

Gilbert Achcar seeks to cover up his support for Middle East wars

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In an attempt to salvage what little remains of his “socialist” credentials, Professor Gilbert Achcar, a longtime associate of France’s New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), has written an essay entitled “Inventive Illiteracy Amidst Petty Sectarianism.”

Working at London’s School of Oriental and African Studies and within the NPA-linked Socialist Resistance group in Britain, Achcar has been a leading propagandist for the wars in Syria and in Libya, which he claimed were waged in defense of human rights. Despite the fact that pro-war propaganda has enveloped his political persona with an ineradicable stench, Achcar now protests that his positions on the Middle East wars have been grievously misrepresented. Thus, he attacks an article by Sarah McDonald in the *Weekly Worker*, the publication of the Stalinist Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), which called Achcar a “social-imperialist.”

In dismissing McDonald’s epithet, Achcar vents his outrage against the “countless politically illiterate people” who “have accused [me of] of ‘supporting’ NATO’s intervention in Libya.” He pompously adds, “I will not waste my time and that of the readers in reminding them here of what I really stood for.”

Though Mr. Achcar does not care to review the record of his political support for the neo-colonial enterprises in Libya and Syria, he cannot be allowed to rewrite his own history. The record is clear: Achcar publicly supported imperialist wars and discussed their prosecution with US and French intelligence assets. He bears political responsibility for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people.

From the outset of the Libyan operation, Achcar played a key role in promoting the propaganda required by imperialism to build a pro-war constituency within the milieu of the “leftish” affluent middle class. In

March 2011, two days after the passage of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 authorizing war in Libya, Achcar published an interview praising the war as a humanitarian operation to keep Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s regime from attacking opposition groups in Benghazi.

While noting that “there are not enough safeguards in the wording of the resolution to bar its use for imperialist purposes,” Achcar said: “But given the urgency of preventing the massacre that would inevitably have resulted from an assault on Benghazi by Gaddafi’s forces, and the absence of any alternative means of achieving the protection goal, no one can reasonably oppose it... You can’t in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians.”

He acknowledged the right-wing politics of the NATO-backed opposition, but hailed the war as similar to revolutionary working class struggles that had toppled Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak the month before. He called NATO’s Libyan allies “a mixture of human rights activists, democracy advocates, intellectuals, tribal elements, and Islamist forces—a very broad coalition ... The bottom line is that there is no reason for any different attitude toward them than to any other of the mass uprisings in the region.”

Two years later, it is clear that the war Achcar embraced was an act of imperialist plunder. The NATO powers seized Libya’s oil revenues and oil fields, carpet-bombed cities, including Tripoli and Sirte, and killed and wounded tens of thousands of people. It brought to power a NATO stooge regime based on a patchwork of Islamist militias that were NATO’s main proxy force to topple and murder Gaddafi.

Achcar repeatedly demanded that NATO funnel more weapons to Libyan opposition militias. Thus, in a

largely sympathetic comment on Obama's April 2011 speech on the war, he said the best way to "enable the uprising to win, in conformity with the Libyan people's right to self-determination, is for the hypocritical Western governments—who have sold a lot of weapons to Gaddafi since the arms embargo was lifted in October 2004, and Gaddafi turned into a model—to deliver arms to the insurgency."

Finally, as Libyan government forces began to collapse under NATO air strikes in August 2011, Achcar criticized NATO for not striking Libya harder. He issued a statement citing right-wing *Wall Street Journal* columnist Max Boot's observation that NATO warplanes had flown 11,107 sorties against Libya, but 38,004 sorties in the 1999 war against Serbia over Kosovo.

He wrote, "The crucial question then is: why is NATO conducting an aerial campaign in Libya that is low-key not only in comparison with the air component of the war to grab similarly oil-rich Iraq, but even compared to the air war for economically unimportant Kosovo? And why is the alliance at the same time refraining from providing the insurgents with the weaponry they have consistently and insistently requested?"

Achcar's support for the war epitomized the unrestrained movement of a layer of pseudo-left middle class intellectuals into the camp of imperialism. He functioned not only as a media publicist for war, but also as a strategist, hobnobbing with various US and French intelligence personnel and collaborators to discuss how best to present the wars to minimize popular opposition to them.

In his latest piece, Achcar seeks to distort the facts surrounding his October 2011 meeting in Sweden with Burhan Ghalioun, the president of the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC). During this meeting, he advised Ghalioun not to call for a NATO invasion of Syria—which would risk provoking mass popular opposition—but for "indirect" intervention to arm opposition forces.

In the event, this is the policy NATO ultimately pursued, arming the SNC and other Islamist opposition forces, including some tied to Al Qaeda. It led to a devastating proxy war in Syria that, in two years, has claimed over 100,000 lives and forced millions to flee their homes.

In his current article, Achcar denounces as a "canard" claims that "I took part in a meeting of the Syrian National Council (whereas it was actually a meeting of the left-wing National Coordination Council) in order to urge them to call for an imperialist intervention in Syria (whereas my contribution to the meeting was dedicated to exactly the opposite)."

Achcar's denial is simply rubbish. He himself publicly announced that he had met with Ghalioun and described his advice to the SNC in an article published in November 2011 in the Lebanese daily *Al Akhbar*. The NPA reposted the article, including on its English language web site, *International Viewpoint*.

In this article, he wrote: "I was able to attend the meeting of the Syrian opposition that was held on October 8-9 in Sweden, near the capital, Stockholm. A number of male and female activists operating in Syria and abroad joined with prominent figures from the Syrian Coordination Committee (SNC—who had come from Syria for the event) in the presence of the most prominent member of the Syrian National Council—its president, Burhan Ghalioun."

Professor Achcar can lie to his heart's content, but the objective record of his reactionary political role has left smudges all over the internet.



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