

Libyan Opposition Leaders Slam U.S. Business Lobby's Deals With Gaddafi

Saturday 26 February 2011, by [BARAM Marcus](#) (Date first published: 24 February 2011).

NEW YORK — A broad coalition of interests from oil companies, defense manufacturers and well-connected lobbying firms to neoconservative scholars and Harvard Business School professors has worked in recent years to advance a rapprochement with Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and take advantage of business opportunities in the country, even in the face of the longtime international pariah's brutal repression of his people and his legendary belligerence.

Yet Libya's opposition leaders say that such efforts have harmed the interests of the North African country by helping enrich Gaddafi's family and close allies at the expense of the majority of Libyans, serving only to prolong Gaddafi's brutal reign. They also blame U.S. policy for prioritizing national security interests over issues of reform and human rights, the lack of which helped fuel the country's ongoing violent upheaval [1].

Soon after U.S. President George W. Bush dropped sanctions against Libya in 2004, when Gaddafi announced that he intended to give up weapons of mass destruction and expressed his eagerness to join the war on terror, U.S. and British oil producers and business interests jumped at the chance to expand into the country, which has been ruled with an iron fist by the unstable leader for some 40 years.

Some of the biggest oil producers and servicers, including BP, ExxonMobil, Halliburton, Chevron, Conoco and Marathon Oil joined with defense giants like Raytheon and Northrop Grumman, multinationals like Dow Chemical and Fluor and the high-powered law firm White & Case to form the US-Libya Business Association in 2005. The members of its executive advisory council each pay \$20,000 in annual dues to the group, which is managed by the National Foreign Trade Council, a coalition that seeks to facilitate international opportunities for U.S. companies. Most of the group's members have lobbied the U.S. government since 2004 to protect their investments in Libya or to iron out business problems with the regime [2]. Bilateral trade with Libya totaled \$2.7 billion in 2010, compared to practically nothing in 2003 when sanctions were still in force.

The role of the USLBA, which calls itself the only U.S. trade association focusing solely on the United States and Libya, combines lobbying for the former outlaw state with advancing the commercial aims of the association's member groups. The nonprofit has sponsored policy conferences, briefing sessions and events featuring senior U.S. and Libyan officials — two months ago, the group's honorary chairman David Mack, a former U.S. ambassador, and executive director Charles Dittrich traveled to Libya for meetings with Libyan government officials, private business leaders and representatives of American companies working in the country.

On its now-offline website, the group said it seeks to promote Libya by educating the White House and Congress about the country's "growing importance in maintaining stability in North Africa as well as Libya's potential as an expanding commercial market for American business." The website also touts the USLBA's proximity to Gaddafi, stating that "we were the only U.S. business group to meet privately" with the leader during Gaddafi's "historic first visit" to the United Nations in 2009.

As one measure of the group's influence, founding chairman David Goldwyn was appointed the State Department's coordinator for international energy affairs by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton [3]. On a visit to Libya in December 2008, Goldwyn waxed rhapsodic about the "fantastically warm reception" he and eight U.S. executives received from senior Libyan officials.

Marcus Baram

P.S.

* From Huffington Post, First Posted: 02/24/11 05:27 PM Updated: 02/25/11 11:20 AM:
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/24/muammar-gaddafi-us-business-lobby_n_827769.html

Footnotes

[1] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/02/24/libya-protests-gaddafi-fo_n_827568.html

[2] See on ESSF: [U.S. Companies Lobbied To Keep Libyan Market Open For Business](#)

[3] <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/biog/128091.htm>