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Slouching Towards Sirte: NATO's War on Libya and Africa

Maximilian Forte
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In Slouching Towards Sirte: NATO's War on Libya and Africa, Maximilian Forte dissects the purposes, justifications, myths, and consequences of NATO's military intervention in Libya in 2011. Publicized for world consumption as a humanitarian campaign to protect Libyans against Muammar Gaddafi's threats of mass violence and genocide, "Operation Unified Protector," Forte contends, was a "rehearsed military expedition" to force regime change and wield Western authority in the region. Furthermore, far from being an action to save lives, NATO's "indiscriminate" bombing of civilian targets and cities such as Sirte (Gaddafi's birthplace) resulted in genocide, ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, and civil war.

These claims are bold and incendiary, and Forte doesn't skimp on documentary evidence to make his case. He includes cables written by US diplomats from the State Department; US Congressional and NATO documents; reports by human rights organizations and media outlets; and statements from Libyan state television and high-ranking officials in the former Libyan government. A complex depiction of collusion and willful ignorance among NATO nations—and most especially, the United States—emerges.

Prior to the grassroots rebellions in Egypt and Tunisia and the protests against the Gaddafi government in Libya, the US sought opportunities for strategic expansion in Africa. America's foray into Africa's social, political, and economic development demanded a "unified military command" to defend against potential threats to US interests. Thus, in 2007, the military's Africa Command (AFRICOM) became operational—despite disapproval throughout Africa.

In 2009, Gaddafi became chairman of the African Union (AU)—much to the chagrin of the West. In his inaugural address at the AU summit, Gaddafi, a staunch Pan-Africanist and outspoken AFRICOM "rejectionist," proffered his long-held proposal for a United States of Africa—a proposition that many African leaders deemed fantastical and a relinquishment of national sovereignty. However, as chairman, Gaddafi occupied a "high-profile platform from which he [could] … rail against Western interference on the continent." Gaddafi's increase in political capital worried the US.

Then, in February 2011, descriptions of the "wide-scale slaughter" of peaceful protesters by Gaddafi's forces circulated on social media sites like Twitter and Facebook, as did reports of "mercenaries" flying in from sub-Saharan Africa to pillage neighborhoods and rape Libyan women.

Calls for Western intervention intensified. Facing a humanitarian crisis, the international community could not "stand idly by" while Gaddafi massacred innocents. Within weeks, the UN Security Council authorized military action, and NATO began its aerial bombardment of Gaddafi strongholds.

Forte's allegations that NATO's war was manufactured by liberal interventionists and "iPad imperialists" whose agenda to disrupt African independence and execute regime change under the "fig leaf" of saving lives are chilling—and persuasive. So too is the timeline of events between the start of the protests and the propagandist hysteria promulgated online.

Even though Forte couches descriptions of Gaddafi in amorphous, guarded language, he isn't an apologist. In this provocative and unabashedly direct book, Forte speaks truth to power.

AMY O'LOUGHLIN (January 4, 2013)

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