

The Neocolonial Order is to Stay: The Fate of Libya

By Akbar E. Torbat

September 23, 2011 "[Information Clearing House](#)" -- Colonialism by the imperial powers gradually ended after World War II. However, a neo-colonial order was created to maintain the same economic relationship without formal political mandate or protectorate of the former colonies. The neo-colonial order since has lingered in most Third World countries and the western powers are at work to continue it for the foreseeable future.

In Egypt, the neocolonial order was halted for some years under President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1956-70). After his untimely death, the neo-colonial order gradually started to comeback under President Anwar Sadat (1970-81) for a few years and then continued for thirty years under President Hosni Mubarak. In Tunisia, for three decades, President Habib Bourguiba (1957-87) tried to end the neo-colonial order without much success. He was ultimately replaced, in a coup d'état in 1987, by Zine El Abidine Ben Ali who brought back the neo-colonial order for 23 years. In Iran Prime Minister Mohammad Mosadeqh (1951-53) tried to end neo-colonial order imposed by the British imperialism. However, he was overthrown in 1953 by a coup jointly managed by the intelligence agencies of the United States and Great Britain. The coup restored the neo-colonial order until the Iranian revolution ended the Pahlavi monarchy regime in 1979. Since then, the West has tried to re-dominate Iran in various ways, including imposing economic sanctions and threat of military attacks, without much success.

The Uprisings in the Arab States

The recent uprisings in the Arab states have seriously challenged the neocolonial orders in the oil-rich regions of the Middle East and North Africa. The uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia have been the struggles for ending neo-colonization and to progress toward self-determination and democracy, which haven't succeeded yet. So far, the uprisings have led to the fall of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia on January 14, 2011 and Hosni Mubarak in Egypt on Feb 11, and it seems there are more to come. The Western powers backed Mubarak and Ben Ali for decades to rule in these countries. After their demise, they want to stop further uprisings by making some cosmetic changes in their regimes and preserve the status quo.

In Tunisia, the bellwether of the Arab uprisings, the situation has not changed much. It looks like the continuation of Ben Ali regime without Ben Ali himself. The election is now set for October 23, 2011, and that could lead to more protests and unrests in the streets of Tunisia. The main issues in the protests have been unemployment and problem of income inequality. Since the toppling of Ben Ali, however no real change has been seen to resolve these problems. Fouad Mebazza who has been acting president since January 15, 2011 and Beji Caid el Sebsi who has been acting prime minister since February both had served under Ben Ali regime. They are now manipulating the transitional process in order to continue to stay in power. In Egypt, a military

junta belonging to the Mubarak regime is still ruling the country. Field-Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi has headed the junta since Mubarak was deposed. Nevertheless, the uprisings have continued to challenge the surviving junta. According to Al-Ahram newspaper, the election for the lower house People's Assembly is going to be held on November 21, 2011. Other elections for the upper house and the presidency are planned to be held in 2012.

Libya's Fate

Libya was an Italian colony since 1911 until it gained independence in 1951. King Idris ruled Libya after its independence until 1969, at which time Colonel Muammar Qaddafi led a revolutionary movement that overthrew King Idris in a military coup. In early 1970, Qaddafi challenged the oil companies and demanded higher prices for the Libya's oil, which gained him prestige. Libya's oil has one of the best qualities among the oil producing countries. Libya's proximity to Europe gives its oil an important freight advantage over the distant Persian Gulf countries' oil. Because of its oil wealth, Libya became the most advanced country in Africa as measured by the Human Development Index according to the United Nations Human Development Report.

While Qaddafi collaborated with the Western powers in later years, he wanted to pursue independent policies. That displeased the West and led to his ouster. This also sent a warning to any Third World country's leader who wants to skip the neo-colonial order and pursue independent policies. The fate of Libya is an example for any Third World regime that wants to be independent from the Euro-American domination.

Since February 2011, some key members of Gaddafi's regime gradually defected to the West and collaborated with the imperial powers to overthrow him in a military campaign. Some former members of the regime along with some Islamic factions and mercenaries organized in Benghazi as well as some advisors and military officers from the NATO member countries provided the manpower for the campaign. Under the cover of "humanitarian intervention" and "protecting the civilians", the Libyan people became victims of an imperial offensive by the US – NATO air attacks. Aside from destruction of the modern infrastructure in Libya that takes years to re-build, the intervention caused thousands of deaths and injuries.

Now the so called National Transitional Council (TNC) claims it has control over Libya. TNC is composed of about 40 handpicked compradors who are participating in a puppet government to serve the interests of the West. Its key figures are Mustafa Abdel Jalil, who was the Justice Minister under the Gaddafi regime until late February 2011; Abdel Hakim Belhaj, a former al-Qaeda member who had previously joined the Taliban in Afghanistan; and Mahmoud Jibril who served as the head of Economic Development Board in charge of privatization and liberalization under Qaddafi. Other Islamic and secular factions are presently challenging the supremacy of the TNC. Mustafa Abdel Jalil, the head of Libya's interim government is advocating Islamic legislation as he announced in the capital, Tripoli, on September 13. He said he would incorporate Islamic Sharia law into Libya's principal legislation. As of now, it appears the clock is moving backward towards an Islamic fundamentalist government controlled by the West instead of a secular democracy in Libya.

On September 15, 2011, in a joint trip to Tripoli and Benghazi, the British Prime Minister David Cameron and the French president Nicolas Sarkozy, celebrated their victory over Libya and endorsed the puppet government in front of the TNC supporters. Cameron said “This does go beyond Libya ... this is a moment when the Arab spring could become an Arab summer and we see democracy advance in other countries too;” warning Syria and other regimes across the Middle East and North Africa. It appears, this is the model that the Western leaders are planning for other countries. Separately, the British government announced it would provide a six-month "military liaison team" to find and destroy pro-Gaddafi forces' weapon stockpiles and to decommission weapons some of which sold to Gaddafi by the British government itself. This announcement heralds Libya is becoming a 'NATO protectorate' led by Britain.

Now some war mongers are beating the drum for air raids on Syria and Iran. The West uses the strategy of divide-and-conquer to create civil wars to be followed by NATO – US air raids. At the same time, the West is protecting its client regimes against the ongoing people's uprisings elsewhere in Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Qatar, Jordan, and Bahrain. Whether the uprisings in the Arab World could succeed to end neocolonialism remains to be seen.

Akbar E. Torbat (atorbat@calstatela.edu) teaches economics at California State University – Los Angeles. He has published a number of articles in scholarly journals concerning international Political/economic affair. He received his Ph.D. in political economy from the University of Texas at Dallas.