

## **Demonization, War Crimes and the Task of the Antiwar Movement**

Currently, the corporate media in the U.S. and its allies can demonize the leader of a country targeted by the Pentagon to the point that the consequences of using the most deadly weapons against a totally defenseless population are hidden and dismissed. How does this monopoly of ideas impact the antiwar movement in the United States regarding intervention in Syria, and the war against Libya?

Some supposedly antiwar groups and even usually liberal and progressive media unfortunately spend more time cataloguing the real, or alleged, shortcomings of the demonized leader, at the moment the cases of Bashar al-Assad and Muammar Gadhafi, than rallying people to respond to a criminal intervention and attacks by the U.S. and NATO “great” powers. The influence of this kind of critic coincides with the opinions of U.S. ruling powers. They are like the voices who said “neither NATO nor Milosevic” in 1999, “neither Bush nor Saddam” in 1991 and 2003, and “neither Israel nor Hezbollah” in 2006. This approach played into the warmongers’ motives and weakened the antiwar forces.

Thus, it is important to thoroughly answer their arguments and point to the antiwar movement’s main tasks.

Since March, NATO forces have carried out approximately 20,000 sorties in Libya, hitting 8,000 targets selected by U.S. military intelligence and the CIA, killing many civilians, in what is described as implementing a “no-fly zone.” No other armed

force in history has had the capacity to wreak such havoc, using cruise missiles, bunker busters, drones, depleted uranium and dense inert metal explosive bombs, antipersonnel razor shredding bomblets, and antipersonnel mines.

### **What should be the response to this terror?**

Whatever one's evaluation of the leadership of a small, underdeveloped country facing U.S. sanctions, sabotage, and assassination attempts, these leaders are not the reason the U.S. is hell-bent on intervening to try to overthrow the Syrian government and is destroying Libya today.

**The U.S. and all the old regimes tied to it in the region are trying desperately to manage and contain the social explosion that is shaking the mostly Arab countries from Morocco to Saudi Arabia, highlighted by the tremendous popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt.**

They want to hold this still unfolding mass upheaval in channels where it doesn't threaten neocolonial domination of the region. Replacing the Ba'athist government in Syria with a client regime and gaining military bases in Libya — which lies between Egypt and Tunisia — would serve this purpose.

What is also at stake in Libya is that U.S., French, British, and Italian regimes are determined to lay hold of Libya's now well-developed infrastructure of oil refineries, pumping stations, gas lines, ports, and pipelines directly into Europe, as well as billions of dollars in gold reserves, oil reserves — the largest in Africa — and Libya's other rich assets. All of this has been built up over the four decades since the Libyans expelled colonial and neocolonial domination by the Britain and the U.S.

These imperial powers are especially determined to stop Libya's assistance in the development of other African countries. Libya planned a United Federation of Africa and backed it with

\$90 billion in investment funds. This move toward independence deeply threatens the continued multinational corporate looting of the continent.

### **Corporate media sells the war**

In preparation for a war of conquest, the role of the corporate media is to endlessly repeat every charge and statement made by the institutions of U.S. power. An almost frenzied level of lies, wild fabrications, racist stereotyping, and ugly caricatures saturates all political discussion.

The corporate media spread the demands that the Pentagon death machine must act in the name of “humanity” in order to “save lives.” The war itself is cloaked in neutral terms. Demonization is meant to disorient and put the massive, criminal destruction planned by the U.S. and NATO beyond debate. Enormous pressure is placed on every level of the U.S. population to accept the premise that the targeted country and its leadership are to blame. The attacks are presented as if Assad is the only person who lives in Syria and Gadhafi is the only one who lives in Libya.

As the Libyan people continue to resist, Western media continues to distort this reality. The Libyans endured more than five months of nonstop aerial assault. The bombing united the population and their cohesion grew. More than one million people have held pro-government, anti-NATO rallies in Tripoli. Libya’s government has distributed more than three million weapons in a country of 6.5 million people to enable them to resist occupation, something no government does if it considers its citizens to be hostile.

### **What antiwar forces should do**

The response to colonial wars of aggression should be the same as the response to a racist mobilization, a racist lynch mob or a police attack on an oppressed community: Mobilize all pos-

sible forces to stand up to the crime and say “no!” Refuse to take part in the orchestrated campaign of vilification that blames the victims.

However difficult it may be, it is essential to reject the racist political onslaught that accompanies the military onslaught on Libya and intervention in Syria. The responsibility of progressive intellectuals and groups in the United States is to explain the corporate interests behind the latest “humanitarian” war, and never to echo in left terminology the charges made in the corporate media. The antiwar movement must counter media demonization in the midst of a war mobilization and must focus on the outrageous crimes being committed, refusing to accept or give weight to any justification for them.

The good news is that despite an ocean of propaganda, poll after poll has confirmed that from 60 percent to 65 percent of the U.S. population is against the U.S. war on Libya.

### **The Cynthia McKinney tour**

People were able to begin to build resistance to aggression toward Syria and Libya, as former U.S. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney engaged them on a 17-city national speaking tour, sponsored by International Action Center. More than 500 people packed the historic Shrine of the Black Madonna in Atlanta’s West End community on July 24.

McKinney had risked her life to visit Libya with a U.S. delegation in the midst of the U.S./NATO bombing. She deserves nothing but respect from the movement.

McKinney was first a target of national media condemnation as a young, first-term state representative in the Georgia Assembly, when she dared to speak out against the U.S. war on Iraq. The entire chamber of representatives stood up, turned their backs on her and walked out.

When she was elected to the U.S. Congress, her outspoken opposition to and questioning of the orchestrated national frenzy surrounding the Sept. 11, 2001, attack; her clear opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement; her defense of political prisoners; and her support of the Palestinian people generated reactionary campaigns that poured funds into opposing candidates in her small Georgia congressional district. Again and again the district lines were redrawn in an attempt to disqualify McKinney from the U.S. Congress. But she has earned international acclaim for her candidacy for president on the Green Party ticket, for her participation in humanitarian convoys to Gaza, and for being jailed by Israel.

It was expected that McKinney's tour would be attacked politically by reactionaries and militarists. What was unfortunate was that some of the "neither Gadhafi nor NATO" people have also criticized her, some saying she must echo the imperialist demand that Gadhafi "must go." Even more arrogant and insensitive are their attacks on the Nation of Islam and Pan-African voices opposing the war, simply because these forces for more than three decades have followed developments in Libya with great interest and enthusiasm.

Whatever one's attitude toward the Libyan or Syrian governments, the worst thing would be for the U.S. and NATO countries to increase their influence in these countries and in the region. Leave it to African, Arab, and especially Syrian and Libyan people to discuss, debate, and decide their own future, without outside interference and U.S./NATO bombs.

The slogans of the antiwar movement should be: No intervention in Syria! Stop the U.S./NATO war on Libya!

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While on tour in Libya  
Cynthia McKinney vis-  
its a hospital of people  
wounded by NATO  
shelling June 5, 2011.



New York, June 27, 2011.

WW PHOTO: ELLEN CATALINOTTO



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