

MSNBC's Rachel Maddow lines up behind Obama's attack on Libya

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On March 21, MSNBC's Rachel Maddow offered a defense of the Obama administration and its role in launching a military assault on Libya. With tortured logic, Maddow attempted to show that the means by which President Barack Obama made public this new act of great power aggression revealed a chasm separating his administration from that of his predecessor, George W. Bush.

The arguments offered by the MSNBC news program host, a principal voice of the American liberal-left in the mainstream media, are absurd and unworthy, but it is unlikely anyone in and around her circle will object. This social layer is fully committed to the Obama administration and, moreover, to the defense of American imperial interests, with which it identifies, in the final analysis, its own material comfort and peace of mind. This helps explain the collapse of the official anti-war movement in the US since the 2008 election.

Maddow began her program Monday in a typically flippant manner. "In the United States of America, we are used to thinking of ourselves as a superpower, as a world leader, as a country capable of throwing our weight around when we feel the need to. ... We go to war all the time—big wars, little wars, medium-sized wars, weird wars, normal wars, wars. America as a country fights a lot of wars."

Maddow's cynical tone *hints* at criticism and a vaguely anti-establishment, even anti-war stance, while actually committing her to no position or analysis whatsoever. Why does the US government go to war so frequently? What has been the character of those wars? What is her attitude toward those conflicts? About that, nothing ...

After showing clips of Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and the most recent Bush announcing military actions from the White House

(against Grenada, Libya, Iraq, Serbia, and Iraq once more), Maddow told her viewers, "Now that the United States has embarked on its latest new military intervention in Libya, I would love to be able to show you the current president's Oval Office address on the subject, but there isn't one."

Maddow noted that Obama made his public statement about the latest US military action while in Brazil. She continued, "President Obama announced his own military intervention, but he pointedly declined the opportunity to do it in a way that US presidents usually do." The current administration's decision, the news program host explained, "to forego the chest-thumping commander-in-chief theater that goes with military intervention of any kind, that in itself is a fascinating and rather blunt demonstration of just how much this presidency is not like that of George W. Bush."

In other words, Maddow treats Obama's anti-democratic and unconstitutional act of declaring war behind the backs of Congress and the American people as a positive good.

From there, Maddow presented clips of past presidents, while running for office, posturing as humble 'peace' candidates. She went on, "A candidate named Barack Obama promised that. The difference with Mr. Obama as president is that he appears to be walking more of that walk as well as talking that talk."

But Obama has launched a military assault against a virtually defenseless country (and, of course, escalated the war in Afghanistan to unprecedented levels, while maintaining 50,000 US troops in Iraq). How is that different from Bush, who also launched such attacks?

Because Obama has gone about it differently, making no Oval Office address, "repeatedly stressing the limited nature of US involvement, promising there will be no ground troops, no matter what" (Maddow),

bringing in European allies and various Arab regimes, etc. Obama's empty phrase that the bulk of US involvement in the Libyan operation would last "A Matter of Days, Not a Matter of Weeks" appeared on the screen throughout the first portion of her program.

Maddow and the social layers she speaks for approve of the cosmetic changes that the Obama administration has instituted—including the end, as she says, of "the [Bush-Cheney] interventionist, chest-thumping, triumphalist stuff." The same imperialist policy, the same drive for American global dominance, but more effectively and intelligently packaged.

She comes very close to revealing what lay behind the tactical shift that resulted in Obama being elevated to office, with a considerable section of the American financial and corporate elite behind him. This is how she presents the issues in the 2008 election: "Do you want the narrative of America's role in the world to be America leads Western aggression against Arab countries, or don't you want that?" And further on: "President Obama wants the narrative to be something different. He very clearly did not want there to be another American military action in the Arab world. He is very open about his reluctance. He wants everybody to know how reluctant he was."

Maddow is quite right, from her point of view. For the ruling elite and its media hangers-on, the issue in 2008 was a shift in "narratives," from "triumphalist" US military intervention to a more "reluctant," less unilateralist version of the same thing. Libyans are dying and will die, but imperialist intervention is presented in a different light. And upper-middle-class liberals (and Greens) around the world feel more at ease embracing it.

The MSNBC news program host left out of her discussion Monday the barbaric and obscenely hypocritical character of the attack on Libya: the use of cruise missiles and bombs against an impoverished former colony in the name of "humanitarianism." A war launched by the same governments who turn a blind eye to mass repression and violence in Bahrain, Yemen and, for that matter, Iraq; who did everything in their power to keep murderers and torturers such as Ben Ali of Tunisia and Mubarak of Egypt in power; who countenance and prop up the feudal human rubbish that governs Saudi Arabia and Oman...

Despite the pseudo-iconoclastic nature of her opening

monologue Monday about America's propensity to go to war, Maddow never offered any challenge to White House and Pentagon disinformation in the course of the program.

She allowed Steve Clemons of the New America Foundation, in an interview, to claim that the US and the other powers intervened in Libya because of the "potential massacre" of "tens of thousands of people," and that Obama had decided "he needed to do something to save those people, but to do it in a minimal way so that the US footprint and the Western footprint, as you've been saying, was small."

This is a giant lie, which great numbers of people see through. The preposterousness and defensiveness of Maddow's arguments are testament to that. She doesn't dare discuss the character of the war or US aims and thus restricts herself to the gulf between Bush and Obama supposedly established by their different approaches to announcing military operations.

A word that crossed no one's lips Monday night, including Maddow's, was "oil." Astonishing, considering that Libya's economy depends on revenues from that industry, to the tune of one-quarter of its gross domestic product. The North African nation has the largest oil reserves on the continent and the ninth largest in the world. Almost accidentally, one would think that someone might blurt out the word. But no one did.

Maddow's defense of Obama's new war in Libya, which will result in the deaths of thousands and risks unleashing far wider and bloodier conflagrations, sheds light on her and the American liberal-left more generally. There is nothing remotely "progressive" about these people.



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