

# Professor Cole gloats over Gaddafi's murder

Bill Van Auken  
25 October 2011

The eight-month US-NATO war against Libya, culminating in the barbaric siege of the Mediterranean coastal city of Sirte and the hideous lynching of the country's deposed ruler, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, has been backed from its outset by a number of political parties around the world that call themselves "left" and an upper-middle-class socio-political milieu that forms their key constituency.

In the United States, this phenomenon is bound up with the support given by such parties and this milieu to the Democratic administration of President Barack Obama, even as it carries out military aggression around the world and embraces assassination as a principal policy tool.

Among the most prominent representatives of this trend is the University of Michigan professor of Middle Eastern history Juan Cole, who has postured as an expert on Libya while uncritically promoting the war propaganda of the Obama administration and NATO.

Cole's reputation as a self-described "left" stems from his role as a limited critic of the Bush administration's phony pretexts for the war against Iraq. Once it was launched, however, he supported the US invasion, describing it as "worth the sacrifices"—now amounting to some one million Iraqi lives—to rid the world of Saddam Hussein.

Similarly, at the outset of the current war against Libya, Cole declared that "if it succeeds in getting rid of Qaddafi's murderous regime and allowing Libyans to have a normal life, it will be worth the sacrifices in life and treasure." He added, "If NATO needs me, I'm there."

His writing and speaking on the Libyan intervention has been a filthy exercise in apologetics for a war that was without question fomented by the US and the other major powers in the pursuit of strategic and profit interests. Exploiting the situation created by the uprisings in neighboring Egypt and Tunisia and

deliberately stoking the protests in Libya with the aim of creating conditions for regime-change, the Western powers intervened principally to establish a tight grip on the country's huge oil and gas supplies and deny a foothold to their rivals in Russia and China.

Cole has steadfastly denied that US imperialism and its Western European allies intervened in Libya for any but the purest motives of pursuing human rights, protecting civilians and promoting democracy.

His latest piece, entitled "Qaddafi's People's Temple," exposes Cole as a figure who is moving ever more violently and recklessly to the right.

The peculiar premise of this essay is a comparison of the bloody siege of Sirte and the lynching of Gaddafi to the 1978 mass suicide in Guyana of members of the Peoples Temple led by Jim Jones.

What equates Gaddafi's resistance to the US-NATO exercise in regime-change with a mass suicide by a religious cult? According to Cole, to resist inevitable defeat was "suicidal," an exercise in "irrationality" and "fanaticism."

"Qaddafi had on more than one occasion offered exile abroad [sic]," Cole writes, "but sneaked off to his home town of Sirte to make a suicidal last stand."

He blames forces loyal to the Libyan leader, described as "his glassy-eyed minions," for the destruction of Sirte, even though the reduction of this city of 120,000 to blackened rubble and the killing and maiming of an untold number of its inhabitants has been accomplished by a relentless NATO bombing campaign, followed by the shelling of the city by the NATO-backed "rebels."

That is, the US and NATO have carried out in Sirte precisely the kind of siege they claimed they were intervening to prevent.

As for the murder of Gaddafi, exposed by multiple cell phone videos posted on the Internet as a lynching, Cole floats the alternative alibis that the Libyan leader

died in a “firefight” or was killed trying to escape.

Cole dismisses mounting reports of tensions between different regions and the armed militias they have formed—as well as the evidence that various powers, both Western and Arab Gulf states, are intervening to promote them—insisting that the Libyan war is a “victory for the Fourth Wave of democratization.”

In response to the article, one of his readers writes, “I keep seeing reports that the rebels have been massacring black Libyans and that Tawergha [a town with a predominantly black population south of Misrata] was wiped off the map. Can you address these issues?”

Cole’s response is chilling: “There are very few black Libyans... This is not a significant divide.”

In reality, black Libyans, combined with the more than two million black African migrant workers, many of whom had lived in Libya for years, made up roughly a third of the population. In his bloodthirsty enthusiasm for the imperialist victory, Cole is absolutely indifferent to the fact that thousands of these people have been murdered, tortured and imprisoned because of the color of their skin.

The professor’s conclusion is triumphalist and gives the lie to his claims that the only issue in the Libyan war was that of human rights.

“Those with investment capital who short Libya out of such overblown concerns [of impending conflicts] will only be missing a big opportunity,” he writes. “The Transitional National Council needs our support now, and the new, liberated Libya will remember who befriended it in these uncertain times. The bulls are running in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica.”

In other words, a regime that comes to power as the client of Washington and NATO can be counted on to dispense oil deals on far more lucrative terms than the ousted government of Gaddafi, as well as fat contracts for the reconstruction of the massive amount of infrastructure demolished by NATO’s bombing.

What is remarkable here, and politically significant, is the unabashed identification by a university professor who describes himself as a “left” with an exercise in imperialist violence, recolonization and assassination.

Cole’s writings and activities are emblematic of the movement to the right of a layer of academics who have been deeply corrupted by the political climate in the US and Western Europe, as well as by their own

attainment of a stable perch in the upper-middle class.

There is more than a whiff of fascism in Cole’s writings. He is someone who is excited by his ability to cozy up to those in power—boasting of his briefings of intelligence and military officers—and by his being able to play some role, even if only vicariously, in the violence and killing carried out by American imperialism. With Libya, he evidently feels that he has come into his own.

Under conditions of deepening social crisis, growing social polarization and emerging class struggle in America and internationally, such an evolution has a deep historical significance.

In the 1920s in Weimar Germany there was not a small number of German academics and intellectuals who began an evolution to the right that ended a decade later with their shouting “Sieg Heil!” Individuals like Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt were prominent among this layer, which also found a diseased attraction in Nazism’s violence and killing.

Before an authoritarian regime can come to power in America, the ruling elite requires the services of academics and lumpen-intellectuals like Cole to help lay the ideological groundwork and prepare public opinion by becoming the defenders and justifiers of the crimes of the state.

Cole’s posturing as a “man of the left” has become more and more preposterous. Among an increasing number of people familiar with his role, the mention of his name evokes feelings of political revulsion. There is, to put it bluntly, an unpleasant odor surrounding his intellectual reputation.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**