

British ruling elite advance “humanitarian” cover for intervention in Libya

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Britain’s ruling elite are sharpening their neo-colonial claws once again in the guise of “humanitarian intervention”, this time utilising the suffering of the Libyan masses.

In the last days, the UK has led the way in demanding Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi “must go”, insisting “all options” in achieving a desired “regime change” are on the table.

The capture of numerous British military and intelligence operatives—six SAS men and an MI5 agent—by rebel forces in Benghazi made clear that the powers that be are already hard at work to this end. It has since been revealed by the *Daily Mail* that ministers have approved “a presence on the ground” of the SAS and MI6, who “will link up with Special Forces already in Libya to provide protection and give informal military advice to the Libyan opposition.”

The UK frigate *Westminster* and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship *Argus* have been sent to the area, British aircraft in Malta are primed and 600 Black Watch soldiers are on 24-hour standby “to fly in and avert a humanitarian catastrophe”, the *Mail* continued.

A government spokesman said that President Barack Obama and Prime Minister David Cameron had agreed to “press forward with planning” the next course of action should Gaddafi defy demands that he step down.

Answering questions in parliament Wednesday, Cameron would not “guarantee” that taking action would be contingent on the approval of the United Nations Security Council. He was keeping options open should the motion drafted by Britain and France for the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya be vetoed. A no-fly zone would constitute an act of war, since it could be policed only by shooting down any Libyan planes breaking the ban and attacking the country’s airbases.

While the military “options” are put in place, preparing the political and legal case for intervention is more complex. Tony Blair’s infamous 2004 “deal in the desert” with Gaddafi is the cause of justified public scepticism as to the ruling elite’s sudden volte face as to the Libyan dictator.

Over the last years, government ministers, oil and business corporations through to royalty, leading universities and academics have lined up to ingratiate themselves with the brutal Gaddafi regime in return for contracts and monies: So far, indeed, that Abdul Baset Ali al-Megrahi, convicted for the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 that killed 270 people, was returned to Libya from a Scottish jail in 2009 on the grounds of ill health.

Above all, Iraq looms large over the calls for “humanitarian intervention” into Libya. It is now a matter of record that Britain’s ruling elite, its intelligence services and leading ministers, wilfully lied about Iraq’s supposed “weapons of mass destruction” so as to concoct a justification for its illegal invasion in 2003. Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have died as a consequence, and the country laid to waste. Today, the client regime installed at the behest of Washington and London is violently repressing opposition parties and demonstrations in Baghdad.

It is against this background that the political establishment, and its media, have begun a bogus “discussion” as to the UK’s “moral” responsibility to the Libyan masses.

At the time of the Iraq war, *Guardian* columnist Timothy Garton Ash praised Blair for his “strong Gladstonian instincts for humanitarian intervention.” Writing in the newspaper on March 3, however, Ash acknowledged that Iraq gave “liberal intervention” a “bad name” and “Blair nearly killed it”.

“To intervene or not to intervene? [in Libya] That is the question,” he insisted.

Iraq wasn’t really a liberal intervention at all, Garton Ash continued, although “liberal arguments” were used, and “some liberals supported” the war and occupation. Among the real reasons for the invasion was Washington’s desire to project its overwhelming military superiority and to establish control over Iraq’s oil, he acknowledged, as if similar considerations did not apply in Libya.

Instead, with twisted logic, he claimed, “The fact that western countries like Britain and Italy were until very

recently sucking up to Gaddafi in the most craven fashion, and selling him weapons that he can now turn against his own people” made it more vital to pose the question as to how long to wait before intervening in the country.

Although unconvinced at the efficacies of a no-fly zone, “We should prepare contingency plans,” he argued.

Writing in the *Independent*, Geoffrey Robertson QC—a member of the UN's justice council—concurred that the “shadow of Iraq invasion illegality has tainted talk of ‘liberal interventionism’.”

Despite this, “The lesson of Iraq is not that this country should never use force against another, but that never again should it do so in breach of international law.”

Robertson outlined what he described as his “contested” view that intervention into Libya could be legally justified.

“[T]he use of force by Nato [is] not merely ‘legitimate’ but lawful” to stop murder of innocent civilians, he wrote, citing the “safe havens” operation by the US, UK and France in northern Iraq supposedly to protect the Kurdish population and the NATO bombing of Kosovo. Moreover, the rule of law was developing to “allow ‘coalitions of the willing’ to use appropriate force to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe”.

Such a coalition could intervene with force if the Security Council had “identified a situation as a threat to world peace”, Robertson went on. It had already done so, he argued, by referring Libya “unanimously to the ICC prosecutor”.

On Thursday, former Liberal Democrat leader Menzies Campbell and Philippe Sands QC made a similar argument, in the *Guardian*, in favour of intervention. It was necessary to establish an “enforceable no-fly zone” and ensure arms supplies to the opposition, they wrote. While “the debacle of Iraq” meant that this could not “be led by Britain and the US”, the two countries should provide “active support” to the Arab League, African Union and Gulf Cooperation Council in implementing such measures.

The depiction of the Iraq invasion as an aberrant departure from the supposedly “just war” against Yugoslavia is false. Only in the last months, a report by the Council of Europe detailed fascistic crimes carried out by the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) prior to, during and after NATO's war—including the murder of Serb and Kosovan Albanian civilian prisoners to sell their body organs.

KLA commander and current Prime Minister Hachim Thaci is accused of heading a criminal network involved in murder, prostitution and drug trafficking and placing Kosovo under “mafia-like structures of organised crime”.

Kosovo and Iraq are part of a continuum in the efforts of the US and its allies to assert their geo-political interests in strategic regions in the face of growing competition from

major rivals.

To claim that no such considerations are involved today is wilful deception. If anything, they are even more pressing. The US stands at the centre of the world financial crisis, and its economic and political decline is even more gravely threatened by the popular unrest sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa.

The situation is graver still for the British bourgeoisie, which has long relied on the dominance of US imperialism to shore up its own weakening world position. Writing in the *Telegraph*, Sir Richard Dalton, former British ambassador to Libya, warned of the danger of a stalemate whereby neither Gaddafi nor the opposition could land the knock-out blow.

“Amid the uncertainties”, he wrote, “Britain and its partners must explore actively and seriously how international armed humanitarian intervention could be undertaken urgently.”

“There are bad memories in Libya of European and US involvement in their affairs”, he warned, so planners and diplomats would “have to weigh their choice of national contingents for any armed intervention carefully.”

Several factors made a coalition behind intervention a possibility—not least that oil prices are around \$120 a barrel, so causing “alarm for the world economy”.

Just as pressing as oil and business contracts are the counterrevolutionary designs of British imperialism. For decades it has relied on the dictatorial regimes in the Middle East and North Africa to guard its interests against the impoverished and oppressed masses. That is why, even as they were taking measures to forcibly put down opposition in their own countries, Cameron led a delegation of UK arms manufacturers on a trade tour of the various Gulf despots.

Tellingly, the *Guardian* reported that one concern amongst “senior British military officials” as to “committing British forces to Libya” was that “they may be needed in the event of crises in other countries, notably Bahrain and Oman”. “The Gulf states, bases for British warships and aircraft, are of greater significance strategically for the UK than Libya, whose main interest is commercial, they indicated.”



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