

To The Shores of Tripoli

Uri Avnery

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THOUGH THE Bible tells us “*Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth*” (Proverbs 24:17), I could not help myself. I was happy.

Muammar al-Gaddafi was the enemy of every decent person in the world. He was one of the worst tyrants in recent memory.

This fact was hidden behind a façade of clownishness. He liked to present himself as a philosopher (the “Green Book”), a visionary statesman (Israelis and Palestinians must unite in the “State of Isratine”), even as an immature teenager (his innumerable uniforms and costumes). But basically he was a ruthless dictator, surrounded by corrupt relatives and cronies, squandering the great wealth of Libya.

This was obvious to anyone who wanted to see. Unfortunately, there were quite a few who chose to close their eyes.

WHEN I expressed my support for the international intervention, I was expecting to be attacked by some well-meaning people. I was not disappointed.

How could I? How could I support the American imperialists and the abominable NATO? Didn't I realize that it was all about the oil?

I was not surprised. I have been through this before. When NATO started to bomb Serbian territory in order to put an end to Slobodan Milosevic's crimes in Kosovo, many of my political friends turned against me.

Didn't I realize that it was all an imperialist plot? That the devious Americans wanted to tear Yugoslavia (or Serbia) apart? That NATO was an evil organization? That Milosevic, though he may have some faults, was representing progressive humanity?

This was said when the evidence of the gruesome mass-murder in Bosnia was there for everyone to see, when Milosevic was already exposed as the cold-blooded monster he was. Ariel Sharon admired him.

So how could decent, well-meaning leftists, people of an unblemished humanist record, embrace such a person? My only explanation was that their hatred of the USA and of NATO was so strong, so fervent, that anyone attacked by them must surely be a benefactor of humanity, and all accusations against them pure fabrications. The same happened with Pol Pot.

Now it has happened again. I was bombarded with messages from well-meaning people who lauded Gaddafi for all his good deeds. One might get the impression that he was a second Nelson Mandela, if not a second Mahatma Gandhi.

While the rebels were already fighting their way into his huge personal compound, the socialist leader of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, was praising him as a true model of upright humanity, a man who dared to stand up to the American aggressors.

Well, sorry, count me out. I have this irrational abhorrence of bloody dictators, of genocidal mass-murderers, of leaders who wage war on their own people. And at my advanced age, it

is difficult for me to change.

I am ready to support even the devil, if that is necessary to put an end to this kind of atrocities. I won't even ask about his precise motives. Whatever one may think about the USA and/or NATO - if they disarm a Milosevic or a Gaddafi, they have my blessing.

HOW LARGE a role did NATO play in the defeat of the Libyan dictator?

The rebels would not have reached Tripoli, and certainly not by now, if they had not enjoyed NATO's sustained air support. Libya is one big desert. The offensive had to rely on one long road. Without mastery of the skies, the rebels would have been massacred. Anyone who was alive during World War II and followed the campaigns of Rommel and Montgomery knows this.

I assume that the rebels also received arms and advice to facilitate their advance.

But I object to the patronizing assertion that it was all a NATO victory. It is the old colonialist attitude in a new guise. Of course, these poor, primitive Arabs could not do anything without the White Man shouldering his burden and rushing to the rescue.

But wars are not won by weapons, they are won by people. “Boots on the ground”, as the Americans call it. Even with all the help they got, the Libyan rebels, disorganized and poorly armed as they were, have won a remarkable victory. This would not have happened without real revolutionary fervor, without bravery and determination. It is a Libyan victory, not a British or a French one.

This has been underplayed by the international media. I have not seen any genuine combat coverage (and I know what that looks like). Journalists did not acquit themselves with glory. They displayed exemplary cowardice, staying at a safe distance from the front, even during the fall of Tripoli. On TV they looked ridiculous with their conspicuous helmets when they were surrounded by bareheaded fighters.

What came over was endless jubilation over victories that had seemingly fallen from heaven. But these were feats achieved by people – yes, by Arab people.

This is especially galling to our Israeli “military correspondents” and “Arab affairs experts”. Used to despising or hating “the Arabs”, they are ascribing the victory to NATO. It seems that the people of Libya played a minor role, if any.

Now they blabber endlessly about the “tribes”, which will make democracy and orderly governance in Libya impossible. Libya is not really a country, it was never a unified state before becoming an Italian colony, there is no such thing as a Libyan people. (Remember the French saying this about Algeria, and Golda Meir about Palestine?)

Well, for a people that does not exist, the Libyans fought

very well. And as for the “tribes” – why do tribes exist only in Africa and Asia, never among Europeans? Why not a Welsh tribe or a Bavarian tribe?

(When I visited Jordan in 1986, well before the peace treaty, I was entertained by a very civilized, high-ranking Jordanian official. After an interesting conversation over dinner, he surprised me by mentioning that he belongs to a certain tribe. Next day, while I was riding on a horse to Petra, the rider next to me asked in a low voice whether I belonged “to the tribe”. It took me some time to understand that he was asking me if I was a Jew. It seems that American Jews refer to themselves in this way.)

The “tribes” of Libya would be called in Europe “ethnic groups” and in Israel “communities”. The term “tribe” has a patronizing connotation. Let’s drop it.

ALL THOSE who decry NATO’s intervention must answer a simple question: who else would have done the job?

21st century humanity cannot tolerate acts of genocide and mass-murder, wherever they occur. It cannot look on while dictators butcher their own peoples. The doctrine of “non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states” belongs to the past. We Jews, who have accused mankind of standing idly by while millions of Jews, including German citizens, were exterminated by the legitimate German government, certainly

owe the world an answer.

I have mentioned in the past that I advocate some form of effective world governance and expect it to be in place by the end of this century. This would include a democratically elected world executive that would have military forces at its disposal and that could intervene, if a world parliament so decides.

For this to happen, the United Nations must be revamped entirely. The veto power must be abolished. It is intolerable that the US can veto the acceptance of Palestine as a member state, or that Russia and China can veto intervention in Syria.

Certainly, great powers like the US and China should have a louder voice than, say, Luxemburg and the Fiji Islands, but a two thirds majority in the General Assembly should have the power to override Washington, Moscow or Beijing.

That may be the music of the future, or, some may say, a pipe dream. As for now, we live in a very imperfect world and must make do with the instruments we have. NATO, alas, is one of them. The European Union is another, though in this case poor, eternally conscience-stricken Germany, has paralyzed it. If Russia or China were to join, that would be fine.

This is not some remote problem. Gaddafi is finished, but Bashar al-Assad is not. He is butchering his people even while you read this, and the world is looking on helplessly.

Any volunteers for intervention?