

# The US Hand in Libya's Tragedy

**Exclusive:** Some 900 people from Libya may have died when their boats capsized in the Mediterranean Sea as they fled the barbaric chaos that the Obama administration helped unleash in Libya in 2011. Yet, the mainstream U.S. media has amnesia about the bloody American hand in this tragedy, writes Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The mainstream U.S. news media is lambasting the Europeans for failing to stop the humanitarian crisis unfolding in the Mediterranean Sea as desperate Libyans flee their war-torn country in overloaded boats that are sinking as hundreds drown. But the MSM forgets how this Libyan crisis began, including its own key role along with that of "liberal interventionists" such as Hillary Clinton and Samantha Power.

In 2011, it was all the rage in Official Washington to boast about the noble "responsibility to protect" the people of eastern Libya who supposedly were threatened with extermination by the "mad man" Muammar Gaddafi. We also were told endlessly that, back in 1988, Gaddafi's agents had blown Pan Am 103 out of the skies over Lockerbie, Scotland.

The R2Pers, led by then-National Security Council aide Power with the backing of Secretary of State Clinton, convinced President Barack Obama that a "humanitarian intervention" was needed to prevent Gaddafi from slaughtering people whom he claimed were Islamic terrorists.

As this U.S.-orchestrated bombing campaign was about to begin in late March 2011, Power told a New York City audience that the failure to act would have been "extremely chilling, deadly and indeed a stain on our collective conscience." Power was credited with steeling Obama's spine to press ahead with the military operation.

Under a United Nations resolution, the intervention was supposed to be limited to establishing no-fly zones to prevent the slaughter of civilians. But the operation quickly morphed into a "regime change" war with the NATO-led bombing devastating Gaddafi's soldiers who were blown to bits when caught on desert roadways.

Yet, the biggest concern in Official Washington was a quote from an Obama's aide that the President was "leading from behind" with European warplanes out front in the air war when America's war hawks said the United States should be leading from the front.

At the time, there were a few of us who raised red flags about the Libyan war “group think.” Though no one felt much sympathy for Gaddafi, he wasn’t wrong when he warned that Islamic terrorists were transforming the Benghazi region into a stronghold. Yes, his rhetoric about exterminating rats was over the top, but there was a real danger from these extremists.

And, the Pan Am 103 case, which was repeatedly cited as the indisputable proof of Gaddafi’s depravity, likely was falsely pinned on Libya. Anyone who dispassionately examined the 2001 conviction of Libyan agent Ali al-Megrahi by a special Scottish court would realize that the case was based on highly dubious evidence and bought-and-paid-for testimony.

Megrahi was put away more as a political compromise (with a Libyan co-defendant acquitted) than because his guilt was proven beyond a reasonable doubt. Indeed, by 2009, the conviction was falling apart. Even a Scottish appeals court expressed concern about a grave miscarriage of justice. But Megrahi’s appeal was short-circuited by his release to Libya on compassionate grounds because he was suffering from terminal prostate cancer.

Yet the U.S. mainstream media routinely called him “the Lockerbie bomber” and noted that the Libyan government had taken “responsibility” for the bombing, which was true but only because it was the only way to get punitive sanctions lifted. The government, like Megrahi, continued to proclaim innocence.

### **A Smirking MSM**

During those heady days of bombing Libya in 2011, it also was common for the MSM to smirk at the notion that Megrahi was truly suffering from advanced prostate cancer since he hadn’t died as quickly as some doctors thought he might. Then, in September 2011, after Gaddafi’s regime fell, Megrahi’s family invited [the BBC](#) and other news organizations to see Megrahi struggling to breathe in his sick bed.

His son, Khaled al-Megrahi, said, “I know my father is innocent and one day his innocence will come out.” Asked about the people who died in the Pan Am bombing, the son said: “We feel sorry about all the people who died. We want to know who did this bad thing. We want to know the truth as well.”

But it was only after Megrahi died on May 20, 2012, that some elements of the MSM acknowledged grudgingly that they were aware of the many doubts about his conviction all along. The New York Times’ [obituary](#) carried a detailed account of the evidentiary gaps that were ignored both during the trial in 2001 and during the bombing of Libya in 2011.

The Times noted that “even some world leaders” saw Megrahi “as a victim of

injustice whose trial, 12 years after the bombing, had been riddled with political overtones, memory gaps and flawed evidence. Investigators, while they had no direct proof, believed that the suitcase with the bomb had been fitted with routing tags for baggage handlers, put on a plane at Malta and flown to Frankfurt, where it was loaded onto a Boeing 727 feeder flight that connected to Flight 103 at London, then transferred to the doomed jetliner.”

Besides the lack of proof supporting that hypothesis was the sheer implausibility that a terrorist would assume that an unattended suitcase could make such an unlikely trip without being detected, especially when it would have been much easier to sneak the suitcase with the bomb onto Pan Am 103 through the lax security at Heathrow Airport outside London.

The Times’ obit also noted that during the 85-day trial, “None of the witnesses connected the suspects directly to the bomb. But one, Tony Gauci, the Maltese shopkeeper who sold the clothing that forensic experts had linked to the bomb, identified Mr. Megrahi as the buyer, although Mr. Gauci seemed doubtful and had picked others in photo displays.

“The bomb’s timer was traced to a Zurich manufacturer, Mebo, whose owner, Edwin Bollier, testified that such devices had been sold to Libya. A fragment from the crash site was identified by a Mebo employee, Ulrich Lumpert. Neither defendant testified. But a turncoat Libyan agent testified that plastic explosives had been stored in [Megrahi’s co-defendant’s] desk in Malta, that Mr. Megrahi had brought a brown suitcase, and that both men were at the Malta airport on the day the bomb was sent on its way.”

In finding Megrahi guilty, the Scottish court admitted that the case was “circumstantial, the evidence incomplete and some witnesses unreliable,” but concluded that “there is nothing in the evidence which leaves us with any reasonable doubt as to the guilt” of Megrahi.

However, the evidence later came under increasing doubt. The Times wrote: “It emerged that Mr. Gauci had repeatedly failed to identify Mr. Megrahi before the trial and had selected him only after seeing his photograph in a magazine and being shown the same photo in court. The date of the clothing sale was also in doubt.” Scottish authorities learned, too, that the U.S. Justice Department paid Gauci \$2 million for his testimony.

As for the bomb’s timer, the Times noted that the court called Bollier “untruthful and unreliable” and “In 2007, Mr. Lumpert admitted that he had lied at the trial, stolen a timer and given it to a Lockerbie investigator. Moreover, the fragment he identified was never tested for residue of explosives, although it was the only evidence of possible Libyan involvement.

“The court’s inference that the bomb had been transferred from the Frankfurt feeder flight was also cast into doubt when a Heathrow security guard revealed that Pan Am’s baggage area had been broken into 17 hours before the bombing, a circumstance never explored. Hans KÃ¶chler, a United Nations observer, called the trial ‘a spectacular miscarriage of justice,’ words echoed by [South African President Nelson] Mandela.”

In other words, Megrahi’s conviction looked to have been a case of gross prosecutorial misconduct, relying on testimony from perjurers and failing to pursue promising leads (like the possibility that the bomb was introduced at Heathrow, not transferred from plane to plane to plane). And those problems were known prior to Megrahi’s return to Libya in 2009 and prior to the U.S.-supported air war against Gaddafi in 2011.

Yet, Andrea Mitchell at MSNBC and pretty much everyone else in the MSM repeated endlessly that Megrahi was “the Lockerbie bomber” and that Libya was responsible for the atrocity, thus further justifying the “humanitarian intervention” that slaughtered Gaddafi’s soldiers and enabled rebel militias to capture Tripoli in summer 2011.

### **Al-Qaeda Hotbed**

Similarly, there was scant U.S. media attention given to evidence that eastern Libya, the heart of the anti-Gaddafi rebellion, indeed was a hotbed for Islamic militancy, with that region supplying the most per-capita militants fighting U.S. troops in Iraq, often under the banner of Al-Qaeda.

Despite that evidence, Gaddafi’s claim that he was battling Islamic terrorists in the Benghazi region was mocked or ignored. It didn’t even matter that his claim was corroborated by a report from U.S. analysts Joseph Felter and Brian Fishman for West Point’s Combating Terrorism Center.

In their report, “Al-Qaeda’s Foreign Fighters in Iraq,” Felter and Fishman analyzed Al-Qaeda documents captured in 2007 showing personnel records of militants who flocked to Iraq for the war against the Americans. The documents showed eastern Libya providing a surprising number of suicide bombers who traveled to Iraq to kill American troops.

Felter and Fishman wrote that these so-called Sinjar Records disclosed that while Saudis comprised the largest number of foreign fighters in Iraq, Libyans represented the largest per-capita contingent by far. Those Libyans came overwhelmingly from towns and cities in the east.

“The vast majority of Libyan fighters that included their hometown in the Sinjar Records resided in the country’s Northeast, particularly the coastal cities of

Darnah 60.2% (53) and Benghazi 23.9% (21)," Felter and Fishman wrote, adding that Abu Layth al-Libi, Emir of Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), "reinforced Benghazi and Darnah's importance to Libyan jihadis in his announcement that LIFG had joined al-Qaeda."

Some important Al-Qaeda leaders operating in Pakistan's tribal regions also were believed to have come from Libya. For instance, "Atiyah," who was guiding the anti-U.S. war strategy in Iraq, was identified as a Libyan named Atiyah Abd al-Rahman.

It was Atiyah who urged a strategy of creating a quagmire for U.S. forces in Iraq, buying time for Al-Qaeda Central to rebuild its strength in Pakistan. "Prolonging the war [in Iraq] is in our interest," Atiyah said in a letter that upbraided Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi for his hasty and reckless actions in Iraq.

After U.S. Special Forces killed Al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden on May 2, 2011, in Pakistan, Atiyah became al-Qaeda's second in command until he himself was reportedly killed in a U.S. drone strike in August 2011. [See Consortiumnews.com "[Time Finally Ran Out for Atiyah.](#)"]

However, to most Americans who rely on the major U.S. news media, little of this was known, as the Washington Post itself [acknowledged](#) in an article on Sept. 12, 2011, after Gaddafi had been overthrown but before his murder. In an article on the rise of Islamists inside the new power structure in Libya, the Post wrote:

"Although it went largely unnoticed during the uprising that toppled Gaddafi last month, Islamists were at the heart of the fight, many as rebel commanders. Now some are clashing with secularists within the rebels' Transitional National Council, prompting worries among some liberals that the Islamists, who still command the bulk of fighters and weapons, could use their strength to assert an even more dominant role."

On Sept. 15, 2011, the New York Times published a similar article, entitled "[Islamists' Growing Sway Raises Questions for Libya.](#)" It began: "In the emerging post-Qaddafi Libya, the most influential politician may well be [Ali Sallabi](#), who has no formal title but commands broad respect as an Islamic scholar and populist orator who was instrumental in leading the mass uprising. The most powerful military leader is now [Abdel Hakim Belhaj](#), the former leader of a hard-line group once believed to be aligned with Al Qaeda."

Belhaj was previously the commander of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, which was associated with Al-Qaeda in the past, maintained training bases in Afghanistan before the 9/11 attacks, and was listed as a terrorist organization

by the U.S. State Department.

Belhaj and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group denied continued allegiance to Al-Qaeda, but Belhaj was captured during George W. Bush's post-9/11 "war on terror" and was harshly interrogated by the CIA at a "black site" prison in Thailand before being handed over to Gaddafi's government which imprisoned and Belhaj claims tortured him.

The Times reported that "Belhaj has become so much an insider lately that he is seeking to unseat Mahmoud Jibril, the American-trained economist who is the nominal prime minister of the interim government, after Mr. Jibril obliquely criticized the Islamists."

The Times article by correspondents Rod Nordland and David D. Kirkpatrick also cited other signs of growing Islamist influence inside the Libyan rebel movement: "Islamist militias in Libya receive weapons and financing directly from foreign benefactors like Qatar; a Muslim Brotherhood figure, Abel al-Rajazk Abu Hajar, leads the Tripoli Municipal Governing Council, where Islamists are reportedly in the majority."

It may be commendable that the Post and Times finally gave serious attention to this consequence of the NATO-backed "regime change" in Libya, but the fact that these premier American newspapers ignored the Islamist issue as well as doubts about Libya's Lockerbie guilt while the U.S. government was whipping up public support for another war in the Muslim world raises questions about whether those news organizations primarily serve a propaganda function.

### **Gaddafi's Brutal Demise**

Even amid these warning signs that Libya was headed toward bloody anarchy, the excited MSM coverage of Libya remained mostly about the manhunt for "the madman" Muammar Gaddafi. When rebels finally captured Gaddafi on Oct. 20, 2011, in the town of Sirte and sodomized him with a knife before killing him Secretary of State Clinton could barely contain her glee, joking in one interview: "We came, we saw, he died."

The months of aerial slaughter of Gaddafi's soldiers and Gaddafi's own gruesome death seemed less amusing on Sept. 11, 2012, when Islamic terrorists overran the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, killing U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. diplomatic personnel. In the two-plus years since, Libya has become a killing ground for rival militias, including some now affiliated with the Islamic State.

As the BBC reported on Feb. 24, 2015, the Islamic State "has gained a foothold in key towns and cities in the mostly lawless North African state [Libya],

prompting Egypt – seeing itself as the bulwark against Islamists in region – to launch air strikes against the group.

“IS has launched its most high-profile attacks in Libya, bombing an upmarket hotel in the capital, Tripoli, in January, and releasing a video earlier this month showing the beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians it had kidnapped. On 20 February, it killed at least 40 people in a suicide bombing in the eastern town of al-Qubbah.”

Now, the chaos that the U.S.-sponsored “regime change” unleashed has grown so horrific that it is causing desperate Libyans to climb into unseaworthy boats to escape the sharp edges of the Islamic State’s knives and other depredations resulting from the nationwide anarchy.

Thus, Libya should be a powerful lesson to Hillary Clinton, Samantha Power and the other R2Pers that often their schemes of armed “humanitarianism” can go badly awry and do much more harm than good. It should also be another reminder to the MSM to question the arguments presented by the U.S. government, rather than simply repeating those dubious claims and false narratives.

But neither seems to be happening. The “liberal interventionists” like their neoconservative allies remain unchastened, still pumping for more “regime change” wars, such as in Syria. Yet, many of these moral purists are silent about the slaughter of ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine, Palestinians in Gaza, or now Houthis and other Yemenis dying under Saudi bombs in Yemen.

It appears the well-placed R2Pers in the Obama administration are selective in where that “responsibility to protect” applies.

Samantha Power, now serving as U.S. ambassador to the UN, remains the same self-righteous scold denouncing human rights abuses in places where there are American-designated “bad guys” while looking the other way in places where the killing is being done by U.S. “allies.” As for Hillary Clinton, she is already being touted as the presumptive Democratic nominee for President.

Meanwhile, the MSM has conveniently forgotten its own propaganda role in revving up the war on Libya in 2011. So, instead of self-reflection and self-criticism, the mainstream U.S. media is filled with condemnations of the Europeans for their failure to respond properly to the crisis of some 900 Libyans apparently drowning in a desperate attempt to flee their disintegrating country.

**Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America’s Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)). You also can order Robert Parry’s trilogy on the Bush**

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