



LIBYA AND THE WORLD OF OIL

By Noam Chomsky

Resumen.

El mundo de los grandes intereses petroleros ha proporcionado orientaciones útiles para el manejo de las reacciones occidentales a las sublevaciones por la democracia en el mundo árabe (primavera árabe). Básicamente, se trata de apoyar a los estados petroleros y a sus gobernantes. La primavera árabe tiene raíces profundas. La región ha estado hirviendo a fuego lento por años. La corriente actual de protestas comenzó el año pasado; en Kuwait, en Bahrein, en Egipto, en Túnez y la Arabia Saudita. En algunos de ellos se ha impuesto la política petrolera de las potencias occidentales y, en otros todavía el ambiente esta caliente.

Abstract.

The world of the great oil interests has provided useful directions for the handling of the western reactions to the revolts by the democracy in the Arab world (Arab spring). Basically, one is to support to the oil states and his governors. The Arab spring has deep roots. The region has been boiling to untimed fire per years. The present current of protests began the past year; in Kuwait, in Bahrein, in Egypt, in Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. In some of them the oil policy of the western powers has prevailed and, in others still the atmosphere this hot one.

Article.

The international tribunal on crimes during the civil war in Sierra Leone, the trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor came to an end. The chief prosecutor, U.S. law professor David Crane, informed The Times of London that the case was incomplete: The prosecutors intended to charge Moammar Gadhafi, who, Crane said, "was ultimately responsible for the mutilation, maiming and/or murder of 1.2 million people." But the charge was not to be. The U.S., U.K. and others intervened



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to block it. Asked why, Crane said, “Welcome to the world of oil.” The world of oil is rarely far in the background in affairs concerning this region

Another recent Gadhafi casualty was Sir Howard Davies, the director of the London School of Economics, who resigned after revelations of the school’s links to the Libyan dictator. In Cambridge, Mass., the Monitor Group, a consultancy firm founded by Harvard professors, was well paid for such services as a book to bring Gadhafi’s immortal words to the public “in conversation with renowned international experts,” along with other efforts “to enhance international appreciation of (Gadhafi’s) Libya.”

The world of oil is rarely far in the background in affairs concerning this region. For example, as the dimensions of the U.S. defeat in Iraq could no longer be concealed, pretty rhetoric was displaced by honest announcement of policy goals. In November 2007 the White House issued a Declaration of Principles insisting that Iraq must grant indefinite access and privilege to American investors.

Two months later President Bush informed Congress that he would reject legislation that might limit the permanent stationing of U.S. armed forces in Iraq or “United States control of the oil resources of Iraq” – demands that the U.S. had to abandon shortly afterward in the face of Iraqi resistance.

The world of oil provides useful guidance for western reactions to the remarkable democracy uprisings in the Arab world. An oil-rich dictator who is a reliable client is granted virtual free rein. There was little reaction when Saudi Arabia declared on March 5, “Laws and regulations in the Kingdom totally prohibit all kinds of demonstrations, marches and sit-in protests as well as calling for them as they go against the principles of Shariah and Saudi customs and traditions.” The kingdom mobilized huge security forces that rigorously enforced the ban.



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In Kuwait, small demonstrations were crushed. The mailed fist struck in Bahrain after Saudi-led military forces intervened to ensure that the minority Sunni monarchy would not be threatened by calls for democratic reforms.

Bahrain is sensitive not only because it hosts the U.S. Fifth Fleet but also because it borders Shiite areas of Saudi Arabia, the location of most of the kingdom's oil. The world's primary energy resources happen to be located near the northern Persian Gulf (or Arabian Gulf, as Arabs often call it), largely Shiite, a potential nightmare for Western planners.

In Egypt and Tunisia, the popular uprising has won impressive victories, but as the Carnegie Endowment reported, the regimes remain and are "seemingly determined to curb the pro-democracy momentum generated so far. A change in ruling elites and system of governance is still a distant goal" – and one that the West will seek to keep far removed.

Libya is a different case, an oil-rich state run by a brutal dictator, who, however, is unreliable: A dependable client would be far preferable. When nonviolent protests erupted, Gadhafi moved quickly to crush them. On March 22'2011, as Gadhafi's forces were converging on the rebel capital of Benghazi, top Obama Middle East adviser Dennis Ross warned that if there is a massacre, "everyone would blame us for it," an unacceptable consequence.

And the West certainly didn't want Gadhafi to enhance his power and independence by crushing the rebellion. The U.S. joined in the U.N. Security Council authorization of a "no-fly zone," to be implemented by France, the U.K. and the U.S.

The intervention prevented a likely massacre but was interpreted by the coalition as authorizing direct support for the rebels. A cease-fire was imposed on Gadhafi's

forces, but the rebels were helped to advance to the West. In short order they conquered the major sources of Libya's oil production, at least temporarily.

On March 28´2011, the London-based Arab journal Al-Quds Al-Arabi warned that the intervention may leave Libya with "two states, a rebel-held, oil-rich East and a poverty-stricken, Gadhafi-led West. ... Given that the oil wells have been secured, we may find ourselves facing a new Libyan oil emirate, sparsely inhabited, protected by the West and very similar to the Gulf's emirate states." Or the Western-backed rebellion might proceed all the way to eliminate the irritating dictator.

It is commonly argued that oil cannot be a motive for the intervention because the West had access to the prize under Gadhafi. True but irrelevant. The same could be said about Iraq under Saddam Hussein, or Iran and Cuba today.

What the West seeks is what Bush announced: control, or at least dependable clients, and in the case of Libya, access to vast unexplored areas expected to be rich in oil. U.S and British internal documents stress that the "virus of nationalism" is the greatest fear, since it might breed disobedience.

The intervention is being conducted by the three traditional imperial powers (though we may recall – Libyans presumably do – that, after World War I, Italy conducted genocide in eastern Libya).

The western powers are acting in virtual isolation. States in the region – Turkey and Egypt – want no part of it, nor does Africa. The Gulf dictators would be happy to see Gadhafi gone – but, even as they're groaning under the weight of advanced weapons provided to them to recycle petrodollars and ensure obedience, they barely offer more than token participation. The same is true beyond: India, Brazil and even Germany.



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The Arab Spring has deep roots. The region has been simmering for years. The first of the current wave of protests began last year in Western Sahara, the last African colony, invaded by Morocco in 1975 and illegally held since, in a manner similar to East Timor and the Israeli-occupied territories.

A nonviolent protest last November was crushed by Moroccan forces. France intervened to block a Security Council inquiry into the crimes of its client.

Then a flame ignited in Tunisia that has since spread into a conflagration.

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