

“The Quiet American”: the death of J. Christopher Stevens

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In his sardonic 1955 novel *The Quiet American*, Graham Greene offered a devastating portrait of Alden Pyle, a young American covert agent in Vietnam exuding idealist notions of democracy and Americanism while trying to cobble together a “third force” to stem the tide of the Vietnamese revolution. Unleashing mayhem upon the country’s population in the process, he ultimately becomes the victim of his own political intrigues.

“I never knew a man who had better motives for all the trouble he caused,” Graham Greene’s narrator says of Pyle.

The description seems apt as the eulogies pour in for J. Christopher Stevens, the US ambassador to Libya who was slain together with three other Americans in an armed assault on the American consulate in Benghazi on Tuesday.

No one should rejoice in the violent death of a 52-year-old man. But for all the tributes to his “idealism” and—in the words of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton—his commitment to “advancing America’s values and interests,” it is impossible to understand the demise of Stevens without recognizing that this was an individual with blood on his hands who, like the fictional Pyle, fell victim to the very forces he helped unleash.

Stevens was a career operative for US imperialism in the Middle East. He was sent to Damascus, Cairo, Riyadh, Jerusalem and Tripoli as “political officer” and “chargé d’affaires,” defending “America’s values and interests” under conditions in which Washington was carrying out a near-genocidal war of aggression in Iraq, propping up the Mubarak dictatorship in Egypt, and defending unconditionally every crime carried out by Israel against the Palestinian people.

In Libya, he played a major role in cementing ties between the US and the regime of Col. Muammar Gaddafi. Secret embassy cables written by Stevens from that period and made public by WikiLeaks give a revealing picture of his work.

They discuss, among other things, negotiations with the Libyan government for continued access by American

interrogators to Libyan detainees who had been abducted, tortured and then handed back to the Gaddafi regime as part of the “war on terrorism.” Other cables detail multi-billion-dollar deals struck on behalf of American corporations seeking profits from Libyan oil.

At that time, Stevens described Gaddafi as an “engaging and charming interlocutor” as well as a “strong partner in the war against terrorism.”

The cables also reveal that Stevens devoted his attention to researching conditions in eastern Libya and what he described as its “historical role as a locus of opposition.”

When, in the aftermath of the popular revolts in Tunisia and Egypt, Washington decided to seize upon demonstrations in Libya and promote a war for regime-change as a means of bolstering its position in the region, Stevens was the man selected to become US envoy to the so-called rebels organized in the Benghazi-based National Transitional Council (NTC).

At the time, the State Department refused to make public his official biography. Photographs of him were also unavailable. *Businessweek* was one of the few publications to carry a profile of Washington’s “man in Benghazi.” It noted his previous research on social unrest in eastern Libya and quoted a former State Department colleague as saying that Stevens was “already familiar with some opposition members from his posting in Tripoli.”

This raises the obvious question as to what role Stevens and the US had in fomenting the armed conflict in Libya from its outset. Whatever the case, what was promoted to the public as a crusade for human rights and the protection of Libyan civilians was in reality a war of imperialist plunder whose main objective was to establish hegemonic control over the North African country’s oil wealth at the expense, in particular of Russia and China.

Once in Benghazi, beginning in April 2011, Stevens’ role was to coordinate funds, weapons and training for the “rebels,”

while ensuring that the collection of exiles, ex-Gaddafi functionaries and Islamists in the NTC toed America's line.

A central problem in this venture was, in the absence of a genuine mass revolutionary uprising, the organization of a fighting force able to follow up the murderous aerial bombardment by the US and its allies. The opportunistic solution was the utilization of forces tied to the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group and Al Qaeda in the Maghreb who had both experience and motivation as fighters.

The Libyan war saw elements that had previously been denounced as terrorists and, in a number of cases, detained and tortured by the CIA suddenly hailed as freedom fighters and heroes.

Clearly, Washington's calculation was that, after using these forces, it could dispose of them later as a puppet state headed by the Libyan equivalent of a Hamid Karzai took shape. This state is being formed—now under the leadership of newly elected Prime Minister Mustafa Abu-Shakour, who spent 32 years as an exile in the US, where he worked at one time for the Pentagon—but its power has proven inadequate to disarm and disband tens of thousands of armed and unemployed militia members.

The war in Libya ended in October 2011 with the barbaric lynch-mob murder of Gaddafi. At the time, Secretary of State Clinton gloated over the former Libyan leader's fate, laughingly declaring, "We came, we saw, he died."

Speaking in the aftermath of Stevens' killing Wednesday, Clinton declared, "How could this happen in a country we helped liberate in a city we helped save from destruction?" If the secretary of state doesn't know the answer to this question, she should have her head examined.

The same elements that she was lauding as "heroes" when they were sodomizing and lynching Gaddafi are the "savages" she and Obama now say must be "brought to justice." No doubt, their desire to murder the ambassador was fueled by the conviction that the so-called "revolution" has brought them—not to mention the Libyan people—nothing.

Such sentiments are widespread throughout the region. Those who live in these countries know first-hand that the pursuit of American "interests and values" is a cynical exercise in destruction and greed that no professions of idealism can conceal.

As for the media, the fulsome tributes by those claiming to have known Stevens, in some cases citing emails he sent to members of the press, are a telling self-indictment of the

incestuous relations between the Washington ruling establishment and the so-called fourth estate.

As in Iraq earlier, the war of aggression against Libya was possible thanks to deliberate and systematic lying to the American public by a corporate-controlled media that regurgitated the US government's propaganda. It played an indispensable role in packaging an illegal war for regime-change as a humanitarian venture aimed at saving lives and fostering democracy.

Standing out among the media eulogies for Stevens is that offered by the loathsome Roger Cohen, the *New York Times* columnist and former foreign editor who has churned out column after column promoting US militarism from the Balkans to Iraq. Cohen tells his readers that Stevens "died for American values."

What he means was spelled out a little over a year ago when he penned a column on Libya entitled "Score One for Interventionism," arguing that "interventionism is inextricable from the American idea... the idea that the West must be prepared to fight for its values against barbarism."

Cohen cites a July 4, 2011 email Stevens sent to a large number of people wishing them "a great 4th with plenty of beer, ice cream, hamburgers and Chinese fireworks." At the time, Libya was awash in blood and gore, having undergone over 100 days of continuous US-NATO bombardment.

The endless repetition of tributes to Stevens' idealism and good nature will no doubt strike a chord with the layers of the petty-bourgeois pseudo-left that lined up behind the Obama administration's war in Libya. That this praise has come from both Democrats and the likes of Condoleezza Rice and others within the Bush administration, which he also served, will not faze them in the least.

Stevens in the end embodied the hypocritical and murderous role played by Washington on the world stage that Graham Greene's novel pointed to more than half a century ago. He was another "quiet American," concealing naked imperialist interests with rhetoric about democracy and liberation, while leaving a trail of mayhem and destruction in his wake.



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