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Economic &amp; Political Weekly

March 16, 2013

## On Imperialist Intervention

**LENGTH:** 784 words

This is with reference to Stuart Schaar's review (23 February) of my book, *Arab Spring, Libyan Winter* (LeftWord 2012). My book conveys three related arguments. Firstly, the Arab Spring is an unfinished process, driven by myriad social forces arrayed against the twinned powers of neo-liberal economic policy and authoritarian political structures. Fallacious arguments about "democracy promotion" and "social media" missed the longer history of struggle that prepared the terrain for the ongoing battle to fashion a new dispensation in the region. Secondly, the forces of the counter-revolution (or indeed imperialism), manifest in the capitals of the west and in their local client regimes (the Gulf Arab states and Israel, as well as in the recesses of the Arab authoritarian regimes), fought back from the first glimmer of the Spring. Ben Ali, the client of France, and Mubarak, the client of the United States, had to be defended until such defence was no longer viable. They had managed the region through four pillars: the steady removal of oil, the firm hand of friendship for clients capable of hegemonic control over the region (the Gulf Arabs), the unyielding defence of Israel, and finally, the isolation of powers deemed to be "revisionists", or those who threaten the managed order (since 1979, Iran).

Thirdly, the Libyan rebellion was an authentic upsurge among social forces alienated from the Gaddafi regime, which had begun to drift from its radical origins in 1969 into the arms of reaction by the 1990s and 2000s. This upsurge provided an opening for the counter-revolution, which sought to make vastly exaggerated claims about genocide in order to trigger the United Nations' (UN) Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine and intervene with military force. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)/Gulf Arab intervention in Libya provided an avenue for the counter-revolution to assert itself as a genuine social force of the Arab Spring - as the defender of the very democracy that the west had so long been eager to suppress. It also provided cover for the Saudi intervention to crush the rebellion in Bahrain.

Stuart Schaar's review makes out as if my book has only one argument: that the west intervened in Libya to steal the oil. Schaar makes some polemical points without analysing (and only caricaturing) the arguments from the book (there are virtually no quotations from it). That Libya's Gaddafi was a megalomaniac or that his threats against his people would lead to immense loss of life are not missed by my book (p 150, where I assess his rants on pp 155-60). The fact is that neither the human rights agencies nor the UN agencies found evidence of any major massacre in the early phase of the war. In January 2013, the Libyan government's Ministry of Martyrs and Missing Persons disputed earlier figures (50,000 or 25,000) for casualties during the war down to 4,700 deaths for the rebels and 2,100 missing in total. The ministry is not collating the dead among Gaddafi loyalists. Now these numbers reveal that we are far from the standards of genocide, and question the R2P doctrine's usage in the Libyan case.

Apropos Schaar's point about the Left's "case by case" examination of intervention, my book tests the question of NATO intervention in Libya and finds that it falls short from the standpoint not of a knee-jerk anti-imperialism but from that of the Libyan people. The mayhem in Libya, as I have written in a number of articles (including in the EPW, 16

June 2012), is related to the nature of the intervention and its subvention of the political process toward a set of elites who were the preferred interlocutors of the west. Schaar's assumption is that the west is capable of selfless intervention, which I question.

Debates on liberal interventionism have been ongoing since the 1990s with the interventionists getting the upper hand because their position was the policy of powerful governments. That is the reason why the UN opened up a dialogue about the R2P doctrine. A concerted effort to shut down other sources of debate and action led the UN Security Council to being suborned to a western narrative, and for all regional institutions and regionalism itself to being sidelined. I consider the potential of the African Union (AU) in the reviewed book in light of this argument, being aware of the weakness (not "bankruptcy", as Schaar put it) of the AU. This is precisely why I have written about the Syria Contact Group (Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey) - not because I believe that it can broker the crisis (its potential is being blocked by the US and Russia) but that it could do so under a different global dispensation.

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**LOAD-DATE:** March 23, 2013

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Magazine