

Professor Cole “answers” WSWS on Libya: An admission of intellectual and political bankruptcy

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Last week, Professor Juan Cole, a University of Michigan professor of Middle Eastern history, posted a comment on his *Informed Comment* blog slandering the *World Socialist Web Site* with the lie that we support efforts by the Gaddafi regime to reconquer the east of Libya and would welcome a massacre of Libyan civilians.

On August 10, the *World Socialist Web Site* issued “An open letter to Professor Juan Cole: A reply to a slander,” answering Cole’s lies and demanding that he post a “full and public retraction” on *Informed Comment*.

On August 11, we received the following emailed reply from Cole:

“Hi. I hope you will stop supporting the murderous Qaddafi regime and attacking people who want the people of Benghazi to be safe from him.

cheers,
Juan”

This is the kind of response one would expect from someone who is drunk. In Cole’s case, however, this would be an unduly charitable interpretation.

The reality is that he is incapable of articulating any coherent defense of his position. Cole’s one-sentence reply merely reiterates his original slander without adding a word of substantiation.

His hostility toward the WSWS stems from our refusal to line up with the filthy imperialist operation in Libya that he promoted. We based ourselves on the fundamental socialist and Marxist principle of opposition to imperialist wars against historically oppressed countries. We oppose Gaddafi from a socialist standpoint, based on the fight for the independent mobilization of the working class against

his bourgeois regime and imperialism itself.

Five months after the launching of the Libyan war, for which Cole offered his services as the most unabashed cheerleader, the intervention has turned into a debacle and his own position is compromised and exposed. People in such a situation are prone to respond to any challenge in a cynical and dishonest manner.

He writes as if nothing has happened since last March when he issued his “Open Letter to the Left,” urging support for the Libyan war.

While Cole continues to use his *Informed Comment* blog to cheer on what he refers to as the “Free Libya Forces,” the conduct of the war and the evolution of these same forces have made it abundantly clear that what is involved is neither a “liberation” struggle nor a crusade for “human rights,” but rather a war by the imperialist powers for the conquest of Libya and the installation of a more pliant regime.

As Cole himself acknowledged in June, in a column entitled “Top ten mistakes in the Libyan war,” the US-NATO campaign has hardly been focused on protecting civilians.

“That the Libyan intervention is legal does not mean that the war has been prosecuted wisely,” wrote Cole. “I urged after the UNSC resolution that it be a limited intervention aiming at protecting civilians from Muammar Qaddafi’s vicious attacks...”

Instead, he acknowledged, NATO opted for “a ‘shock and awe’ strategy of pounding the capital, Tripoli, especially targeting the compound of dictator Muammar Qaddafi... and to the extent that it looks like a targeted assassination, it raised questions in critics’ minds about the purpose of the intervention.”

Cole “urged” the imperialist powers to stick to the letter of the Security Council resolution. However, they did not hear the professor’s advice because they were too busy executing a war of aggression aimed at establishing unfettered control over the oil-rich North African country. The resolution merely provided cover for this neocolonialist venture, as did the bleating of Professor Cole.

And what of the “Free Libya Forces?” Professor Cole sent his reply to the WSWS just days after the president of the Benghazi-based Transitional National Council (TNC), Abdul Mustafa Jalil, dismissed his entire cabinet over suspicion that its members were involved in the July 28 assassination of General Abdel Fatah Younis, the former Gaddafi interior minister who defected to become the TNC’s military chief.

The dismissal of the government is apparently aimed at forestalling the outbreak of a civil war among the “rebels,” pitting Younis’s powerful Obeidi tribe against the US-backed TNC in Benghazi.

Meanwhile, reports mount of summary executions, torture and ethnic cleansing by the “rebels.” Given these acts and the composition of the TNC’s leadership—ex-Gaddafi ministers, longtime CIA “assets” and Islamists—there is no reason to believe that its victory would install a regime less corrupt or repressive than that of Gaddafi.

Even the pro-war *New York Times* found itself compelled to admit that the supposed struggle to “liberate” Libya has emerged as a “murkier contest between factions and tribes” that “could disintegrate into the sort of tribal tensions that have plagued Libya for centuries,” i.e., a bloodbath.

More people have already died in the US-NATO war against Libya than were ever killed by Gaddafi’s repression, and the threat of a far greater massacre is looming.

Whatever Cole says now, he has blood on his hands. The shoddy role that he played was to lend his authority as a well known intellectual with a reputation as an opponent of the US war in Iraq to promote a naked imperialist enterprise in Libya.

Unwilling and unable to honestly answer the critique of his position made by the *World Socialist Web Site* (first presented last April in “Libya, imperialism and the prostration of the ‘left’ intellectuals: The case of Professor Juan Cole”), Cole resorts to lies and

slanders.

We reject Cole’s fatuous response to our open letter and continue to demand that he publicly retract his reactionary slanders against the *World Socialist Web Site*.



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