

What's going on in Libya? From the Arab World to Latin America

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We have the impression that a great worldwide liberation process may be aborted by the unappeasable ferocity of Gaddafi, U.S. interventionism, and a lack of foresight in Latin America.

We might describe the situation like this: in a part of the world linked once again to strong internal solidarities and from which only lethargy or fanaticism was expected, a wave of popular uprisings have arisen which have threatened to topple the allies of Western powers in the region, one after the other. Independent of local differences, these uprisings have something in common that radically distinguishes them from the orange and rose colored "revolutions" promoted by capitalism in the former Soviet bloc: they demand democracy, certainly, but far from being fascinated by Europe and the United States, they are the holders of a long, entrenched, radical anti-imperialist tradition forged around Palestine and Iraq. There's not even a hint of socialism in the popular Arab uprisings, but neither is there one of Islamism, nor - most importantly - of Euro-centric seduction: it is simultaneously a matter of economic upheaval and democratic, nationalistic and anti-colonial revolution, something that, forty years after their defeat, suddenly opens an unexpected opportunity for the region's socialist and pan-Arabist left.

Progressive Latin America, whose pioneering liberation processes constitute hope for world-wide anti-imperialism, ought to support the Arab world right now without reservation, moving beyond the strategy of the Western powers overtaken by events, as well as those that are providing an opportunity for Gaddafi's return - perhaps militarily, but above all, propagandistically - as a champion of human rights and democracy. That discourse is hardly credible in this part of the world, where Fidel and Chávez enjoy enormous popular credit, but if Latin America aligns itself, actively or passively, with the tyrant, the contagious popular advances that are already extending toward Europe, and have gone as far as Wisconsin, will not only see themselves irreparably halted but will also produce a new fracture in the anti-imperialist camp, so that the world's ever vigilant timekeeper, the United States of America can seize advantage in order to recover lost ground. Something like this may already be occurring as a result of a combination of ignorance as well as schematic and summary anti-imperialism. The Arab people, who are returning to history's stage, need the support of their Latin American brothers and sisters, but above all, it is the relationship between world powers that cannot allow for vacillation by Cuba and Venezuela without having Cuba and Venezuela also suffer the consequences, with Latin America and the hopes for transformation at a global level suffering along with them.

We might say that we know very little of what is happening in Libya and are suspicious about the condemnations coming from the Western media and institutional powers in recent days. We might leave it at that. The imperialists are more intelligent. With many specific interests in the area, they have defended their dictators to the bitter end, but when they have understood that those dictators were unsustainable, they have let them fall and chosen another strategy: that of supporting controlled democratic processes, choosing and deploying post-modern minorities as a driving force for limited change, a new rainbow of democratic rhetoric, in the sure knowledge that memory is short and leftist reflections quite immediate. Any kind of Western interference must be opposed, but we don't believe, truly, that NATO is going to invade Libya; it seems to us that this threat, just barely

pointed out, has the effect of entangling and blurring the anti-imperialist camp, even to the point of making us forget something that we ought to know: who Gaddafi is. Forgetting this produces three terrible effects in the end: breaking the ties with the popular Arab movements, giving legitimacy to the accusations against Venezuela and Cuba, and granting new prestige to the very damaged imperialist discourse on democracy. All without a doubt, a triumph for imperialist interests in the region.

Over the past ten years, Gaddafi has been a great friend to the European Union and the United States, and its dictator allies in the region. We need only recall the inflammatory statements of support from the Libyan Caligula for the deposed Ben Alí, to whose militias he quite probably provided weapons and money in the days following January 14th. It's sufficient as well to recall Gaddafi's docile collaboration with the U.S. in the framework of the so-called "war on terrorism." The political collaboration has been accompanied by close economic ties with the EU, including Spain: the sale of oil to Germany, Italy, France and the United States has paralleled the entry into Libya by the large Western oil companies (the Spanish Repsol, the British BP, the French Total, the Italian ENI and the Austrian OM), not to mention the juicy contracts for European and Spanish construction firms in Tripoli. Moreover, France and the U.S. have continued providing the weapons that are now killing Libyans from the air, following imperial Italy's example from 1911. In 2008, the former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice made it quite clear: "Libya and the United States share permanent interests: cooperation in the fight against terrorism, trade, nuclear proliferation, Africa, human rights and democracy."

When Gaddafi visited France in December of 2007, Ayman El-Kayman summarized the situation in the following paragraph: "Almost ten years ago, as far as the democratic West was concerned, Gaddafi was no long a reprehensible individual: in order to get off the U.S. terrorist list, he took responsibility for the bombing over Lockerbie; in order to normalize his relations with the United Kingdom, he turned over the names of all the Irish republicans who'd trained in Libya; for normalization with the United States, he turned over all the information he had about Libyans suspected of participating in jihad along with Bin Laden, and renounced his "weapons of mass destruction," as well as calling on Syria to do the same; in order to normalize relations with the European Union, he became the guardian of concentration camps where thousands of Africans headed for Europe are held; in order to normalize his relations with his sinister neighbor Ben Alí, he turned over the opponents of the Tunisian regime who had been living as refugees in Libya.

As is apparent, Gaddafi is neither a revolutionary nor an ally, not even a tactical one, of the world's revolutionaries. In 2008 Fidel and Chávez (along with Mercosur) rightly denounced what was known as the "shameful directive" from Europe that reinforced an already very severe persecution in Europe of defenseless immigrants who'd been stripped of everything. Of all Gaddafi's crimes, perhaps the most serious and least known is his complicity in the EU's immigration policy, particularly that of Italy, as the executioner of African migrants. Anyone seeking a wealth of information on the subject can read *Il Mare di mezzo*, by the courageous journalist Gabriele del Grande, or consult his website, *Fortresseurope*, where there is a collection of horrifying documents. By 2006 Human Rights Watch and Afvic denounced the arbitrary arrests and tortures taking place in Libyan detention centers financed by Italy. The Berlusconi-Gaddafi agreement of 2003 can be read in its entirety at Gabriele del Grande's site, and its consequences summarized succinctly and painfully in the cry of Farah Anam, the Somali fugitive from Libyan death camps: "I'd prefer to die at sea than return to Libya." Despite the denunciations of the real extermination practices taking place - or precisely because of them, proof of Gaddafi's efficiency as Europe's guardian - the European Commission signed a "cooperative agenda" in order to "direct migration flows" and "control borders," valid until 2013 and accompanied by the delivery of 50 million Euros to Libya.

Europe's relationship with Gaddafi has been a submissive one. Berlusconi, Sarkozy, Zapatero and

Blair received him with open arms in 2007 and Zapatero himself visited him in Tripoli in 2010. Even the king, Juan Carlos, was dispatched to Tripoli in January of 2009 in order to promote Spanish business. On the other hand, the EU didn't hesitate to humiliate itself and make a public apology on March 27th, 2010, through the Spanish foreign minister at the time, Miguel Ángel Moratinos, for having prohibited 188 Libyan citizens entry into Europe due to the conflict between Switzerland and Libya over the arrest of one of Gaddafi's sons in Geneva where he was accused of assaulting his maids. More than that: the EU didn't issue the slightest protest when Gaddafi imposed economic, trade and human reprisals against Switzerland, nor when he effectively called for a holy war against that country and made a public statement about his wish that it be wiped from the map.

And so now when Gaddafi's imperialist friends - who've seen how the Arab world revolted without their intervention - condemn the Libyan dictatorship and talk about democracy, we vacillate. We apply the universal template of the anti-imperialist struggle, with its conspiracy theories and its paradoxical distrust of the people, and ask for time so that the clouds of dust thrown up by the bombs dropped from the air might clear - to be sure that there are no CIA cadavers underneath. That is, when we don't offer direct support, as the Nicaraguan government did, to a criminal with whom the slightest contact can only stain forever anyone who claims to be leftist or progressive. It's not NATO who's bombing the Libyans, but Gaddafi. "Gun against gun" is how the revolutionary song goes; "Missiles against civilians" is something that we cannot accept and that, without even asking ourselves, we ought to condemn with all our might and indignation. But let's ask ourselves the questions as well. Because if we ask ourselves, the answers that we have - few as they might be - provide further proof of which side the revolutionaries of the world should be on right now. With any luck, Gaddafi will fall - better today than tomorrow - and Latin America will understand that what is happening right now in the Arab world has to do, not with the Machiavellian plans of the EU and the U.S. (which without a doubt are maneuvering in the shadows), but with the open processes of Our America, that America which belongs to everyone, that of ALBA and dignity, since the beginning of the 1990s, following in the wake of the Cuba of 1958.

The opportunity is great and possibly the last for a definitive reverse in the balance of forces and for isolating the imperialist powers within a new global framework. We ought not to fall into such a simple trap. We ought not to underestimate the Arabs. No, they aren't socialists, but in the last two months, in an unexpected way, they have stripped away the hypocrisy from the EU and the United States, have expressed their desire for authentic democracy, far removed from any colonial tutelage, and have opened a space for the left to thwart capitalism's attempts to recover lost ground. It's the Latin America of ALBA, of Che, and Playa Girón, whose prestige in this area remained intact until yesterday, that must support the process before the world's timekeeper manages to turn the hands back and to its favor. The capitalist countries have "interests," the socialist ones only "limits." Many of these "interests" were with Gaddafi, but none of these "limits" have anything to do with him. He is a criminal and moreover, a hindrance. Please, revolutionary comrades of Latin America, the revolutionary comrades of the Arab world are asking that you not support him.

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P.S.

* Translated by Machetera

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