

UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson reveals predatory agenda of NATO's war on Libya

Jean Shaoul
9 October 2017

At a fringe meeting of the Conservative party conference in Manchester Tuesday, Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson made clear that Britain's wars in Libya and throughout the Middle East and North Africa have nothing to do with humanitarianism or fighting terrorism.

Responding to a question about his recent visit to Libya and conditions in Sirte, the war-torn city on Libyan's northern shore, Johnson said that the city could become a world-class tourist and business destination.

He stated, "There's a group of UK business people, wonderful guys who want to invest in Sirte, on the coast, near where Gaddafi was actually captured and executed as some of you may have seen.

"And they literally have a brilliant vision to turn Sirte, with the help of the municipality of Sirte, to turn it into the next Dubai.

"The only thing they've got to do is clear the dead bodies away and then they'll be there."

Sirte was former leader Muammar Gaddafi's hometown and his final stronghold before his defeat and brutal torture and murder at the hands of NATO's Islamist proxies.

His remarks provoked a torrent of hypocritical calls for his resignation or sacking by Prime Minister Theresa May, including by Johnson's pro-European opponents in the Tory party. Emily Thornberry, the Labour party's shadow foreign secretary, called his comments "unbelievably crass, callous and cruel."

Others called for him to apologise for his "gaffe" and excoriated him for "his inability to keep his mouth shut."

What made Johnson's remarks beyond the pale was that he told the truth, devoid of the usual moral cant, in public rather than in private discussions in ruling circles.

Alexander Boris de Pfeffel Johnson, a man without a mute button or off-switch, epitomises the class arrogance and social privilege of Britain's political elite. Frequently tipped as the man to oust May, he ranks as one of the

most disgusting creatures spewed out by British imperialism over the course of several centuries.

Johnson has carefully cultivated a public persona as the Conservative Party's jovial buffoon, someone who is not afraid of "plain speaking," which he uses to articulate his extreme right-wing views. A few days earlier, the British ambassador to Myanmar was forced to stop him mid-sentence as he recited Rudyard Kipling's *Road to Mandalay* in the country's most sacred temple.

The poem includes the declaration, "The temple bells they say/ Come you back you English soldier." Britain colonised Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, from 1824 to 1948 and brutally repressed successive liberation struggles.

Johnson's Libya remarks accurately reflect the true nature of Britain's war for regime change in Libya. Thornberry described the war against Libya in 2011 as being "morally right to protect civilians from a ruthless dictator, and the action has been authorised by the UN." She is furious because Johnson has exposed in the crudest possible terms all such attempts to dress the war up as a "humanitarian" intervention.

The US-orchestrated regime-change operation sought to bolster imperialism in North Africa, which had been shaken by the overthrow of longstanding US-backed dictatorships in Egypt and Tunisia. Invoking the liberal imperialist "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) doctrine, Britain's then-Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron played a major role in the NATO intervention.

Britain's participation in the Libyan war, as in its other interventions in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and elsewhere, are in pursuance of its own geostrategic, corporate and financial interests: these—and other—countries must be opened up to the hucksters and swindlers in Britain's corporations and banks. It was yet another war for oil and gas.

Last year, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs

Select Committee issued a damning report exposing the fraudulent basis of the war. It criticised Cameron for claiming without evidence that Gaddafi was about to carry out a massacre of genocidal proportions against protesters in Benghazi.

Cameron had pursued “an opportunistic policy of regime change,” while telling parliament in March 2011 that the intervention was not for regime change. Just one month later, Cameron signed a joint letter with the French and US presidents declaring their aim of pursuing “a future without Gaddafi.”

He supported so-called rebels among whom Islamist terror groups were known to be embedded. These “rebels” included Abdul Hakim Belhaj, who had fought with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and was one of the founders of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG) that sought to “transform Libya into an Islamic state.”

In the 1990s, Britain’s Conservative government gave him and other LIFG members sanctuary in London and used them in plots to assassinate Gaddafi. In 2004, Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair did an abrupt about-turn and signed a deal with Gaddafi that opened Libya to oil giant BP. His government colluded with the CIA in its secret rendition and torture programme, leading to Belhaj’s imprisonment by the Gaddafi regime.

In 2011, the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government rediscovered his usefulness and worked closely with Belhaj, the LIFG and similar groups to topple the Gaddafi regime, with NATO forces providing him with air cover.

Belhaj became the leader of the Tripoli Military Council tasked with keeping order in the capital after Gaddafi’s assassination. According to media reports in 2015, he became a leader in the newly emerging ISIS in North Africa.

The war, waged between March and October 2011, killed at least 20,000 people and plunged the Libyan population into a humanitarian catastrophe that persists to this day. Following Gaddafi’s ouster, the fighting between hundreds of militias for control of Libya’s rich resources has led to the flight of 2 million people, one third of the pre-war population, to Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere, and the internal displacement of hundreds of thousands.

According to a report by the United Nation’s World Food Programme (WFP) published last summer, at least 1.3 million, or 20 percent of the entire Libyan population, which numbered 6.4 million before the war, are still without necessities such as food and housing, and require

urgent humanitarian assistance.

This was a country that had previously enjoyed economic prosperity and stability, and had the highest Human Development Index (HDI) ranking in Africa. While its huge oil wealth was commandeered by a small corrupt elite, the state ensured a relatively high standard of living by providing free education, health care and other services.

Libya’s HDI ranking has plummeted from 53 to 102 out of the 169 countries in the UN’s 2016 Human Development report. Belhaj is now one of many Islamists-turned businessmen-politicians. Very wealthy, thanks to their patrons in the Gulf and the West, they are the ones seeking deals with Johnson’s “wonderful guys who want to invest in Sirte.”

Sirte, a once prosperous city, is a scene of utter devastation and human tragedy. It is littered with improvised explosive devices (IEDs) left by Islamic State during the near-year-long siege of the city by Libyan government forces. Islamic State seized the city in March 2015, before it was recaptured through the second half of 2016 with the help of US airstrikes and forces loyal to the UN-backed government based in Tripoli.

Johnson has paid two visits to Tripoli this year. In August, he agreed on a package of measures with Prime Minister Fayyez Al-Serraj, who heads one of three governments in Libya. These include funding for training to remove IEDS and mines and for rebuilding critical infrastructure and restoring basic public services via the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This is aimed no doubt at creating a suitable environment for “the next Dubai.” Britain’s Royal Navy is also involved in training local security forces to prevent African migrants using Libya as a route to Europe.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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