

What do the killings of Milosevic, Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi have in common?

Пише: Hannes Hofbauer

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On the 20th of October 2011, late afternoon, international news agencies reported the death of Muammar al-Gaddafi. He was killed by some rebels in his hometown Sirte, after NATO-bombs hit his convoy. Only two days later US-president Barack Obama in Washington and NATO-officials in Brussels declared to stop the war on Libya that had lasted for almost eight months. Mission completed.

At this moment of time there was hardly anyone left who believed in the official version legitimating the foreign intervention. UN-resolution 1973 from the 17th of March 2011 empowered a coalition of willing states around NATO to intervene militarily in a regional uprising to build a shelter over the civic population, to protect civilians. The opposite was the case. In these eight months NATO flew 9600 sorties causing an innumerable figure of deaths, both soldiers and civilians. Regional uprising thereby accelerated towards a civil war. The aim of the NATO-intervention did not even respect the text of UN-resolutions 1973 and 1970.

NATO and its allies were aiming at regime change und a take-over of the most profitable pieces of the Libyan economy. After these aims would have been fulfilled, a post-war effort was intended to bring to trial and to sentence the leaders of the old regime for genocide and “crimes against humanity” and thereby get the exclusive power of definition over the historic process. The International Criminal Court in Den Haag started with this procedure to hegemonise memory on the 27th of June 2011, in the middle of the war. With the killing of Muammar al-Gaddafi this last piece of memory-control maybe failed. It stays unclear whether this was intended by the USA and its allies, because Gaddafi knew too much on international relations, or whether this was due to the “the ground-forces” who were not disciplined enough to act according to this agenda.

Brutalisation in geopolitics

Since the breakdown of the Soviet Union, the Comecon and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation in 1991, three heads of states, odious to Western governments and institutions such as USA, EU and NATO, were killed by them respectively died under their responsibility. This is remarkable.

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On the 11th of March 1996 Slobodan Milosevic, former president of Yugoslavia, was left without medical help during his trial in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in Den Haag and died in his cell in Scheveningen. On the 30th of December 2006 Saddam Hussein, former prime minister and president of Iraq was hanged in Al-Kadhimiya north-east of Baghdad. On the 20th of October 2011 Muammar al-Gaddafi was lynched in Sirte.

What do these three dead leaders have in common? First and visible the brutal form of their elimination. No serious trial, no hearing, no international examination took place concerning their personal or political guilt. Western media followed the will of the Western military alliance and their big economic players. What they really wanted was clear: regime change and take-over of the best parts of national economies. The official arguments were different, they spoke of broken human rights and crimes against humanity to demonise the odious national leaders. In the moment of their elimination they all were presented as the personification of evil. This demonisation even allowed exposing – in the case of Gaddafi and Saddam Hussein – their distorted dead bodies to the public. Media consumers should look at them as if they had not been human beings. This form of brutalisation also shows a historical step backward in terms of standards of civilization.

Killed because of being enemies, not because of their crimes, and for sure: all three were responsible for monstrous crimes. But these crimes served only as a pretext for foreign interventions. Repressive policy towards ethnic minorities and political opposition characterise multiple political regimes all over the world. From Saudi Arabia to Spain, from Nigeria to Indonesia: Ignorance of human rights in most of the cases does not lead to military intervention and killing of the respective leaders. In only a very few cases the Western military alliance takes repression as a pretext for intervention. So what are the reasons behind?

The Western allies did not hunt Slobodan Milosevic, Saddam Hussein and Muammar al-Gaddafi because of their bad politics, but because of their good ones. All the three can be seen as symbols for different versions of a “dictatorship for development”. This includes social politics for the masses and national economic modernization. Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya for some decades used a huge amount of public money to modernise society. Instead of administering the state in favour of foreign investors, they used the means of the nationalization of industries for social, and regional development. Western firms had only restricted access to the markets. This was one of the reasons why Milosevic, Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi were considered as “odious” by Western media and politicians.

But also their geopolitical position made them suspicious to the Western allies. Milosevic, Saddam Hussein and Gaddafi were leaders of societies on the periphery of the Western sphere

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of influence, historically as well as actually. Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya – all three of them were key states between the two blocks in the period of the Cold War. And they were not willing to give-up political and economic independence completely, as they were asked for after the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Their closeness to Moscow had allowed them to keep relative distance to Western economic and political interests. Out of this position “in between” they had developed a certain self-consciousness, which survived the breakdown of the Soviet Union. But without the geopolitical backing this position directly led to catastrophic situations... It looks as if the “In-betweens” of the two old geopolitical blocks had to suffer most under the advance of imperial strategies to streamline political regimes in order to päj-In, take over economic core pieces. Was it, because their potential to take part in a different integration than the dictated one from the Western block threatened the imperial advance?

Yugoslavia, Iraq and Libya: From partners of the Comecon to pariahs of the West

All three states have a long history of partnership with Eastern Europe. This partnership geopolitically as well as ideologically was rooted in the cases of Libya and Iraq in a common interest to counterbalance Western economic and political advances since at least the 1970s. This was true also for Yugoslavia a decade later. And all three of them were willing to trade on barter or bilateral clearing as well as on hard currency basis. This mixture could be seen best in the Soviet-Iraqi system of trade. Iraqi oil was imported by the Soviet Union in exchange for Soviet weapons, and then Moscow sold this oil to India on hard currency basis in a triangular arrangement. Libya was one of the main importers of Soviet military equipment outside Comecon after 1978, when Tripoli opposed the Camp David accords as a betrayal of long-term Arab aspirations. Estimations rise to 10 % of the Soviet hard currency earnings in early 1980s realised by the trade with Libya. Also this trade could have been a triangular one, although it was never published to what extent the Soviet weapons were re-exported by Libya to other African states.

Beside weapons, the economic relations between Soviet Union/ Comecon and their periphery highlighted in multiple projects of infrastructure (like in railroads and health care) and – in the case of Yugoslavia – in the exchange of Russian oil and fertilizers against shipbuilding and consumer goods like for example shoes. Many of these projects survived the breakdown of the Soviet Union and were to be continued in the 1990s. But it should come differently.

In the early 1990s the United States and the European Community used the weakness of the post-Soviet Russian leadership to impose economic and cultural embargo on all of the three peripheral states. The model was copied partly from the regime of sanctions the West imposed on the Comecon since 1948, known under the abbreviation of “Cocom” (Coordinating

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Committee on Multilateral Export Controls) forbidding all Western firms to export “strategic” commodities into the Rouble zone. By the way: the “Cocom”-embargo against Moscow survived the overthrow of the communist regime in 1991. Officially it was transformed in 1995 to a new regime of trade regulations called Wassenaar agreement. But the embargo-policy continued. So IBM was sentenced to a fine of 9 millions of US-Dollars because of selling high-tech-computers to Russia – and in this case we speak of the year 1998.

Against Iraq, Yugoslavia and Libya the embargo was working differently from the “Cocom”. It was not only the Western capitals putting economic pressure on odious states, the United States and its allies succeeded in convincing the whole UN Security Council to sanction Iraq, Yugoslavia and Libya. In August 1990 Iraq was put under a total trade and financial embargo under the pretext of its invasion of Kuwait some days before. The sanctions were lifted after Saddam Hussein had been captured in 2003. One year later, in 1992, the UN Security Council asked all member states to sanction Yugoslavia and Libya. In the case of Yugoslavia the argument for these sanctions was that the Yugoslav army actively took part in the civil war. In the case of Libya the bomb explosion of the Pan Am flight over Lockerbie served as a pretext to sanction the country. An interesting remark has to be noted: Libyan oil was too important for European states to cut themselves from the flow, so the oil-business was excluded from the UN-embargo. The sanctions against Yugoslavia were lifted after Milosevic lost its power, the lifting of the sanctions against Libya occurred when Gaddafi compensated the families of the victims of the Pan Am flight in 2003.

All three sanctions were voted in full accordance with the Russian Federation under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin. Before the breakdown of the Soviet Union, an internationalisation of such sanction-regimes under the UN-flag would not have been possible. In this special historic epoch of transformation, the embargo-regimes against three important economic partners of Russia not only weakened Baghdad, Belgrade and Tripoli, but also Moscow. It is an irony of history that this was carried out with the help of the first post-communist Russian leadership.

To make it clear: the capitalisation of the Soviet communist economy would exactly have needed partners from the non-Rouble zone to cooperate with. Instead of this, three of the most important partners, three of the most important possibilities to integrate on a non-Dollar based level were kicked out of the play, were sanctioned by the United Nations. The “Journal of commerce” on the eve of the Soviet breakdown gives us an idea of what could have had happened without UN-embargoes: “The Turkish construction concern Enka agreed with the Soviet Union”, the journal stated on the 25th of February 1991, “on a 5 billion railway construction plan to link Baghdad and Basra”. And Igor Mordvinov, speaker of the Soviet Ministry of External Economic Relations, added in an interview, that the Soviet Union lost “about 4 billion Dollar during the first six months of the trade embargo of Iraq.” Today we know that Russia lost far more: it lost markets in Iraq, Libya and Yugoslavia and geopolitical influence.

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And we also came to know that all of the three sanction-regimes were foreplays of military interventions: 1991 and 2003 in Iraq, 1994 in Bosnia and 1999 in Serbia/Kosovo, 2011 in Libya. The sanctions served as a means to weaken the state and the economy, the military intervention completed the aim.

Mission completed

Milosevic and Saddam Hussein were already dead, when Gaddafi's Libya saw a small window of opportunity to survive after 2003. International agreements were signed with Great Britain, France and Italy. But also the traditional Libyan-Russian relationship was going to be renewed. Within the year 2007/08 three powerful representatives of the Russian Federation visited Tripoli. First came Sergey Lavrov to talk about a new start of Russian-Libyan cooperation and to prepare the visit of Vladimir Putin five months later. Two big civil projects were to be discussed: a contract for Russian railways to build 550 km of a new line connecting Sirte with Benghazi; and – far more important – an offer to Gazprom to construct a pipeline through the Mediterranean Sea to provide Libyan gas for Europe. On the peak of these possible new relations the boss of Gazprom, Alexei Miller, came to Tripoli in April 2008 with an offer that could have been a geopolitical bomb. Gazprom asked Gaddafi to sell “all gas and liquefied natural gas intended for export from Libya at competitive prices in the future” to Gazprom, as “Interfax” noted on the 9th of July 2008. This offer was a real threat to the West. It could have led to a monopolization of gas-supply for Europe. From the “North Stream” pipeline opening soon to the Mediterranean pipeline Western Europe's supply of gas could have been under Russian control.

As we know today, history developed differently. Since a couple of weeks CEO's from Western oil- and gas-firms are heading to Tripoli to get contracts from a non-existing – “transitional” – government, which makes the buying cheaper. The NATO-war on Libya forced back and pushed back Russian (and Chinese) economic interests in the region. Libya's market is open for the big players of the “collation of the willing”, for the big capital of France, Great Britain and the United States.

In this sense the situation resembles the regime changes we observed in Iraq and Yugoslavia. Puppet governments of the Western allies are running more or less failed states after they had been demolished by the Western military machine. The economic take-over took place successfully. And administrators like Boris Tadic or Nuri (Dschawad) al-Maliki guarantee the new status quo.

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For an observer there is not much more to do then to remember the background of the historic events, the economic and the geopolitical interests behind and how and why they were hidden under massive but primitive propaganda. By doing this work of remembrance we hopefully might avoid a “cultural take-over” of defining the events by the Western media and historians along their imperial needs