

A Dirty Word

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March 19, 2011

ON THURSDAY EVENING I could not think of anything except Libya.

First I heard the blood-curdling speech by Muammar Qaddafi, in which he promised to occupy Benghazi within hours and drown the rebels in a bloodbath.

I was extremely worried and extremely furious with the international community and especially with the US, which had wasted days and weeks of precious time with empty phrasemongering, while the dictator reconquered Libya bit by bit.

Then there was the almost incredible sight of the UN Security Council convening within the hour, dispensing with speeches and unanimously adopting the resolution calling for military intervention.

The scene that ensued in Benghazi's central square and broadcast live on Aljazeera reminded me of Mugrabi Square in Tel Aviv on November 29, 1947, just after the United Nations General Assembly had adopted the resolution on the partition of Palestine between a Jewish and an Arab state. The feelings of Joy and relief were palpable.

THE HESITATION of the United States and other countries to intervene militarily in Libya was scandalous. More than that - it was monstrous.

My heart is with the Libyan people. (Indeed, in Hebrew "libi" means "my heart".)

For me, "non-intervention" is a dirty word. It reminds me of the Spanish civil war, which took place when I was very young.

In 1936, the Spanish republic and the Spanish people were viciously attacked by a Spanish general, Francisco Franco, with troops imported from Morocco. It was a very bloody war, with untold atrocities.

Franco was decisively aided by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. German Air Force planes terrorized Spanish cities. The bombardment of the town of Guernica was immortalized in a painting by Pablo Picasso. (The story goes that when the Nazis occupied Paris a few years later, they were outraged by the painting and shouted at Picasso: "Did you do that?" "No," he answered quietly: "You did!")

The Western democracies adamantly refused to help the republic and coined the term "non-intervention". Non-intervention meant in practice that Great Britain and France did not intervene, while Germany and Italy did, and did their worst. The only foreign power to help the beleaguered democrats was the Soviet Union. As we learned much later, Stalin's agents exploited the situation in order to eliminate their fellow fighters - socialists, syndicalists, liberals and others.

At the time, it looked like a clear fight between good and absolute evil. Idealists from all over the world joined the International Brigades of the republic. If I had been only a few years older, I would without doubt have volunteered, too. In 1948, we sang with gusto the songs of the International Brigades in our

own war.

FOR SOMEONE who was alive at the time of the Holocaust, especially for a Jew, there can be no doubt at all.

When it was over, and the awful extent of the genocide emerged, there was an outcry that has not yet died down.

"Where was the world? Why did the allies not bomb the railway lines leading to Auschwitz? Why did they not destroy the gas chambers and crematoriums in the death camps from the air?"

These questions have not been satisfactorily answered to this very day. We know that Anthony Eden, the British foreign minister, asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt: "What shall we do with the Jews [who manage to escape]?" We also know that the allies were mortally afraid to be seen as conducting the war "for the Jews", as Nazi propaganda proclaimed from morning to evening. Indeed, the Germans dropped leaflets over American positions in Italy with the picture of an ugly, crooked-nose Jew dilly-dallying with a blond American woman, with the caption: "While you are risking your life, the Jew is seducing your wife at home!"

Using military force to prevent the Nazis from killing the German Jews - as well as the Roma - would definitely have constituted interference in the internal affairs of Germany. A very strong case could have been made that it was not the business of other countries, certainly not of their armed forces.

Should it have been done? Yes or no? And if the answer is yes, why does it apply to Adolf Hitler and not to this little Fuehrer in Tripoli?

THIS, OF course, leads us straight to Kosovo.

There the same question arose. Slobodan Milosevic was committing an act of genocide - driving out a whole people, committing barbarities along the way. Kosovo was a part of Serbia, and Milosevic claimed that it was an internal Serbian affair.

When there was a worldwide outcry, President Bill Clinton decided to bomb installations in Serbia in order to induce Milosevic to desist. Nominally, it was a NATO action. It achieved its goal, the Kosovars returned to their homeland, and today we have the independent republic of Kosova.

At the time, I applauded publicly, to the dismay of many of my leftist friends at home and all over the world. They insisted that the bombing campaign was a crime, particularly since it was conducted by NATO, which for them is an instrument of the devil.

My answer was that in order to prevent genocide, I am ready to make a pact even with the devil.

This goes for today, too. I don't care who puts an end to Qaddafi's murderous war against his own people, and especially to the bombing raids of his air force. The UN, NATO or the US alone - whoever does it, may they be blessed.

A few days ago, on a day when Qaddafi's pilots were killing Libyans as usual, I read an article by an American journalist I like and appreciate very much. She ferociously attacked the idea of the US enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya, especially since the abominable Paul Wolfowitz was advocating it.

It seems that this has become a domestic American affair. While the extreme right (called for some reason "conservative") - tea partiers, neo-cons and such - advocate the non-flying zone, politically correct "liberals" (another of these curious terms) oppose it.

People are being killed by a ruthless, half-mad dictator, a whole country is going down the drain - what the hell has that got to do with domestic American politics? And why have my friends been maneuvered into the wrong corner?

BARACK OBAMA was again at his best, saying all the right things and doing the wrong - or doing nothing at all.

He told Qaddafi to go, and then looked on passively as the tyrant, instead of going anywhere, terrorized his people. His Secretary of Defense told everybody what an incredibly difficult operation enforcing a no-fly zone would be, his generals warned against taking on another war they are unable to fight. The almighty United States of America looked like a has-been power, unable to mount even the smallest military operation against the negligible air force of a tin-pot dictator. Any Israeli air force commander would have finished the job by lunchtime.

We are not the policeman of the world, American politicians argued. But that is exactly what a superpower is - power brings responsibility.

The pitiful sight of the Obama administration throughout this crisis shows that the US is no longer a superpower, just a big power anxious to keep its oil supplies safe with the help of assorted kings and emirs. Coming after its abject capitulation to the Israeli right-wing lobby and its veto of the Security Council resolution against the enlarging of the settlements, the conclusion is sad indeed.

Cynics will say that the Americans really desire to keep Qaddafi, so that he can go on delivering the oil, much as they

support the autocrats of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain who are crushing their peoples and continue to deal with the oil as if it were their private property.

"Non-intervention" turned the Spanish people over to the tender mercies of Franco, and protected Hitler at the most sensitive stages of his preparation for war. Direct intervention, on the other hand, sent Milosevic to the war criminals' prison.

I WANT to make my position on this perfectly clear.

The doctrine of non-intervention into the internal affairs of other countries when matters of genocide and mass killings are concerned is dead and should be buried, before the corpse starts to stink to high heaven.

At this point in history, it is the duty of all nations to prevent systematic atrocities committed by a criminal government against its own citizens. This duty falls on international institutions like the UN, but when these fail, as they so often do, the duty falls on individual nations or groups of nations. To its credit, the Arab League, comprising 22 Arab nations, did come out unequivocally for military intervention against Qaddafi - though not against other Arab tyrants, some of whom voted for the resolution.

Centuries ago, it was accepted that every nation is responsible for the capture and trial of pirates, irrespective of where and against whom their crimes were committed. This principle should be applied now to crimes committed by regimes against their citizens. Muammar Qaddafi should be caught and put on trial.

Humanity is moving towards a civilized world order. Non-intervention is the very opposite.]

Thursday's hurried Security Council resolution was a historic step in this direction. In my imagination I saw French planes rolling off the airstrips minutes after the votes were counted. That has not happened. But Libya is saved and Qaddafi's fate is sealed.

In international parlance, non-intervention has indeed become a dirty word.