

The agents of Washington and Britain within Libya's opposition leadership

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The Interim Transitional National Council (TNC) was not officially able to participate in the conference held on Libya at London's Lancaster House on Tuesday due to differences within the war coalition over support for the anti-Gaddafi leadership. However, Washington and London made clear their backing for what is being groomed as Libya's government-in-waiting—once, that is, the military onslaught against the country has achieved its desired objective of regime change.

British Prime Minister David Cameron and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton both held meetings with TNC Chairman Mahmoud Jibril. The UK's Foreign Office hosted a press conference by Guma El-Gamaty and Mahmoud Shammam, described as leading figures in the Libyan opposition.

Despite persistent claims by London and Washington that no vested interests are involved in their intervention into Libya's civil war, an outline of their relations with Jibril and El-Gamaty shows otherwise.

On March 28, the *Boston Globe* reported that Jibril "has played a key role in persuading the United States and its allies" to intervene militarily against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's regime. Just one day after Washington began launching missile strikes against the country, Jibril reportedly met Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts in a Cairo hotel "to outline his vision for Libya's future." Kerry is the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Jibril had also met with Clinton and French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the newspaper said.

Jibril (also known as Mahmoud Gebril ElWarfally) is "in many ways an unlikely leader of rebellion," the *Globe* reported. He spent many years teaching in the US after he obtained his PhD at the University of Pittsburgh "under the late Richard Cottam, a former US intelligence official in Iran who became a renowned political scientist specializing on the Middle East."

That really depends on what kind of "rebellion" one is leading. At any rate, in 1998, Jibril turned his dissertation—"Imagery and Ideology in US Policy Toward Libya"—into a book and returned to the Middle East, where he became the president of a consultancy firm, providing training programmes for senior managers across the region including Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Jordan and Bahrain.

Jibril is still best known for his work with the Gaddafi regime. In 2004, then-British Prime Minister Tony Blair concluded the "deal in the desert" with Gaddafi that saw Libya brought in from the cold. In addition to being a key ally of the US and Britain in the

Middle East, especially in the wake of the Iraq invasion, Gaddafi began opening Libya up to foreign investment.

Gaddafi's son, Saif, appears to have led this drive and it was he who reportedly recruited Jibril's aid. From 2007, Jibril headed Gaddafi's National Economic Development Board, founded to facilitate the introduction of global capital.

These developing relations were helped by the Boston-based management consultancy, the Monitor Group. In recent weeks the firm has come under attack for its openly proclaimed efforts to "enhance the profile of Libya" and Gaddafi. Central to this was developing often lucrative relations between the regime and leading academics and institutions, particularly in the US and UK, including the London School of Economics.

But Monitor's involvement also facilitated contacts between leading neo-liberal economic "reformers" in the regime and Western corporations. Jibril's work put him "in frequent contact with US diplomats," the *Globe* reported, as well as with US oil executives.

The newspaper pointed to a US diplomatic cable from January 2010, released by WikiLeaks. The cable provides an account of discussions between the US ambassador to Libya, Gene Cretz, and Jibril. Cretz recounts talks with Jibril in which the latter expressed his belief that "now is the time" for US businesses to exploit their "competitive edge" in the rush for trade and investment in Libyan projects.

"The US has the edge here," Jibril told Cretz. "If you don't step in, Singapore, the UK, Germany and France are ready."

The cable concluded: "Jibril seemed to be a very open interlocutor," one who appeared to be "well-connected within the regime" and who "may have a unique ability to influence decision-makers without challenging their authority."

However, the newspaper reports, Jibril quit Libya in frustration after "hardliners in the regime stifled the reforms," becoming one of the "opposition's most potent weapons since the rebellion broke out in February."

The *Globe* article complained that people like Jibril underscore "a major weakness of the movement to topple Gaddafi: their lack of military might."

Seven members of the 31-member TNC are university professors, and only three are generals, it reported. This accounted for the "urgent appeal" issued by Ali Aujali, who resigned as Libya's ambassador to Washington to join the opposition, "for the United States to provide weapons, training and logistical support

to the rebels.”

What of Guma El-Gamaty, the TNC’s UK coordinator?

El-Gamaty is invariably described as a “Libyan writer, political commentator and frequent critic of the Libyan regime.” A researcher at the University of Westminster, his PhD was entitled the “Libyan Brain Drain and its Effect on Human Development in Libya.”

“It is people like him who, Coalition members hope, will provide a future for a new Libya,” the *Independent* newspaper reported. Yet, despite some 30 years as an oppositionist and writer in the UK, it is very hard to find anything substantive about El-Gamaty and his writings and research.

The *Independent* reported that El-Gamaty was among the group of protesters who gathered in London on April 17, 1984 outside the Libyan Embassy to protest Gaddafi’s rule. He “was just a few yards away when a gunman opened fire on them from the window of the Libyan embassy—hitting and killing PC Yvonne Fletcher,” the newspaper stated.

The police constable’s killing led to an 11-day armed police siege of the Libyan Embassy, after which its staff were expelled from the country. Britain broke off diplomatic relations with Tripoli.

El-Gamaty’s exact political affiliations are unclear, but the demonstration was organised by the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL).

There are numerous accounts that the NFSL, formed in October 1981, was established as part of US and Israeli efforts to assemble and train a military force to overthrow Gaddafi. Its core comprised those captured in Chad while fighting in a Libyan-supported rebellion against the US-backed government of Hissène Habré. Efforts to this end were supported and funded by Britain, France, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Morocco, among others.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has reported, earlier this week long-time CIA collaborator Khalifa Hifter was appointed the military head of the Benghazi-based opposition. The one-time colonel in the Libyan army went over to the anti-Gaddafi opposition while he was in Chad in the late 1980s. Just a few years later he emigrated to the US.

Hifter was referenced in a *Washington Post* report of March 26, 1996 dealing with an armed rebellion against Gaddafi. This cited witnesses reporting that the rebellion was led by Hifter, described as the leader of a “contra-style group based in the United States called the Libyan National Army.” (See “A CIA commander for the Libyan rebels”)

One month after PC Fletcher’s killing in London, the NFSL claimed responsibility for a military assault on Gaddafi’s compound at Bab al-Azizia on May 8, 1984—an action widely regarded as having being coordinated with the CIA. Gaddafi escaped, but 80 others were killed in the attack, which was followed by mass reprisals in Libya.

According to the whistle-blowing former MI5 officer David Shayler, the UK had engineered another plot to assassinate Gaddafi just one month earlier. This involved the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), considered the Libyan wing of Al Qaeda. British intelligence reportedly paid the LIFG £100,000 to plant a bomb under Gaddafi’s motorcade in Sirte. The wrong car was

targeted and innocent bystanders were killed.

On April 14, 1986 the US, with British backing, carried out bombing raids on Libya. Although the Libyan dictator’s residence was bombed, he escaped. His adoptive baby daughter, however, was killed.

There are other reports of British intelligence involvement with Islamic opponents of Gaddafi in assassination plots throughout the 1990s. Shayler was jailed for six months in November 2002 for disclosing MI5 documents thought to relate to the 1984 plot.

In June 2005, the NFSL came together with a number of other groups to hold the first conference of the National Libyan Opposition (NLO) in London, dedicated to mobilising external and internal forces to oust Gaddafi. The NFSL, which reportedly withdrew from the NLO in 2008, held its last conference in the US in 2007.

El-Gamaty’s precise involvement with these machinations is unclear. But in recent years, especially since Blair’s 2004 deal, he has been invited to address the House of Lords twice on Libyan affairs.

In March 2007, El-Gamaty was praising news that the US was to help Libya build its first nuclear plant as “a significant reward for Gaddafi and a sign of how far relations between America and Libya have come...” He continued: “This will send a diplomatic signal to other more crucial countries, like Iran and North Korea, that if they follow Libya’s example and completely capitulate and give up to American pressure and toe the American line ... they will be rewarded.”

In the more recent period, he has been responsible for some of the most extravagant claims about the Libyan civil war. These include assertions that Gaddafi was bound for Zimbabwe on a private jet stacked with gold bullion and that the regime had recruited “thousands of African mercenaries” to suppress the opposition.

El-Gamaty told the Australian Broadcasting Corporation on February 24 that these “Africans who speak French or English ... are totally alien to the Libyan society and they said they have been promised large amounts of dollars to fight for Gaddafi.”

“And these thousands of Africans are within the Bab al-Azizia barracks,” he continued. “It’s a huge complex and they unleash them out of the barracks into the streets of Tripoli to terrorise the population and to prevent them from coming out and demonstrating.”

He told the same programme that Libya had been suffering under what he described as “Shia oppression for 41 years.”



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