

Libya: Revolution, Intervention and Crisis

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Solidarity National Committee

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For socialists and for antiwar forces, the events in Libya have presented — and continue to present — agonizing political and ethical choices. It is entirely logical and inevitable that thoughtful activists find themselves in disagreement among each other, and indeed in internal conflict within themselves, over questions raised by the Libyan popular uprising and by the military intervention of the western powers. Recognizing the difficulties of the situation is the essential first step for the international left to work through them.

Solidarity supports the struggles against dictatorships in Libya and throughout the Arab world, and does not believe imperialist intervention can resolve the problems that have led to the revolts. We found ourselves in disagreement, however, on whether to oppose the Libyan rebels' demand for a "no-fly zone" over Libya. Therefore, we are publishing two statements, each written by some members of our National Committee, representing the two main views of the Solidarity leadership. We do have clear areas of agreement, which we present not only as our own position but also as part of a necessary discussion within the left.

Which side are we on? We are supporters of the Libyan popular revolt. This uprising takes place in the context of the "Arab spring," the democratic revolutionary wave that began with Tunisia and Egypt and has spread to countries as diverse as Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan and Syria. At the same time, we believe that the liberation of nations and their people is the work of the people themselves, not of outside "saviors" and certainly not of imperialist powers.

Despite whatever disagreements may exist within the international left and antiwar forces, we must remain unified in our unqualified opposition to the imperialist wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan, our support for the struggles of the Palestinian people, and in our support for the democratic Arab Uprising — which is bringing new hopes for political freedom and social justice for tens of millions of people whose basic rights have counted for nothing in the world powers' cynical games of oil and geopolitics.

Statement in Support of the Libyan Uprising, in Opposition to US-NATO Airstrikes in Libya

While the situation in Libya remains unclear, and the issues are complex, we believe that it is important to state some of the general principles which should guide us in our approach to this issue.

To begin with, we support the movements for democracy and social and economic justice taking place in North Africa and Southwest Asia — the "Middle East." Throughout the Arab world, millions of people are fighting for freedom, and we are on their side.

We do not believe that the Arab League, composed as it is largely of dictatorial or authoritarian

regimes, can speak for the Arab world or the Libyan people. The Arab League states simply seek to protect their own economic and political interests against each other and against the rising tide of democracy in the region.

Neither do we believe that the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have legitimacy to speak either for the people of the world or the people of the Arab region. We oppose U.N. Resolution 1973, despite its reference to protecting civilians and human rights, since from the beginning its purpose and effect are to legitimate imperial intervention in Libya.

France, Great Britain, the United States, and other European powers claim to intervene out of concern for human rights and democracy, but these claims are contradicted in practice. These nations support other dictatorial regimes in the Arab world and around the globe, even during the course of events in Libya doing nothing to stop the use of Saudi troops against protesters in Bahrain. They intervene in Libya due to their own economic interests and concerns for geopolitical control. Qaddafi was already a willing client of empire, and Euro-American powers have intervened in the civil conflict to broker deals with disaffected and ambitious members of the Libyan elite who are backing the uprising. Power abhors a vacuum.

The principal goal of the imperial powers—France, Britain, and the US, whether individually or acting in concert as the UN or NATO—is to dominate and shape the unfolding Arab revolution. As new governments form in the region and new political actors emerge in the course of the revolutions and uprisings, these powers will not stand idly by and let events take their course. The intervention is a show of force to an entire region but Libya was not chosen arbitrarily. The rebellion in Libya lacks the infrastructure of longstanding social movements and labor organizing that exists in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt—where demonstrations continue and activists have given political expression to the left wing of the movements. The situation in Libya appears more pliant to the Euro-American powers.

The Right to Demand Assistance

We support the right of the Libyan activist-fighters opposing the Qaddafi regime, who liberated the eastern half of the country at the outset of the uprising, to request and receive international assistance. Our starting point in the current global context is what advances the Libyan people's fight for freedom and the Arab Uprising as a whole. We do understand that there is, and will be, wrenching disagreement among the very best forces in the international left and antiwar movement about these issues.

It is necessary to remember the real-world state of affairs immediately preceding UN Security Council Resolution 1973 and the intervention that followed. Until the last minute, it appeared that the popular movement's desperate appeals for assistance (a "no-fly zone" and interdiction of the regime's attack forces, not foreign troops) would go unanswered.

The adoption of the hastily introduced UN Security 1973, in the view of some on the left, represents a calculated project of western powers to "recolonize" Libya. We believe, however, that there were a variety of motives. One of these was the prospect of chaos and mass refugee flight from Libya. Another was the pressure of popular opinion in the Arab world demanding that the impending slaughter be halted. Almost certainly, this pressure was a factor in the decision of China and Russia not to veto the resolution, and in the abstentions rather than "No" votes of Brazil, India and Germany.

Among the intervening powers — mainly the United States, France, Britain and NATO partners — there are also a mix of motivations (France wanting to gain a greater commercial foothold in Libyan

oil, the United States wanting to maintain its “global leadership” and dominance in NATO without taking serious risks, etc.). We don’t buy the mantra of “humanitarian intervention.” If, as president Obama claims, this intervention was to prevent a civilian massacre, that’s essentially because the imperialist powers feared the consequences of letting it happen — not mass killing in itself, which they have enabled or directly perpetrated so often. The fact that the imperialist powers’ motivations are neither humanitarian nor progressive, however, doesn’t negate the right of the rebels and the civilian population to protection from destruction.

In this emergency, two slogans were raised in juxtaposition by some on the international left — “Support the Libyan Uprising! No to UN/NATO/U.S. Intervention!” We respect this attempt to pose a principled approach to the crisis, but we find the slogans to be internally contradictory since, in the context of the impending assault on Benghazi by Qaddafi’s overwhelming land, sea and air power, “No Intervention” would have meant not only the defeat of the uprising but the extermination of its supporters, their families, and anyone suspected of sympathizing with them.
