

Libyan government assists US aggression in the Middle East

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Libya's declaration that it will abandon its "weapons of mass destruction" (WMD) ends a long process through which the regime of Colonel Muammar Gadhaffi has sought to accommodate itself to the United States' plans for a redivision of the world.

Under a deal negotiated between the Libyan, US and British governments announced on December 19, Libya admitted that it possessed nuclear and chemical weapons "programmes" which it would henceforth dismantle with international verification. In future its missiles would be limited to a range of 300 kilometers. Documentation has been handed over, and inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency are to enter Libya. In return, the Libyan government has been offered an end to economic sanctions that have barred US investment to the country for a decade and a half. United Nations sanctions had previously been suspended.

The deal, announced simultaneously by US President George W. Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair, was presented as a coup for both governments, confirming the correctness of the "war on terror" just days after the arrest of Saddam Hussein. The Bush government boasted that Gadhaffi's capitulation showed that US military might, in the words of Pentagon adviser Kenneth Adelman, "scares the bejesus out of rogue dictators." Columnist William Safire opined that Gadhaffi had come up with a "strategy to avoid being next on the regime-change list: pre-emptive surrender." Gadhaffi had been "transformed into a pussycat by the force of American arms."

With US forces embroiled in a bloody occupation of Iraq, the news from Libya was a much-needed fillip for the Bush administration—proving that violence works.

In the British camp, Blair offered full support in re-integrating Libya into the "international community". Rather than a triumph of force, however, the *Guardian* newspaper claimed the agreement was a "seriously impressive achievement" for the Foreign Office and for former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook, who began the rapprochement with Libya and who opposed the attack on Iraq. An editorial trilled that "patient diplomacy, dialogue, negotiation, clearly enunciated principles and red lines, respect, mutual trust, and attractive incentives—these are the civic tools that helped to bring... the most significant... breakthrough in arms control" since the later Cold War era.

Essentially the rapprochement demonstrates the inability of the national bourgeoisie in the former colonial countries—even its more radical representatives—to oppose the predatory ambitions of the

imperialist powers. It will pave the way for further acts of military aggression by the US in the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere.

Gadhaffi came to power in 1969, promising to develop the former Italian colony along the lines once promised by his hero, Egypt's Abdul Nasser. The country's large oil industry was nationalised and the monarchy overthrown. Gadhaffi, like other radical nationalist leaders of formerly colonised countries, was able to lean on the Soviet Union as a counterweight to the US and Western Europe. This gave the Libyan government a veneer of independence. Gadhaffi adopted a distinctive anti-imperialist stance and allied himself with national liberation movements worldwide.

From the 1980s, however, Libya increasingly became the focus of US hostility, as part of the Reagan administration's drive to "roll back" Soviet influence. A series of military provocations were mounted by US fighter aircraft and warships, culminating in the 1986 bombing of Tripoli—an attack which killed Gadhaffi's own daughter. The US applied economic sanctions at the same time. Libyan officials were expelled from London following the killing of a policewoman during a siege of the Libyan embassy and the assassination in Britain of several opponents of the Gadhaffi regime.

UN sanctions were imposed in 1992 following a US and British campaign to blame Libya for the 1988 destruction of Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie. In the end a combination of Western sanctions and the collapse of the Soviet Union deprived Gadhaffi of any freedom of manoeuvre. Faced with economic ruin, his government, and the wealthy bourgeois layer around it, set out to restore friendly relations with the major imperialist powers, particularly the US.

In 1999, following a UK-sponsored deal to hand over for trial the two Libyans accused of perpetrating the Lockerbie attack, UN sanctions were removed. A flood of investment began to find its way into Libya, primarily from Europe. In contrast US sanctions were not removed, leaving Libya open to commercial domination by the European powers. Italian ENI, French TotalFinaElf and others developed substantial interests in Libya, seeking to exploit the high-quality, easily produced and underexplored oil reserves within a country which holds three percent of known world reserves.

Concerned at the prospect of missing out on a bonanza, US oil companies such as Conoco, Occidental, Amerada Hess and Marathon began agitating for the final lifting of sanctions and the

resumption of full trading relations with Libya. Prior to 1986 Amerada Hess, Marathon and Conoco, together with Libya's National Oil Company, had been producing 850,000 barrels of oil per day. The Libyan government never seized the US companies' assets.

Despite the close relations enjoyed by these companies with the Bush administration, it was not immediately possible to erase two decades of anti-Libyan hysteria among both Bush supporters and the top levels of the US state apparatus. Libya was only recently included in Bush's "axis of evil" list, making the country a potential target for US military aggression.

The Libyan government did everything it could to remedy this situation. It seized on the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre as an opportunity to deepen relations with the US. The *Observer* newspaper reported recently that the head of the Libyan intelligence services, Musa Kousa, a man expelled from Britain in 1980, appeared at Heathrow airport, London in October 2001 to meet the Italian Deputy Foreign Minister, the chairman of the North Africa department of the US State Department, the US ambassador in London and several top CIA and MI6 officers.

Ostensibly the meeting was to discuss compensation payments from Libya to victims of the Lockerbie bomb. But what seems to have emerged was a political framework designed to end US sanctions in return for Libya agreeing not only to accept responsibility for Lockerbie, but to also collaborate with US efforts against Al Qaeda and wind up whatever efforts it was making to acquire nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. According to the *Observer*, Kousa handed over a large pile of documents with details of Islamic terrorists operating in Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and their organising units.

In the last two years relations between Libya, the US and UK and their allies have become increasingly cordial. Libya's standing on the US "axis of evil" has been downplayed. In August 2003 the influential US-based Middle East Institute urged the Bush government to review its sanctions policy, warning that the government "should be under no illusions that unilateral US sanctions would be even partially effective."

Compensation terms for Lockerbie have been agreed, with Libya starting to release funds to relatives of the disaster's victims. In return, the UN Security Council voted in September to finally end its already suspended sanctions. France, also in dispute with Libya over a downed airliner, and the US abstained, but did not exercise any veto. Shortly afterwards, Spanish Prime Minister and Bush ally Jose Maria Aznar visited Libya with a view to expanding commercial links.

Libya has also supported British policy over Zimbabwe, cutting off oil supplies to the beleaguered regime of Robert Mugabe.

The US deputy ambassador to the UN, James Cunningham, warned Libya that it still needed to address the remaining bone of contention between Washington and Tripoli—"weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery".

To this end, in December, Kousa, along with the Libyan ambassadors to Rome and London, met with the director general of the UK Foreign Office and leading MI6 spies in the exclusive Travellers' Club in London's Pall Mall. An agreed statement was forwarded to Blair, UK Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and US

National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice. Libya would agree to abandon its primitive nuclear weapon research, biological weapons—described elsewhere as at the level of booby trapping munitions with human faeces—and chemical weapons thought to be more of a threat to Libyan citizens than to the major powers. In return the US would lift sanctions it already considered ineffective, and allow its oil majors into the market from which they had been excluded since 1986 and where they were in danger of losing to their European rivals. The US also offered to sell Libya more modern conventional weaponry.

Libya has provided the Bush administration with a propaganda coup. US National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice apparently insisted that the decrepit Libyan arsenal should be talked up and that any final statement should include references to "weapons programmes". This facilitates comparison with Iraq, where the failure of the occupation forces to find any actual weapons of mass destruction has led Washington to shift to a less ambitious claim that Saddam Hussein had "weapons programmes".

By allying itself closely with the US and UK, inviting weapons inspectors onto Libyan soil, Gadhaffi is also contributing considerably to the isolation of Iran and Syria—both of which are facing ultimatums from the US over their alleged WMD programmes and accusations of sponsoring terrorism.

At the same time as it is making its peace with US imperialism, internally the Libyan government is pressing ahead with a mass privatisation programme intended to enrich Gadhaffi's immediate supporters in a country where unemployment already stands at 30 percent.

Last June Gadhaffi appointed Shukri Ghanem, former head of the oil producers' cartel OPEC, as head of the economics ministry. Ghanem has now been elevated to secretary of the General People's Council, making him effectively prime minister. He is charged with the privatisation of 300 state companies, a move presented by Gadhaffi as "people's capitalism".

Shortly before his agreement with US imperialism was announced, Gadhaffi told an audience of Libyan women that "the times of Arab nationalism and unity are gone forever... these ideas which mobilised the masses are only a worthless currency." Intended as a criticism of Libya's neighbours, Gadhaffi's words are a fitting condemnation of his own regime and the failure of bourgeois nationalism in all its manifestations to satisfy the social needs and basic democratic rights of the Arab working class and oppressed masses.



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