropping arms to the rebel forces. It's becoming clear that the mass popular uprising has become a proxy war. That isn't to say that some of those who are fighting aren't doing so to overthrow Gaddafi for legitimate reasons. But the rebels are loosely organised and the factions most likely to receive western military aid - and therefore most likely to pre-dominate - are those most likely to be amenable to a pro-Western sentiment.

The man in charge of the military wing of the "pro-democracy rebels" is Colonel Khalifa Haftar who, according to a study by the US Jamestown Foundation, set up the Libyan National Army in 1988 "with strong backing from the Central Intelligence Agency". Funnily enough Colonel Haftar's home from home for the last twenty years has been Langley in Virginia - base of the CIA. Other senior figures in the movement were until recently part of Gaddafi's regime - so a victory for the rebel forces would hardly be the clean slate one might hope for after the overthrow of a dictator. There are already indications that the rebels might not be quite the lilywhite freedom fighters portrayed in the mainstream press, with evidence of atrocities carried out against sub-Saharan (i.e black) Africans in the rebel-held areas.

A BAD TRIPOLI

Plans have already been drawn up for the division of power in post-Gaddafi Iraq. According to the Guardian, the proposals have been drafted by the Department for International Development, all in the best possible interests of the Libyan people naturally. The 50 page document, which is hoped to be ratified at the forthcoming meeting of the 'Libyan contact group' in Istanbul in mid-July, only deals with the possibility of regime change in Libya, effectively boxing the dictator into a corner, to fight or die.

Largely unreported have been the Gaddafi regime's overtures for a negotiated ceasefire. At the end of May, Libyan prime minister Al-Baghdadi al-Mahmou-di wrote to Britain, France and other governments proposing an immediate ceasefire monitored by the United Nations and the African Union, unconditional talks with rebel forces, an amnesty for all fighters, compensation for victims of the civil war and the formation of a new constitution for a "radically different" Libya. This offer was rejected out of hand by the NATO powers.

Increasingly reports of civilian deaths in Tripoli



THIS IS GOLD LEADER; CONFIRM I HAVE RELEASED MY PAYLOAD OF HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION...

are filtering through. The familiar language of targeted attacks against military tactics, used in every 'intervention' is surfacing again, casting a smoke-screen over the indiscriminate nature of aerial bombardment. This war carries strong echoes of the NATO's 'humanitarian intervention' in Serbia in 1999. The reasons given at the time - prevention of ethnic cleansing by Serbian forces - were a stage managed exaggeration: The ethnic cleansing in fact massively intensified after the bombing. Civilian targets were hit repeatedly in Belgrade. The much feted Kosovan Liberation Army turned out to be a mafia organisation that indulged in its own bouts of ethnic cleansing once in power.

The Arab Spring, a genuinely radical moment in history initially full of optimism, is moving into a dangerous new phase as the Western elites and regional powers seek to manipulate the outcome. In Egypt the state remains intact despite the change of regime and the bringing of criminal charges against Mubarak, with clashes between protesters and riot police taking place yet again in the iconic Tahrir square. Meanwhile in Bahrain, home of the U.S 5th(?) fleet and satellite kingdom of Saudi Arabia - the repression enthusiastically backed by the West is claiming civilian victims. The Middle East is caught in the balance of the new cold war - China vs the U.S.

AFRICA HOUSE EVICTED

The Africa House squat in Calais, home to hundreds of migrants and No Borders activists over the last year, was finally completely evicted on Monday (27th).

The industrial complex was raided by PAF border police accompanied by city workers and plain clothes police at 6am. Most of the migrants without documents had already fled and only around 30 people remained. The PAF manhandled activists off the site before forcing those that remained out the back, out of sight of the journalists waiting at the front. An empty factory nearby was squatted by many of the migrants, only to be evicted the same evening by private security heavies.

The migrants were left to camp out in makeshift shelters in the jungle, in the parks, under bridges or in other abandoned buildings. On Wednesday (29th) migrants staying in the old university buildings at the back of Africa House were also raided and evicted, despite a visit the night before where police told the migrants they would be evicted in 10 days time.

With the authorities stepping up their campaign of harassment and migrants more vulnerable than ever, now is the time for a booze cruise/solidarity work. See www.calaismigrantsolidarity.wordpress.com

* Calais Migrant Solidarity activists have released a dossier of police violence and repression collected over the last few years. Last week they presented the evidence to France's new ombudsman for Human Rights and human rights organisations.

PARTY & PROTEST

For events listings updated weekly see www.schnews.org.uk/pap

SIMON LEVIN RIP

Long-term Brightonian activist for social justice, Simon Levin, passed away on Friday 24th June, at the age of thirty-six. He spent much of his life fighting against injustice. Attending pickets during the miners' strike when he was a young boy, Simon was then an active supporter of the Irish struggle against imperialism and, during the last decade, involved in action for Palestine and against the Iraq war.

Simon was from a Jewish background; his great grandparents were murdered at Auschwitz. This was one of the reasons that he joined the Palestinian struggle against Israeli apartheid. In 2004 Simon travelled to Palestine and spent months as an international volunteer in Balata refugee camp. During Israeli army incursions Simon provided an international presence designed to make people in the camp safer and support Palestinian resistance. In 2008 he led a delegation to the Jordan Valley and worked with Palestinians to establish Fasayil School (see SchNEWS 608), despite Israeli military orders that building was prohibited.

Involved in the Smash EDO campaign from the beginning, he was part of the first blockade of EDO in 2004 and fought against EDO's planned injunction against protesters. Simon helped the decommissioners break into the EDO factory in 2009 - and was with the others found not guilty of conspiracy to cause criminal damage on the basis that he had acted to prevent war crimes (SchNEWS 729). His own experiences in Palestine were used as evidence. On hearing the verdict he said, "Considering that the whole point of this is that we have broken no law, hopefully it will set a precedent for the people of this country to realise that in a liberal democracy we are the checks and balances."

Despite personal battles, Simon never gave up on the struggle for justice and the well-being of those lucky enough to count him as a friend. One such friend said, "Simon was not only a dedicated activist in the name of liberty, against oppression in all its forms, but a sublimely passionate human being, whose eccentricities, eloquence and wild imagination will never be forgotten."

For those who wish to celebrate Simon's there will be a wake at the Cowley Club, Brighton Thursday 7th July at 4pm.

A SHIP OFF THE OL'BLOC

Westminster got a flavour of the Freedom Flotilla to Gaza today as campaigners from the Free Gaza movement and OneWorld sailed along the Thames to Parliament to deliver a message of freedom for Palestine.

Draped in a huge Palestinian flag, and pumping out the online hit "Freedom For Palestine" by OneWorld, a boat packed with campaigners, press and supporters sailed from Festival Pier to the Houses of Parliament.

They were there to raise awareness and to build support for the Freedom Flotilla currently preparing to sail to Gaza in order to break the Israeli siege.

A police boat tailed along behind. Unlike the Israelis in international waters last year, the police did not board the vessel while sailing. In 2010 Israeli commandos boarded the first Freedom Flotilla and killed nine peace activists on board Turkish aid ship the Mavi Marmara. (see SchNEWS 725)

Meanwhile the Gaza flotilla itself waits in various Mediterranean ports after suspicious acts of sabotage delayed the sailing date.

* see www.freegaza.org

CAMPAIGN FOR REAL BAIL

Since the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) came into effect it has been routine for cops to arrest and lock up suspects for most of the day, interview, then release on police bail for weeks or months. This bail often comes with restrictive conditions like banning use of the internet, curfews, restriction on movement and association, the forcing of 'suspects' to sign on at ridiculously inconvenient times and places and more.

The period of bail and the conditions attached to it are arbitrarily decided by the police themselves, who have a particular penchant for applying them to political cases - restricting people's ability to protest and making their day-to-day life a struggle (see SchNEWS 1-776). In many cases police bail has been used as a form of extra-judicial punishment, with long bail periods and more draconian conditions often hinting that police feel they have little or no chance of successful prosecution.

This may all be set to change, after the High Court upheld a ruling that police bail should be treated as detention and, therefore, can only be applied for a maximum of 96 hours. Of course, this won't mean police can only investigate an offence for four days, merely that they would have to gather evidence and charge people prior to punishing them, so surely a step forward for the 'justice' system?

Apparently not, if the police and politician's pleas are anything to go by. Having spent the past 25 years abusing the power of indefinite police bail, officers are now understandably upset they may have to investigate crime and put a case before the courts in future. No longer will not liking someone's politics, attitude or skin colour be enough to make someone's life a misery.

Chief Constable Norman Bettison of West Yorkshire Police stated that his force is "running round like headless chickens...wondering what this means to the nature of justice." Fortunately these powerless coppers have friends in high places with Home Secretary Theresa May "looking at a number of possibilities" including appealing the ruling for a second time or bringing in emergency legislation.

Even Liberty have come down on the side of the cops with their legal director saying "Being out on bail pending investigation is not the equivalent of being detained. Limits on the time that suspects can be held in police custody are necessary but there are good reasons why the police should be allowed to bail suspects for more than 96 hours."

Until the scales of justice can be fully rebalanced back in the state's favour it is unclear exactly what this will mean if you are on bail now or expecting to be in the near future. After the ruling, the CPS and Acpo received legal advice which stated that it set new case law and had to be adhered to. However, senior officers have already indicated they will continue to use police bail as before, regardless of whether or not it is actually legal. Meanwhile Greater Manchester Police (the hapless force that brought this state of affairs about in the first place) is attempting to appeal at the Supreme Court.

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TURN ON THE WATERWAYS: Government plan clampdown on canal boat dwellers.

SHEIKH-DOWN

On Tuesday (28th) Sheikh Raed Salah was arrested in London, having been invited by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign to speak at a meeting. Sheikh Raed leads the Islamic Movement in Israel - the largest movement for Palestinians in Israel - and has been the subject of criticism from the pro-Israel lobby. The sheikh has been banned from the UK and is now expected to be deported as a result of this pressure. This ban came as a surprise to Raed who had strolled in via Heathrow airport only 3 days earlier.

Despite being described as a hate preacher by sections of the UK media, Sheikh Raed has repeatedly distanced himself from racism and anti-Semitism. What prompted the ban or even when it came into effect has not been revealed. Given that the main engagement of the Sheikh's tour was in the houses of parliament, we wonder which of her colleagues Home Secretary Teresa May feared would be radicalised by hearing him speak.

HOLDING THE FORTNUM

The first thirteen defendants in the Fortnum & Mason trials will enter their pleas on 5th July at Westminster Magistrates Court. They stand accused of aggravated trespass after the UK UNCUT action on M26 (see SchNEWS 765). The first group consists of those flagged up by the Crown Prosecution Service as being in the following four categories. 1) Organisers or ringleaders 2) Those with previous convictions 3) Those caught with large amounts of leaflets 4) Most weirdly those who were considered to be 'exercising territorial powers' in the store. The bloke on the end of the phone at UK Uncut reckoned they would 'probably all go not guilty'. Altogether 145 people are facing charges

* See www.ukuncut.org.uk

(HEADLINE ON STRIKE)

On Thursday (30th), as SchNEWS were busy working away, hundreds of thousands of public sector workers went on strike. Ostensibly in opposition to pension changes, it's more of a more a ratcheting up of union resistance to the entire Tory agenda. Thousands marched in towns and cities including Manchester, Leeds, Brighton, Bristol, Bradford, Nottingham, Glasgow, Cambridge and London. Pickets were also formed at many job centres, customs offices, universities and schools (most of which were closed for the day).

The majority of marches were fairly peaceful/ineffectual, but attendances were high. Targeted actions by groups such as UK Uncut, saw more police attention and arrests, including four in Churchill Square, Brighton.

*For more detailed updates on local actions see indymedia.org.uk

...and finally...

Hands up - we don't go to Glasto anymore 'cos we thought it had lost it's edge, Beyonce and supervised pedestrian traffic just ain't for us - but throughout the nineties we never found anything in the bogs quite as weird as a dead Tory. Was it the full suspenders, gas mask and amyl nitrate job we wondered as we chortled. No doubt they'll have to gloss over the 'bizarre and untimely' circumstances at the funeral.

Here at SchNEWS we welcome the return of the bizarre, the macabre and the downright odd to what used to be three days of lawless dreamlike madness with some bands thrown in. Maybe next year the fence'll come down!

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers, don't take NATO for an answer. Honest.

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