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Debate: Libya/Italy

Stop the bombing, support the revolutions, no to the dictators and to repression, rights for migrants.

- Debate - Problems of the Arab and Middle East regions -
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One just has to look at what is happening in Lampedusa to see the hypocrisy of the war manoeuvres in Libya. Western governments, led by France, the USA, Great Britain and followed by Italy, have been ready to bomb in order to protect the Arab people from Gaddafi's dictatorship. This is the same dictatorship, which the West had praised, recognised and sold arms to, in exchange for generous, guaranteed contracts for energy resources and assurances over the control of migration from Africa.

But the people who rebelled, demanding freedom and democracy and in whose name the UN No Fly Zone resolution had been passed, as soon as they arrived on this side of the Mediterranean, were considered to be illegal migrants, left to rot on the island of Lampedusa. They have been herded into makeshift tented camps or in Government Identification Centres, leaving them with the misery of being sent back or the insecurity of the submerged economy and illegality.

The so-called international community has only now noticed that Gaddafi is a danger, that the Libyan people have been oppressed and are now being massacred. Previously various Western countries were competing to sign contracts, sell arms and support a tarnished regime. Gaddafi was fine while he was guaranteeing oil supplies and blocking the flow of emigrants from the south to the north but he became an enemy to be eliminated once the Libyan people – and them alone – had put his regime into a life or death crisis. Rarely has the West shown so much cynicism and taken such extreme action in defence of its own economic interests. Western powers have started to play a sort of North African game of 'Risk' again – similar to the one they played at the beginning of the twentieth century. They are engaged in a complex game of alliances and competition where this time Italy has been the sacrificial victim. In fact France, after having lost part of its influence in Tunisia and concerned with the Algerian situation, has adroitly seized the opportunity of politically 'occupying' (albeit by military means) Libya through building a privileged relationship with the rebel Benghazi government. It has pushed hard to remove Gaddafi and become in this way the new Western 'partner' for the area. The USA acted in the same way and Italy found itself being pulled along into a situation it did not want and had tried to avoid for a long time. The willingness to intervene is linked to the contradictions between the various capitalist countries. The latter have been in crisis for some years and also for this needed to step up their own imperialist intervention.

So war is underway but has anybody make a serious balance sheet of other humanitarian wars? How can one not see that Afghanistan is outside any control, that Iraq is still a battleground and that after ten years Kosovo is ready to explode again? Can serious analysts really argue that the policy, started at the beginning of the 1990s by Bush senior and then re-launched by Bush junior, has really helped humanity, the peoples concerned or improved the quality of international relations? Or rather hasn't it improved the oil supplies to the USA and steadied its economic decline by military means?

This time however there is a supplementary element which is different from other wars and military interventions. This war is the first 'post' September 11 war, that is the first war which takes place in a different context to the war on terrorism and Islamic radicalism due to the scale and impact of the North African and Arab revolutions.

The Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and the shockwaves they generated throughout North Africa and the Middle East is an event of global historical importance which characterises the present phase of international politics. These are the first revolutions of the new century, the first revolutions of the present phase of the crisis. It is no surprise that the social struggles in Europe and the USA identify with them.

We make no excuses for defining what is happening in the southern Mediterranean as 'revolutions'. Too many people, even on the left, have lost the ability to recognise a revolutionary process, with its emotions, potential and limits. Specifically we have also identified a dynamic of 'permanent revolution', a process that starts with democratic questions but which begins progressively to take up social issues. The revolutions have terrified the Western powers and the Arab regime which are as thick as thieves. They are organising an out and out

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counter-revolution either through attempts to politically transform the dynamic or through violent and repressive interventions as we have seen in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and Libya.

The Arab revolutions are an example of ‘Yes we can’ and put onto the agenda the need for an internationalist commitment, the necessity to build stronger links with anti-capitalist and revolutionary social and political forces. Through political dialogue we need to set up common initiatives on some questions, to forge direct relationships between social and cultural activists and to provide material support so that these forces can really become embedded.

Consequently we think that our opposition to war must be closely linked to our support for the revolutions in North Africa and the Arab world – in the first place with Tunisia and Egypt. We should not retreat into campist type positions which oppose the war only because it is imperialist and is silent about the responsibility of the Middle Eastern dictatorships. We place ourselves unreservedly at the side of the Tunisians, the Egyptians, the Libyans, the Syrians, the Yemeni and all those, including many women, who have gone onto the streets to get rid of their own governments.

We do not think that bombing is an effective way forward or that it is useful for strengthening the mobilisations, revolts and revolutions. Many people have asked pacifists and all of us who oppose the war what would be our solution, forgetting that the tactic of leaving the situation to rot and then bringing in the bombs, is as old as military diplomacy itself. In order to be able to say what we would have done would mean having the levers of government and politics under our control. We would have strangled and isolated Gaddafi, we would not have signed the Friendship Treaty [signed by Berlusconi and the Italian Government] whose sole aim was to stop emigration. We would have worked in cooperation with North Africa – without grabbing energy resources, without piling up profit and guaranteeing the prosperity of the big multinationals. The energy resources of North Africa are sufficient to provide the whole area with an economic, social and also ecological surplus that could be equitably distributed. We would have immediately supported the revolts and revolutions, brought aid and resources and even worked out ways of physically protecting both the civilians and rebel forces threatened by Gaddafi’s army.

Our opposition to the war is at one with our support for the Arab revolts which is the only way to guarantee the removal of the tyrannies and the establishment of a new democracy throughout the region. Ranged against this approach are not only the Western governments and the region’s reactionary regimes but also left political forces which swing between two wrong positions: either to defend the military intervention, thereby providing cover for the Western ‘hawks’, asking the Italian government to be more committed than the unreliable Lega Nord will allow; or to defend Gaddafi in the name of an abstract ‘anti-imperialism’ for whom the enemy of my enemy is my friend. The latter is a minority position but is definitely present in the movement and is influencing the reaction of those who repudiate military intervention. These two political reactions are an obstacle to supporting the Arab revolution with the required determination. At the very moment we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Genoa anti-global protests, the movement, which was then defined as the ‘second world superpower’, should today be making its voice heard again.

No to the military intervention, stop the bombing!

Support the revolutions in the Arab world and North Africa!

No to the dictatorships and their repression!

Solidarity, welcome and protection for the migrants!

Build committees in support of the Arab revolutions!