

Whose Dictator Was Qaddafi? The Empire and Its Neo-Colonies

Summary: To put the West's case bluntly and simply, it apparently intervened in Libya to 'protect the people' from the 'dictator' Qaddafi. This begs the question: whose dictator was Qaddafi? The paper argues that Libya was and is a neo-colonial state; it is the imperial finance capital which, despite contradictions, is in effective control of the state and its economy. Qaddafi, notwithstanding his anti-imperialist rhetoric and even certain actions, has always been an unwilling agent of finance capital, of the Empire. That is the reality. When Qaddafi's face became unacceptable to the Empire, he had to go.

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At the time of writing (May 2011), the Empire was trying to replace Qaddafi* with a more pliant regime, one that has a 'democratic', face. The essay makes a distinction between two kinds of realities: existential, extant reality, and diplomatic reality. The latter is a product of negotiations amongst diplomats seeking a compromise between conflicting interests in a particular situation. The war in Libya is a case in point. In this context the paper looks critically at the dangers of 'humanitarian' international interventionism, and suggests the role the United Nations, the African Union and the G77 countries could play in finding a way to move forward.

* For consistency the spelling Qaddafi is used in the whole text

Existential Versus Diplomatic Realities

The outcomes of multilateral negotiations do not necessarily reflect the reality on the ground; they reflect, rather, certain diplomatic and political realities. Diplomatic realities are 'negotiated truths' between states in the global system of asymmetrically positioned power relationships. These 'truths' may have only a partial correspondence with 'existential truths' about reality on the ground. In the 'negotiated diplomatic truths' the diplomats try to craft a language that seeks to balance conflicting interests making the final text appear as if there is a 'consensus'. This does not make the 'diplomatic truth' any less real, but it is a certain kind of reality, which is always questionable because in essence it is a compromise of the existential reality. It is this kind of 'compromised reality' of Resolution 1973 of the United Nations Security Council that created the basis for the NATO countries to what amounts to an invasion of Libya. When the existential reality changes, as is happening on a daily basis in Libya, the diplomatic text 'legitimising' the initial action loses its substantial meaning and essence, and the hiatus between the 'real' reality and the 'diplomatic' one poses serious difficulties for the authors of the initial action. This is the 'messy' situation in which the Empire – the NATO countries – finds itself at the point of writing this essay.

What is a neo-colonial state and economy?

Barely two generations ago, most nations in Asia and Africa were direct colonies of the European Empire. Latin America, however, was slightly different. Most of the nations in that part of 'the South' had won their political independence some 100-150 years ago, but practically all of them had then become 'neo-colonies' of the United States. In other words, their political independence obscured the hard reality of their effective economic neo-colonisation by the powerful neighbour in the north. China too was a bit different. It was largely coastal China that had been 'colonised' by Europe, Japan and the United States, whilst the hinterland was independent. China, thus, was a 'semi-colony'.

In our own generation we have seen the gradual emancipation of the nations of the South from the direct colonial control of the Empire. But few have managed to achieve genuine independence in the sense of being able *also* to control their economic destinies. This *existential reality* was not lost to the first President of the Republic of Tanzania, Julius Nyerere, when he addressed the Ministerial Conference of the Group of 77 in Arusha on 12 February, 1979.

But our diversity exists in the context of one common and over-riding experience. What we have in common is that we are all, in relation to the developed world, dependent – not interdependent – nations. Each of our economies has developed as a bi-product and a subsidiary of development in the industrialised North, and is externally oriented. We are not the prime movers of our own destiny. We are ashamed to admit; but economically we are dependencies – semi-colonies at best – not sovereign states.¹

Nyerere was fully aware that Tanzania was still a neo-colony (or a 'semi-colony at best'), even as he sat on the seat of government, and that he and his colleagues in the others G77 countries were not 'the prime movers of our destiny.'

Things however change; though some things remain essentially the same. Over the last thirty years, China, India and Brazil, for example, have made impressive break from the economic control of the Empire. Nonetheless, even in their cases a dozen or so global banking-financial players such as JPMorgan Chase, Citigroup Inc., Bank of America Corp., Morgan Stanley, Goldman Sachs and Merrill Lynch still exercise considerable influence in shaping their financial markets.² Within the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), South Africa is a new entrant, but unlike the other four countries South Africa remains pre-eminently a 'neo-colonial' state. The South African nation has achieved political independence, but at the economic level it is still, essentially, a neo-colony of the global Empire.

¹ Nyerere, J.K. 1979 'Unity for a New Order', Address to the Ministerial Conference of the Group of 77, Arusha, 12 February, 1979.

² In India, for example, the Commodity Exchange (MCX), the biggest commodity exchange in India that extends credit to rural farmers has many national and global shareholders, including the Fidelity City Group and Merrill Lynch with investment also from Goldman Sachs, and these provide the motive force to the logic of capital accumulation and concomitant dispossession of the peasantry in India.

Why are the neo-colonies problematic for the Empire?

A neo-colonised people are not as docile and supine as the word 'neo-colony' would appear to imply. The Empire does not rule a neo-colony directly; only indirectly -- through its agents in the countries concerned. And this creates four kinds of difficulties for the Empire.

1. Whilst a neo-colonial *economy*, and hence the neo-colonial *state*, is 'in the ultimate analysis' controlled by the Empire – on behalf of global finance capital – there is a 'government' that is in the seat of governance. The government in a neo-colony governs the state *in effect* as an 'agent' of the Empire, until the nation is fully liberated from both the economic as well as the political control of the Empire. Or, to use the now fashionable expression 'regime change', the word 'regime' refers only to those in 'government'; but governments can come and go whereas the underlying capitalist 'order' does not change until complete liberation from the Empire. The 'government', in a democratic dispensation, is ultimately accountable to the people, though electoral accountability is only one aspect of it. The people occasionally rebel against the government if they are oppressed or economically marginalised. In rebelling against the government, they also rebel against the neo-colonial state. Depending on who is in charge of 'governance', there can develop minor or major contradictions between the people and the Empire. It is no accident that the function of governance has become such a major issue in recent years; the Empire is not satisfied with the way in which governments in some of the neo-colonies are conducting the affairs of governance. The likes of Mugabe and Qaddafi, for example, are simply not performing as expected by the Empire. The issue at stake is not whether Mugabe and Qaddafi are 'dictators'. The issue is whether they are the Empire's dictators, and can deliver what is expected of them by the Empire. The Saudi ruling family and King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa in Bahrain are the Empire's dictators. By 'regime change', the Empire only seeks to change the *government* or the *regime* without changing the existing 'order' of the political economy in which it calls the last shots in the neo-colonies. The case of Libya is a case in point, as we shall see in the following account.
2. A second difficulty is that the Empire is not a monolithic bloc. There are existing or potential differences between the different constituents of the Empire. When, for example, Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) was a direct colony of Britain, the latter was accountable only to the British people on matters related to the colony. It is no longer the same any more, now that Zimbabwe is a neo-colony under a collective, or multilateral, Empire of the US, Europe and Japan. Most of the time these constituent parts of the Empire agree on how to deal with a 'rebellious' neo-colony, but often they have differences. In the case of Libya in our own times, for example, Germany has a somewhat different perspective on bombing the country than the US and the other European imperial nations, especially France and Britain.
3. A third problem is that each neo-colony is surrounded by other neo-colonies: Zimbabwe, for example, by the countries in the region of SADC (Southern African Development

Community), and Libya as a member of both the Arab League and the African Union. Thus, for example, before the invasion of Libya in March 2011, the Empire desperately needed the active or at least tacit support of the Arab League and, if possible, of the African Union. It received explicit support from the former and only a grudging support from the latter, and this was bound to create problems later, as we shall see.

4. Finally, neo-colonies (unlike colonies) are `sovereign` members of the United Nations. They have rights as `independent nations`, among them, rights to self-determination, and rights to development. The Empire cannot just bomb a sovereign member of the UN without the UN's sanction, especially of its Security Council which is the organ in the UN that deals with matters of international peace and security. This creates hurdles for the Empire; it has to get on board Russia and China (the two permanent members of the Security Council with a veto power), and at least a majority of the remaining non-permanent members before it can attack a neo-colony.

How the Empire seeks to control and discipline the neo-colonies

Faced with these `problems`, the Empire, over the last thirty years or so, has been able to devise ways and means by which to control the neo-colonies, and to `discipline` errant neo-colonies when the behaviour of their governments poses a risk to the overall global interests of the Empire. These `ways and means` fall into two broad categories: one is `structural` and the other `contingent`.

The *`structural` means of disciplining the neo-colonies* are embedded within the economic institutions and policies of the neo-colonies. This is a vast subject, but its main elements are:

- a) Corporate control over the production, financing, marketing, technology and management of the natural resources of the neo-colonies.
- b) Financial and monetary control through the US dollar as the global currency against which all other currencies find their relative `market exchange rates`. It is a weapon that the U.S. in our times has tried to use against a country, China, that is no longer a mere neo-colony of the U.S., but a weapon that is still potent in dealing with, for example, the neo-colonies in the rest of the third world.
- c) Keeping the neo-colonies in *perpetual financial debt*, and through `debt bondage` control their economic, and often governance, policies.
- d) Aid, or the so-called `development aid`, which not only creates a permanent debt hangover, but more directly used as a powerful weapon to `condition` the policies of the `recipient` neo-colonies.
- e) `Structural adjustment programmes` (so-called SAPs) initiated, monitored and enforced by the IMF on the neo-colonies at the behest of the Empire.
- f) `Globalisation` which is supposed to be like the force of gravity and demands conformity to the dictates of the Empire in relation to matters like trade liberalisation, budgetary controls and monopolisation of scientific knowledge in the form of intellectual property rights (IPRs) vested in the control of transnational corporations.

- g) Creating a `mystique` of the Empire as a `civilised` culture, generous to the neo-colonies with its `development aid` and foreign direct investments (FDIs).

The `contingent` means of disciplining the neo-colonies vary from situation to situation. Of course, each neo-colony is different from the other; each has its own history, `national` culture, economy, and ethnic, religious and class configurations. This too is a vast subject, but its main elements are.

- a) Create or encourage existing cleavages within the neo-colonies: tribal, ethnic, religious, linguistic, class, gender – in short, whatever element provides the Empire a `handle` to divide the civil society and government in the neo-colonies.
- b) Freezing or appropriating the assets of the leaders in the `rebellious` neo-colonies that may have these (bank deposits, investments, properties, etc) in order to incapacitate them, and `bring them to heel`. Libya is a case in point, but there are several such neo-colonies that have been so `disciplined` in the past and in present times.
- c) `Soft sanctions` targeted against only a certain section, or individuals, within the neo-colonies, thus further weakening the national unity of the neo-colony. For instance, the `targeted sanctions` against the leadership of ZANU(PF) barring them, for example, from travelling to the United States and Europe, making them feel `deprived` whilst the leaders of the opposition parties feel `privileged` that they have no such restrictions on their overseas travels or assets accumulation.
- d) `Hard sanctions`, what in fact amounts to `war`, even if the instruments of war are carefully calibrated from `arms embargo` (in the case of Libya imposed only against Qaddafi, and not against the people in Benghazi); `no fly zones`; naval blockade; targeted aerial `precision` bombing; to, finally, full scale war as in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Two proto -type dictators in the neo-colonies

In general, there are two proto-types of `dictators` in the neo-colonies. There are those with `nationalist` ambitions, those who wish to break from the Empire and try and seek their nations` own destinies. These are the *Radical Nationalist Dictators (RNDs)*. We have had a number of these in Africa such as Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso, and of course Mugabe and Qaddafi. The RNDs exist in other parts of the third world as well, such as Fidel Castro in Cuba, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti, and Mahathir Mohamed in Malaysia. From the perspective of the Empire, they are `problematic` dictators.

Then there are the more pliant dictators, submissive to the Empire but brutal when it comes to dealing with their own populations. Most states in Africa are led by governments that mimic their imperial masters. They are the *Mimicmen Puppet Dictators (MPDs)*. I have borrowed the term `mimicmen` from V.S. Naipaul`s novel of the same name³, and the word `puppet` from President Yoweri Museveni, who, in criticising the Western invasion of Libya,

³ Naipaul, V.S. 1969. *The Mimic Men*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

described Qaddafi as a `nationalist` as opposed to the preference of the Western countries for `puppets`. Here is what he said:

Qaddafi is a nationalist. Qaddafi has conducted an independent foreign policy and, of course, also independent internal policies. I am not able to understand the position of Western countries, which appear to resent independent-minded leaders and seem to prefer puppets. Puppets are not good for any country. ... I prefer nationalists to puppets of foreign interests. Where have the puppets caused the transformation of countries? I need some assistance with information on this from those who are familiar with puppetry.⁴

Museveni is probably a bit harsh on some of these `puppet` regimes in Africa. Whilst some of them may well be hanging from strings pulled via remote control by the Empire from behind shadowy black curtains, most of them are caught up in contradictions and dilemmas created by the domination of their economies by imperialist capital. Some of them may well be `nationalists` at night but `realists` by day, or to put it differently, `*rationaly realists` but`*emotionally nationalists`*`. They compromise their independence either because the Empire leaves them very little room to manoeuvre, or because of personal greed for power and/or wealth, which the Empire is ever ready to encourage with corporate graft and imperial corruption which takes many forms and shapes. Equally, on the reverse side of the coin, the RNDs could well be `nationalists` in the day and secret `realists` at night; they roar like lions against imperialism during the day but are engaged in `asset accumulation` at night. There are very few genuine and consistent RNDs in the third world. Most of them are `rent seekers`; they use their power in the state machine to enrich themselves and their relatives and friends. Nonetheless, Museveni is right about the preference of Western countries for `puppets` rather than for `independent-minded leaders`.*

Also, one must bear in mind that there is movement and change: an RND today could become an MPD (or close enough) tomorrow. Two examples come to mind. One is Milton Obote, who was an RND during his first term of office as Prime Minister and President of Uganda in the 1960s and who became a virtual MPD during his second term in the 1980s. The second is Michael Manley who was an RND in his first term of office as Prime Minister in Jamaica in the 1960s who also became a virtual RND during his second term in the late 1970s. One explanation of this `conversion` might be that the Empire is hard with those who rebel against it, but is willing to `guide` them after they have been chastened by experience, and `fallen in line`.

Limits to Democracy and `People Power` in the Neo-colonies

The *idea* and the *reality* of democracy are often poles apart. The best that can be said about democracy is the old adage that defines it as `government of the people, by the people, and for the people.` Since it was first enunciated by the American President Abraham Lincoln at the famous Gettysburg Address in 1863, nobody has improved on it definitionally. This said,

⁴ <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/03/28/ugandas-president-on-the-gadhafi-he-knows/?hpt=Sbin>

the first thing to learn about it from the experience of history is that there is no such thing as a 'model' democratic country or a blueprint stamped with the authority of the U.S. or the West. Like with most ideologies, the 'diplomatic or political truth' and the 'existential truth' about democracy are often at the opposite poles. This is true of imperial countries, let alone of their colonies and neo-colonies. People power is *everywhere* – universally -- undermined by corporate capital and vested interests.

In relation to the United States, touted as the 'model' of democracy, political theorists and commentators like Noam Chomsky and Thomas Ferguson have shown, with evidence and argument, how business, industrial and financial corporations have systematically undermined people power and how they exercise effective control over state power. In Britain the 'Third Way' of Anthony Giddens and Tony Blair has now been fully exposed as a 'Great Liberal Betrayal' of the cherished values of liberalism that its authors claimed for it. And so on and so forth in the case of Germany, France, Japan, and the whole lot of them in the imperial system. This said, it has to be stated that this negation of democracy in the West does not invalidate the ceaseless efforts on the part of the working millions in these countries at national and community levels to assert their right to genuine people power and an effective and fair redistribution of the wealth of their nations.

In the neo-colonies, people's struggles for democracy and basic human rights are incessant and relentless. In fact, it is amazing that people never give up despite repeated disappointments through electoral sabotage and political manipulations by political parties and 'war lords'. Even if cynical politicians exploit and manipulate people's call for democracy, that shows the complexities of the 'existential reality' in the neo-colonies but it does not invalidate people's struggle for democracy and basic human rights. In Haiti people's unceasing effort to exercise their democratic aspirations have been subverted by systematic campaign by powerful local political and economic interests at the behest of the United States, but people do not give up, and in recent months their 'idol', Jean-Bertrand Aristide had to be 'allowed' to return to his country from his forced exile in South Africa, in the teeth of opposition from the Empire. Whether this will bring democracy to Haiti is another story.

And so with this background, we come to Libya and the Arab world and North Africa. Who could have predicted that the self-immolation of a poor vegetable seller, Mohamed Bouazizi, *who dared to earn a living on the streets* and refused to pay bribe to the police, would have sparked peoples' revolts throughout the Arab world? But it should not have surprised anybody, because Bouazizi epitomised the fate of millions (billions) of the masses of the people all over the neo-colonial world. His suicide brought to the surface the inherent inhumanity embedded in the neo-colonial system. Here is a beautiful poem that captures what the author, Billene Seyoum Woldeyes, calls the '*Cracking Fragility*' of the system.

The blood it flowed
Down an undetermined path
Washing with it
The expressions of a non-violent wrath

The fire it blazed

Over the body of Bouazizi, vegetables he was selling
Igniting a flame
Of global freedom story telling

The fighter planes roared
Through the skies of desert lands
Burying our secrets
Inside shifting Libyan sands

The streets clashed
Between Outtara-Gbagbo
As the vagina again a battlefield
In an Abidjan struggle of power-ego

.... (and so on)⁵

Freedom is an eternal desire, however repressed. Like a caged bird, it would rather fly than be fed. Sometimes it is only death, like that of Bouazizi, which provides the ultimate liberation.

Earlier, I made a conceptual distinction between RNDs and MPDs. The RNDs come out in better light conceptually, but in reality, those among the RNDs that are `rent seekers` and `asset accumulators`, or those who use an anti-imperialist rhetoric to hide the brutality inflicted on the people by their police and other agencies of state security, are as impossible to defend from a human rights perspective as their MPD colleagues. The question is: whose responsibility is it to bring about `regime change` whether they are either simply `puppets` of imperialism or `asset accumulators` and violators of people`s human rights masquerading as RNDs?

The political economy of North Africa and Arab Middle East

It would take a courageous person to dare to untangle the complex web of political, economic, religious, ethnic, tribal, and cultural networks that constitute the `political economy` of North Africa and the Arab Middle East. All I will try to do in this brief paper is to give a mere glance of the complexity of a constantly moving and fast changing scenario in summary bullet points. Notwithstanding this complexity, one thing comes out clearly: namely, that the strategic and economic interests of the Empire (US, Europe and Japan) in this region are the *dominant* force that moulds the fate of these nations. Here are some of the highlights (not comprehensive) of this complex network of the Empire and its neo-colonies in this region, and the emerging and deepening contradictions between the two.

1. The Empire has to protect four *primary vital interests* in the region, as part of its global strategy: military-strategic interests; access to oil; shield Israel from radical shift in the balance of power in the region; and prevent `hordes` of Arabs and North Africans `invading` Europe by boatloads as `refugees`. Within the Empire there is, of course,

⁵ http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/African_Writers/71953

different ordering of these `collective` interests between the constituent parts of the Empire. Thus, for example, the US has fewer worries about influx of Arab immigration and access to oil than Europe has. On the other hand, the US is more worried about Israel than say Japan. And so on.

2. Saudi Arabia is generally perceived as the most important `ally` of the Empire in the Arab world. But it too is a neo-colony of the Empire, though of a unique kind. Because of its oil wealth it is not economically dependent on the Empire; on the contrary, it finances the Empire. For instance, it paid the `debt` it is supposed to have `owed` to the Empire for invading Iraq and getting rid of Saddam Hussein by purchasing huge quantities of weapons from their companies (\$15 billion from the United States alone). Saudi Arabia plays a significant role protecting the Empire`s broader strategic goals in the region – such as those in relation to Israel; stabilising world oil prices; as a bulwark against Iran, the Empire`s anathema in the region; and lately, offering asylum to the other regional neo-colonial dictators, namely, deposed Presidents Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. The problem is that the Kingdom is ruled by a minority Sunni royalty whilst the large Shia population has religious affinity with the Shiite-ruled Iran. These are now demanding democratic reforms, which the Empire cannot afford to support if these lead to `regime change`, unless they are `properly engineered` so that a new regime continues to protect the Empire`s vital interests in the region. This, however, is unlikely to happen any time soon.
3. Bahrain. It is a Persian Gulf island connected by a causeway to Saudi Arabia. It has a Shiite minority population in the east, where most of its oil is produced. Bahrain's Sunni ruling family has links with Saudi Arabia, whilst many Shiite Bahrainis retain cultural and family ties with Iran. Bahrain is home to the U.S. Navy's Fifth Fleet. Protesters in Bahrain are calling for a `constitutional monarchy` and a change of government. They are backed by the opposition al-Wefaq party -- the largest Shiite opposition bloc in parliament -- and the General Federation of Trade Unions – which represents workers in industries including aluminium, oil and transport. But a `regime change` in Bahrain too would be a nightmare for the Empire, unless, again, the process of change is carefully `shepherded` by the Empire. It is no surprise that U.S. President Barack Obama told King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa `to show restraint` in dealing with peaceful protests and hold accountable those responsible for violence.
4. Yemen. This is one of the most awkward, almost uncontrollable, neo-colony of the Empire. But because of its geopolitical significance, the Empire cannot afford to let Yemen fall into enemy hands. The U.S. claims that Al Qaeda has training camps in the provinces of Sana'a and Abyan, and its warplanes have fired cruise missiles at them. Yemen gained political independence in 1962, but Britain retained the strategic port of Aden, until it was forced to withdraw in 1967 and the area became South Yemen. In the 1970s, the country had passed through a period of communist rule (like in Afghanistan),

but after the end of the cold war, the two countries were formally united as the Republic of Yemen. Its status as a neo-colony was restored; the government concluded a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) agreement with the IMF and invited the World Bank to help with the reform the public sector and privatization. Yemen is still a largely tribal society; in the mountains of northern Yemen live some 400 Zaydi tribes. Also, there are an estimated 700,000 Somali nationals living and working in Yemen. A long protracted civil war is being fought in the mountains between Yemeni forces and Shiite Houthi rebels. The 2009 South Yemen insurgency has further destabilized the country. Following the `Arab Spring` in early 2011, there have been mass protests, initially against unemployment, economic conditions and corruption, but later demands for President Ali Abdullah Saleh to resign. A regime change here, if not properly managed, would also cause serious problems for the Empire.

5. Djibouti. It is a strategically located country in the Horn of Africa. It borders the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, a critical passage way to the Suez Canal. It is essentially a French neo-colony. However, the former French military base Camp Lemonnier is now leased to the United States Central Command for operations related to Combined Joint Task Force Horn of Africa (CJTF-HOA), which is an integral part of AFRICOM. So Djibouti is an important strategic outpost of the Empire in the battle against Somali pirates in the region as well against terrorists. The U.S. maintains a military base in Djibouti with about 2,000 personnel, while France has 3,000 troops in the country. The Empire's dictator President Ismail Guelleh's People's Rally for Progress party has ruled since independence from France in 1977. In February 2011 protesters took to the street demanding that President Guelleh steps down. The Empire has to manage any change here carefully to protect its neo-colonial strategic interests in the region.

And so on and so forth with the other neo-colonies in the region, in an unending evolving scenario in one of the most complex and difficult areas for the Empire to control. This also reinforces the significance of Israel for the Empire; Israel is not just a `neo-colony` (though that too), but also an `outpost` of the Empire in the region. The Empire cannot do without Israel. As for Palestine, the Empire has tried for the last fifty years, with aid and political `mediation`, to encourage a neo-colonial puppet regime that would accept Israel. But with the Hamas taking over Gaza in a democratic election in 2006, the Empire and Israel are at their wits end to figure out on how to create a neo-colony puppet out of Palestine. The economic blockade of Gaza is clearly failing. At the time of writing this paper, on 4 May 2011, Hamas and Fatah signed a unity agreement. The Empire and Israel will try their best to break this unity. But if the Palestinians are able to sustain it, then this could pose a serious threat to the Empire's vital interests in the whole region.

The above is only a small window to a larger picture; or rather a `movie` of which the most recent episode is the `peoples` revolution` that has taken the region like a tornado. The `Jasmine Revolution` in Tunis ended the 23 years rule of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali on 14 January, 2011. This triggered similar actions for `radical democratic reforms` throughout the Arab world and North Africa that led to the ouster of Egypt's long time

president Hosni Mubarak, and widespread people's peaceful demonstrations (made violent with states' use of the police and the military against the people) in, among others, Algeria, Yemen, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Syria, Mauritania, and Libya. In Libya a full-scale civil war is in the offing at the time of writing this piece.

Imperial doublespeak and U-turn – the case of Libya

If there is one third world leader in the whole galaxy of the Empire's neo-colonial agents, one who also best exemplifies the contradiction between the Empire and a neo-colony, it is Qaddafi. Some might well argue that Qaddafi could not be described as a 'neo-colonial' agent. And that might be the case at his *personal* level. He has been probably the most controversial, and outrageously daring (and adventurous) challenger of the Empire. But Libya as a country never ceased to be a neo-colony of the Empire, despite 40 years of Qaddafi's attempts to break away from it, and to pose as a 'revolutionary' leader of Africa and the South.

A bit of history is necessary to understand Qaddafi and Libya. It is important to bear in mind that Libya is part of an ancient civilisation going back to the Phoenicians in the 5th century B.C. That, and the heroic resistance put by Libya's national hero, Omar Mukhtar, go some way to explain the arrogance of Qaddafi towards Western civilisation and colonisation. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, Libya fell in the hands of Italy. In October 1911, Italian battleships attacked Tripoli bombing the city for three days. Resistance followed under Mukhtar's guerrilla forces. Thousands of Libyans were forced to leave their land and live in concentration camps. Thousands died of hunger, illness and some of them were hanged or shot because they believed to be helping the Mojahideen. The Libyan historian Mahmoud Ali At-Taeb said in an interview with the Libyan magazine Ash-Shoura (October 1979) that in November 1930 there were at least seventeen funerals a day in the camps due to hunger, illness and depression. Today's Libya is a macabre re-play of the Libya of the 1920s. Mukhtar's nearly twenty years struggle came to an end when he was captured in battle and on September 16, 1931, hanged in front of his followers in the concentration camp of Sollouq by the orders of the Italian court. He was about 83 years old, but he refused and kept on fighting until death. Today Mukhtar's face is shown on the Libyan 10 Dinar bill. His final years were immortalized in the movie *'The Lion of the Desert' (1981)*, starring Anthony Quinn.

Coming to modern times, on 1 September 1969, Colonel Qaddafi overthrew King Idris in a bloodless military coup. The British tried to dislodge him (the so-called 'Hilton Assignment') but failed. Qaddafi has been in power ever since. In 1977, he renamed the Libyan Arab Republic the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Qaddafi created a system of 'Islamic socialism' which blended Arab nationalism; 'direct, popular democracy'; aspects of the welfare state; and Islamic morals (among them, outlawing alcohol and gambling), on all of which he elaborated in his *'The Green Book'*. He closed down American and British military bases and partly nationalised foreign oil and commercial interests in Libya. In June 1972 he announced that any Arab wishing to volunteer for Palestinian struggle for liberation could register at any Libyan embassy and would be given training on armed combat. In the hope of persuading the West to end support for Israel, he

promoted oil embargoes as a political weapon. On 7 October 1972, he praised the Lod Airport massacre, carried out by the Japanese Red Army. In 1976 after a series of attacks by the Irish Provisional IRA, he claimed that he had supplying arms to the IRA.

Notwithstanding all this, and despite Qaddafi being a thorn in the flesh of the Empire, Libya has remained a neo-colony of the Empire. A few facts attest to this reality. Libya is OPEC's 8th largest oil producer. It depends primarily upon revenues from the petroleum sector, which contributes practically all export earnings and over half of GDP. According to the International Energy Agency more than 70 percent of its oil is exported to European countries, especially Italy, France, Germany, and Spain, many of whom have invested heavily in Libyan oil. For example, by the end of October 2010, the number of French companies in Libya had nearly doubled from 2008 - most of them in the energy sector. It is no wonder that President Sarkozy is so nervous about the outcome of the current civil war in Libya. Italy alone buys a quarter of Libya's oil and 15 per cent of its natural gas. In all these years, Italian companies continued to retain a strong presence in Libya, which owned significant shares in Italy's Eni oil corporation, Fiat, Unicredit bank and Finmeccanica. In January 2002, Qaddafi purchased a 7.5% share of Italian football club *Juventus* for US\$ 21 million, through a long-standing association with Italian industrialist Gianni Agnelli. As well as Italy, several other European and British companies maintained strong commercial interests in Libya. This is at the national level. But at the personal level, the Qaddafi family became extremely wealthy as a result of his continuing links with the Empire. The \$70 billion Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) is a state institution, but it would be a safe bet that Qaddafi has (or had, until recent freeze on it) full control over it. Whilst he financed many groups fighting the Empire, among them for example, the Nation of Islam in the U.S. and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in the Philippines, he and his sons, known to live in opulent luxury the West, often donated money to 'liberal' causes, such as the London School of Economics Centre for the 'Study of Global Governance' ; indeed, the former Director of the LSE, Anthony Giddens, (Prime Minister Tony Blair's political mentor) visited Qaddafi in 2007 to give him some lectures on 'democracy'. Qaddafi allegedly has been using Swiss banks to accumulate wealth for himself and his family.

Above all, it is because of the unpredictable character of Qaddafi that he is trusted neither by the Empire nor by his fellow heads of state in the Arab League and the African Union. President Museveni, in praising Qaddafi as a 'nationalist' criticised him for his 'mistakes' -- among them, backing Idi Amin in Uganda; pushing for a United States of Africa; proclaiming himself 'king of kings'; ignoring the plight of Southern Sudan; and promoting terrorism.

For the Empire, Qaddafi had become an unreliable, indeed dangerous, neo-colonial dictator. The Empire had to bring him to book. As stated earlier, when the normal '*structural*' means fail to discipline errant neo-colonial dictators (among them Robert Mugabe, for example), then the Empire deploys '*conjunctural*' means, including sanctions. Here is a very brief account of it in the case of Qaddafi, and how he was finally disciplined to toe the Imperial line. For most of the 1980s and 90s, Libya was under the Empire's economic and diplomatic sanctions. More than that, in April 1986, a joint U.S. Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps attacked Libya. In 1993 the U.N. imposed sanctions against it. As the sanctions began to

bite, President Nelson Mandela made a media-hyped visit to Qaddafi in 1997 followed by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. As a result of these overtures, Qaddafi agreed in 1999 to hand over two Libyans accused of planting a bomb on Pan Am Flight 103, which came down on Lockerbie, Scotland. Gaddafi paid compensation to victims of Lockerbie -- US\$2.7 billion to the families of the 270 victims, i.e. up to US\$10 million each. The UN sanctions were thereupon suspended, but U.S. sanctions against Libya remained in force. Qaddafi went on to cooperate with investigations into previous Libyan acts of state-sponsored terrorism, and agreed to end his nuclear weapons program. On 15 May 2006, the U.S. State Department announced that it would restore full diplomatic relations with Libya, and that it would be removed from the list of nations supporting terrorism. Libya was thus restored to its *ancien regime* status as a neo-colony.

Following Qaddafi's rehabilitation, several imperial Heads of State, most flamboyantly the British Prime Minister Tony Blair, French President Sarkozy and Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi rushed to Tripoli to shower the 'dictator' with photo opportunities of kisses and hugs and to secure from him investment opportunities as well as access to oil. In March 2004, Blair went to Libya, and praised Qaddafi's for his co-operation. In July 2007, Sarkozy visited Libya and signed a number of bilateral and multilateral (European Union) agreements with the neo-colonial dictator. In August 2008, Berlusconi signed a landmark cooperation treaty in Benghazi, under which Italy agreed to pay \$5 billion to Libya as compensation for its former military occupation, in exchange for Libya agreeing to stop illegal immigration to Italy, and investments in Italian companies. As the diplomatic editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, David Blair, said, Libya's 'Brother Leader', had gone from being 'the epitome of revolutionary chic' to 'an eccentric statesman with entirely benign relations with the West'.⁶

Britain's Prime Minister Cameron, not to miss his turn, went to Libya to sell arms to the Empire's neo-colonial dictator, even as the people were marching against him in Tripoli. But soon the imperial dictators were to regret their sudden passion for Qaddafi. The Tunisian and Egyptian 'people's revolutions' took them by surprise. When the contagion spread to Libya, the Empire could no longer defend the recently rehabilitated Qaddafi. It jumped on the 'democratic bandwagon', making a quick U-turn, and ditched Qaddafi as quickly as they had dashed to hug him.

That Muammar Qaddafi ran a tight-fisted autocratic regime in Libya for decades was a well-known fact. His autocracy was never a matter of much concern to the Empire. There were other equally harsh regimes in the service of the Empire in other parts of the Arab world, such as Bahrain and Yemen, as well as in many pro-imperial neo-colonies in Africa. What tipped the scale against Qaddafi was his unreliability, and not the fact that he was a 'dictator'. The challenge the Empire faced since his turnaround in 1999 had been how to turn Qaddafi from an RND to an MPD, from a dictator who served 'revolutionary' causes to one who would serve imperial interests without creating problems for it. When this did not happen, he had to go and replaced by a reliable MPD.

⁶ *The Daily Telegraph*, 13 August 2009.

In a speech defending U.S. military action in Libya, Obama said: 'The democratic impulses that are dawning across the region would be eclipsed by the darkest form of dictatorship, as repressive leaders concluded that violence is the best strategy to cling to power.'⁷ Whether Obama was driven by his own 'high ideals' or by the earlier mentioned vital global military-strategic interests of the Empire is immaterial. It was not a personal or simply 'presidential' matter in any case. If intervention is required to protect imperial interests, there are ample excuses to justify it. We know from hindsight, for example, that the Empire created the bogey of 'weapons of mass destruction' to prepare the psychological and political conditions to 'justify' aggression on the neo-colony of Iraq. In the case of Tunisia and Egypt the Empire ditched Ben Ali and Mubarak, long time 'allies' (read, '*neo-colonial dictators*'). In the case of Libya, after the people came to the streets of Tripoli, the Empire had probably decided quite early on for 'regime change', following the example of Tunisia and Egypt. Future WikiLeaks type of revelation might probably provide clues as to exactly when the Empire had decided for a 'regime change' for Libya.

But Libya was a neo-colony, not a direct colony, and led, above all, by an erratic RND. The Empire could not just attack Libya and take out Qaddafi. A proper rationale had to be engineered, one that could be sold to the Empire's own sceptical publics, to 'allies' in the other neo-colonies, and to allies in non-imperial Europe and the rest of the third world. The critical support needed here was that of the other neo-colonies in the Arab World, best of all if it could be expressed institutionally by the Arab League. Here is where the 'diplomatic reality' of power and arms-twisting took over from the 'existential reality' of Libya. After much neo-colonial 'persuasion' and carrot dangling this was achieved. For years the League has been belittled, even ridiculed, by the Empire for its flabbiness and foibles. Suddenly, when the League supported the no-fly zone against Libya, it became 'the voice of the Arab people'. Furthermore, it was also necessary to avoid the vetoes of the other permanent members of the Security Council. In the event, Russia and China abstained, as also India and Brazil, for reasons that we cannot go into here. For good measure, the African neo-colonies – South Africa, Nigeria and Gabon – voted in favour of the resolution. Once these 'enabling conditions' of a new 'diplomatic reality' was created, the Empire was quickly able to get the Security Council of the United Nations to pass a 'consensus' resolution. Resolution 1973 (2011) demanded 'an immediate ceasefire in Libya, including an end to the current attacks against civilians', which it said might constitute 'crimes against humanity'; it imposed a ban on all flights in the country's airspace -- 'a no-fly zone'; and tightened sanctions on the Qaddafi regime and its supporters. It authorized Member States, 'acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, to take all necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack in the country, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory' -- requesting them to immediately inform the Secretary-General of such measures.

However, even before the ink was dry, France had begun to bomb Libya. Soon France was joined by Britain and the United States, until the 'authority' of the U.N. was effectively transferred from it to the NATO.

⁷ Quoted in Muscara Aprile, Inter-Press Service (IPS), Washington, April 5, 2011.

International lawyers will no doubt write copious papers on the legality of the actions that followed in terms of both the S.C. resolution, and international law. For example, in an 'open letter to President Barack Obama on the crisis in Libya' the National Conference of Black Lawyers argued that there was 'no lawful basis for commencing a military campaign' in Libya.⁸ But in the world of 'diplomatic reality', this is just 'a lot of noise' after the fact. And in any case, there are always several contending views on the legality or otherwise of such actions. Above all, there is no equivalent of Nuremburg Tribunal or the International Criminal Court that dare put on trial the Imperials Dictators: Obama, Clinton, Sarkozy, or Cameron.

The dangers of liberal "humanitarian" interventionism

Faced with a situation of genocide or impending genocide no human being would want to sit and simply watch it happen. When the alarm was raised that Qaddafi was approaching Benghazi and on entry around 15 March 2011, and that he would unleash a reign of murder and terror, all scruples about 'imperial intervention' were set aside; the overriding concern was how to stop this from happening. People quoted the tragic experience of Rwanda when the U.N. set itself aside even when it was officially known that lack of action would lead to genocide. Few ventured to show the differences between the two situations of Rwanda and Libya. The U.N. stepped in Libya even when the case of an alleged 'impending genocide' had no evidence to back it, except speculation. No matter. When the diplomatic dust was settled, the S.C. Resolution 1973, among other things, authorised a 'no-fly zone' in order 'to protect civilians under threat of attack in the country, including Benghazi.'

The Empire's ideologues – from 'left' liberals to neo-con diehards – rallied behind the action in Libya. For example, in his *'Open Letter to the Left'* Juan Cole (professor at the University of Michigan and a well-known 'leftist' public intellectual, and historian of the modern Middle East and South Asia) invited 'the left' in the U.S. (and presumably beyond) to a 'civilised discussion', having declared that he was himself 'unabashedly cheering the liberation movement.' In a clear attempt to entice 'the left' he said that 'behind the movement are workers and townspeople'. Anticipating the dilemma of the left he said that the 'Left has to choose between them and opposing foreign occupation.' In order to heighten the dilemma, and show the urgency of supporting 'foreign occupation', he said Qaddafi 'killed 8,000 (or about)' and that the 'prospect loomed of a massacre of committed rebels on a large scale.' To add a bit of spice, he went to say that the UN resolution was passed to save massacre by 'Mad Dog Qaddafi' who would have 'killed aspirations of workers and poor people and jeopardized democratic movement in the region'. In an odd twist of events – in fact a lie -- he argued that it was the Arab League which 'provoked' the UN intervention. He claimed that the Chinese and Russian abstentions did not invalidate 'gold standard credentials of the Security Council'. He cautioned his left colleagues that 'the arguments against intervention have to be answered', putting his detractors into three categories – 'absolute pacifists; absolute anti-interventionists; and anti-military pragmatists'. Having created these straw men, he tried to knock them down most unprofessionally, and dismissed out of hand as 'bizarre'

⁸ <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/category/advocacy/72569>

any suggestion that the reason for intervention might be to secure access to Libyan oil. Summing up the position for the left, he said, `... at issue is if Qaddafi could have been allowed to kill innocent people`. In case the left were afraid of a prolonged war, he assured them that `Only 90 days are needed to level playing fields for democrats.` As a parting shot, he pinned down the left with a sermon: `The Left should learn to chew gum and walk. Take ethical progressive position. Don't make 'foreign intervention an absolute taboo.`⁹

Juan Cole certainly had an effect. In the ensuing dialogue, one of them wrote: `I am a Quaker. Nevertheless, I support this intervention.` I might add that the epithet `mad dog` that Cole used for Qaddafi is a throwback from the colonial period when `dissident` uncontrollable nationalists were so described. Once a dog is pronounced `mad`, you have a licence to kill it, which is what the Empire has done with Saddam Hussein, Osama bin Laden, and might do with Qaddafi. The Empire's media, public opinion, and `left` liberal ideologues (barring a minority) will celebrate the capture – or death - of another `dog`.

Conclusions

The conclusions derived from the above analysis and a radical conceptual framework are a set of barebones propositions. As such they leave out much of the meat and muscle of the empirical evidence and conceptual elaboration that underlies the basic argument of the paper. Therefore the conclusions may appear simplistic or contrived. But there is nothing simple or contrived about the conclusions. This is the real world in which we live. The existential reality is always obscured by diplomatic and political reality in an asymmetrical power situation, and manipulation of the media by those who control it to promote certain interests and viewpoints.

1. Libya is not yet a fully self-governed country; it is a neo-colony of the Empire, which effectively controls its economy and indirectly rules it.
2. For the Empire it has to ensure that the regime is firmly grounded to protect (or at least not put to risk) the collective imperial global strategy in the country and the region. These are: military-strategic interests in the Gulf and Mediterranean region; access to oil; shielding Israel from radical shift in the balance of power in the region; and securing the borders of the Empire from the `invasion` of Arabs and North African `immigrant refugees`.
3. The Empire is not concerned whether the Libyan regime is an autocratic or its people poor as long as it continues to deliver `imperial goods` and does not endanger its vital interests.
4. However, Libya is a neo-colony, not a colony. Gone are the days when the Empire could simply send in its troops and militarily eliminate a `rebellious` movement, such as, for example, the Mau Mau in Kenya. It is no longer that simple. A neo-colony creates difficulties for the Empire – not insurmountable problems, but they have to be addressed. Among the neo-colonial regimes there are those such as Mugabe and Qaddafi that are `radical nationalist dictators` (RNDs); these have some popular support within their countries and in the region

⁹ Cole, Juan. 2011. *Links, International Journal of Socialist Renewal*, March 29, 2011. <http://links.org.au/node/2240>.

(in this case, Africa); and they cannot be simply 'taken out' militarily without causing much 'collateral damage' in terms of physical destruction, civilian deaths, and diplomatic fallout. So they have to be 'disciplined' or 'brought to order' by other means, including, for example, targeted sanctions against the leadership of the 'rebellious' regimes.

5. In the mean time, however, the world has changed. The cold war is over and the Empire is weakening though multiple causes, including systemic failures at the level of managing the global economy and finance, and the challenges posed by new centres of economic power, especially China. If the Empire needs to invade a neo-colony for whatever reason, it has to create a public opinion, as well a diplomatic 'consensus', to support the invasion.

6. Public opinion is easier to create; it is malleable, prone to 'humanitarian' compassion, and devoid of resources to undertake its own research and investigation into the realities on the ground. With media manipulation and carefully chosen language – 'imminent genocide', 'mad dog', etc. – it is not too difficult to get public opinion (global as well as national) on its side. The diplomatic realities are, however, more complex and less easy to manipulate. Here, however, it is relatively easy to manipulate neo-colonies within the Empire; in this case within the Arab world and Africa. But the more independent countries such as BRIC are more difficult to manipulate. The Empire has to deal with them at the diplomatic level. This was achieved in the case of Libya with the UN Security Council resolution 1973.

7. Countries like Russia are now saying that the NATO countries have stepped outside their Security Council mandate. With the civil war continuing unabated, it is now the Empire that has gone 'out of control'. Among other things, it is targeting Qaddafi and his family for what can only be described as murder. The shroud of 'humanitarian' support for the 'people' of Libya is now unveiled to expose imperial interest in 'regime change', which is not part of its mandate. Even the Arab League is now unsure if it can continue to support the military action by NATO. The African Union has expressed openly that its efforts at mediation have been frustrated by the Western countries.

Possible way forward

1. The Empire now seeks to extend its U.N. mandate to allow 'boots on the ground'. But the only way forward is for the Empire to withdraw its demand for 'regime change' and to negotiate with Qaddafi. The Empire and its neo-colonial agent in Afghanistan have been forced, behind the scenes, to negotiate with the Taliban after now nearly ten years' war. They must do the same with the incumbent regime in Libya.

2. The Empire has lost the legal basis of what now constitutes a clear violation of the United Nations Security Council resolution as well as international law. This is not an academic issue; if there are doubts about this then the General Assembly of the UN should ask for an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on the matter.

3. The G77 countries and China and Russia must find a way of extricating the Empire out of this potential quagmire and help unite the people of Libya to take matters in their own hands.

And the African Union must persist in its mediation efforts between the rival factions, in spite of its rejection by the Benghazi based Libyan National Transitional Council (NTC).

4. At the end of the day, it is only the people of Libya who can make their own destiny. They must unite in order to continue to struggle for their genuine liberation from the Empire. Taking into account their past history and culture, they must build institutions of governance based on participatory democracy, transparent norms of justice and the rule of law, and fair and equitable access to Libya's resources for the development of the people.

Postscript

This essay was written in May 2011, about ten weeks after the onset of the Libyan crisis. It is now nearly the end of September. An inevitable time lag between writing and publication has made this postscript necessary. In May it was still possible to suggest a peaceful resolution of the conflict through negotiations with Qaddafi. The Empire had ruled that out, as also all mediation efforts by the African Union. But the war is not over.

Things have changed dramatically. However, the main line of the paper's analysis remains valid; indeed the events have reinforced the conclusions. Libya, as evidence bears out, is not a fully self-governed country; it is a neo-colony. The essay makes a distinction between 'diplomatic' and 'existential' realities. NATO forces have been able to use the 'diplomatic space' offered by the Security Council Resolution 1973 to change the 'existential reality' – the Empire has succeeded in bringing about a 'regime change'. Despite the doublespeak about 'democracy' and 'human rights', it is clear that the Empire is not concerned whether the new regime is democratic or autocratic, or if people's lives are 'short, brutish and nasty', which is what has happened to the thousands of innocent civilians since the capture of Tripoli. All that the Empire is concerned about is that its strategic military and economic interests are protected. Indeed, there is an indecent haste on the part of the Empire's oil and industrial corporations to dash to Tripoli or Benghazi to conclude commercial deals. The Empire has carefully engineered the so-called 'public opinion' in their countries to 'legitimise' what in truth is an illegal imperial war of aggression and occupation -- including clandestine specialised 'boots on the ground', surreptitiously smuggled into Libya. The Empire has also succeeded in getting the bulk of the international community to recognise the National Transitional Council (NTC) as the 'government' of Libya.

However, two things remain uncertain. One is the extent to which Qaddafi remains an influential factor, and for how long. As of now (September 2011), he has evaded capture, and his loyalist forces are still offering resistance. In the body of the paper we had seen how the 'Lion of the Desert', Libya's national hero Omar Mukhtar, had evaded capture for twenty years after Italy invaded Libya in 1911. The war technology has changed since then, and Qaddafi may not be able to evade capture (or assassination) for long. But the desert is a mysterious haven for those who know how to navigate it. And the second is the question of how the various contending forces within the NTC will play out. There is a strong militant Moslem Brotherhood contingent within the NTC and the rebel forces. In July the rebel military commander -- General Abdel Fattah Younis -- was killed by the rebels themselves in

mysterious circumstances. It is clear that the NTC and NATO forces have covered up the mystery, but the internal struggle for power within the NTC is a time bomb. In the body of the paper we had argued that a neo-colonial state is a contested site for control between the people and the Empire. Whether the 'regime' that has taken over Libya will remain Mimicmen Puppet Dictators (MPD) or turn into Radical Nationalist Dictators (RNDs) -- as described in the body of the paper -- is still an open question.

As we said in May, it is only the people of Libya who, at the end of the day, can make their own destiny. The Empire will find that Libya – like Afghanistan and Iraq – will prove to be a sticky patch on the imperial map, a desert from whose depths the voice of resistance of Qaddafi and Omar Mukhtar will continue to haunt the Empire and, ultimately, reverse its ephemeral 'victory' over the people of Libya. It is a matter of time – five years, ten years, fifty years. The imperial illegality and immorality cannot sustain itself for ever.

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September 20, 2011

