



J. Peter Pham: Thugs' club in Africa -- After Charles Taylor, snatch Qaddafi

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THE RECENT ARREST of former Liberian President Charles Taylor and his subsequent arraignment before the internationally backed Special Court for Sierra Leone -- on some 11 counts of crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law -- are a triumph for international justice.

However, this significant victory in the campaign against impunity is incomplete in that the man behind Taylor, Libya's leader, Moammar Qaddafi, remains free, and is in fact being courted by Western governments, businesses and media.

In September 1985, Taylor was an escapee from the Plymouth (Mass.) House of Corrections. Just four years later, on Christmas Eve 1989, he launched an insurrection in Liberia that would turn into a regional conflict engulfing four West African countries and continuing in part to this day.

According to testimony given this year by David Crane, former prosecutor of the Special Court, at a congressional hearing (at which I also testified), Taylor could never have embarked on his murderous rampage -- resulting in the death, rape, maiming and mutilation of over 1 million Africans -- without Qaddafi's backing.

When Qaddafi's relations with the Arab world soured, in the late 1980s, he focused his ambitions southward, where he dreamed of igniting a "revolution," inspired by his "Little Green Book," by destabilizing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. While Qaddafi's strategy dated back to the 1970s, when he first used his oil wealth to fund terrorist groups and violent insurgencies, it was redoubled after the U. N. sanctions imposed on Libya following the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, had turned the Libyan leader into even more of an international pariah.

Former prosecutor Crane has attested to a detailed Libyan plan for West Africa that involved taking down Liberia, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire -- all of which have seen civil war -- and then moving on to Guinea and elsewhere. The strategy was to use surrogates that were beholden to Libya.

Introduced to Qaddafi by Burkina Faso's military ruler, Blaise Compaor, Taylor and his followers

received training in Libya, at the Mataba military base, a school of terrorism whose graduates have wreaked havoc across Africa from Angola to Zimbabwe. While under Qaddafi's tutelage, Taylor met and formed an alliance with Foday Sankoh, whose Revolutionary United Front would plunge Sierra Leone into the hell graphically documented in Sorious Samura's award-winning documentary Cry Freetown.

During the ensuing conflicts, Qaddafi facilitated the transfer of illegal arms to his protégés and allowed Libya to be used as a trans-shipment point for the natural resources they plundered from their war-torn countries -- a debt acknowledged by Taylor, whose first national budget after he ascended to the Liberian presidency, in 1997, included \$26 million to repay "war debts" to Libya.

Recently, the "Guide of the Libyan Revolution" has been trying to burnish Qaddafi's international reputation. Last month, Qaddafi even funded a "Libyan-American Dialogue" at Columbia University, addressing the participants via video conference.

In the wake of the Iraq war, it is completely understandable that Qaddafi should try to mollify the West by dismantling his nuclear-, chemical- and biological-weapons programs, as well as by talking about democracy and human rights. That the West should be seduced by this charade is not only pathetic; it also betrays an ill-disguised double standard that smacks of racism.

If the international community was willing to hold Qaddafi to account for the lives of the 270 mainly American and European victims killed by the Libyan agents who carried out the Lockerbie bombing, does it not owe the same regard for the more than 250,000 Liberians, 60,000 Sierra Leoneans, and thousands of Guineans and Ivorians killed by the African surrogates of Qaddafi?

If Charles Taylor must now face an international war-crimes tribunal -- as one of those who, in the legal phrase, bore "the greatest responsibility for crimes against humanity" in the Sierra Leonean conflict -- then shouldn't Moammar Qaddafi be standing next to him at the defendant's bar?

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