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Title: **War crime: NATO deliberately destroyed Libya's water infrastructure**

Description: *The deliberate bombing of Libya's water infrastructure, with the knowledge that doing so would result in massive deaths of the population, is not just a war crime, but a genocidal strategy.*

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War crime: NATO deliberately destroyed Libya's water infrastructure

Nafeez Ahmed | 14th May 2015

Deprived of piped water supply by NATO's bombing of critical infrastructure, a man in post-invasion Libya fills up a bottle of water from a muddy puddle. Photo: British Red Cross.

The military targeting of civilian infrastructure, especially of water supplies, is a war crime under the Geneva Conventions, writes Nafeez Ahmed. Yet this is precisely what NATO did in Libya, while blaming the damage on Gaddafi himself. Since then, the country's water infrastructure - and the suffering of its people - has only deteriorated further.

Numerous reports comment on the water crisis that is escalating across Libya as consumption outpaces production. Some have noted the environmental context in regional water scarcity due to climate change.

But what they ignore is the fact that the complex national irrigation system that had been carefully built and maintained over decades to overcome this problem was targeted and disrupted by NATO.

During the 2011 military invasion, press reports surfaced, mostly citing pro-rebel sources, claiming that pro-Gaddafi loyalists had shut down the water supply system as a mechanism to win the war and punish civilians.

This is a lie.

But truth, after all, is the first casualty of war - especially for mainstream media journos who can't be bothered to fact-check the claims of people they interview in war zones, while under pressure from editors to produce copy that doesn't rock too many boats.

Critical water installations bombed - then blamed on Gaddafi

It was in fact NATO which debilitated Libya's water supply by targeting critical state-owned water installations, including a water-pipe factory in Brega.

The factory, one of just two in the country (the other one being in Gaddafi's home-town

of Sirte), manufactured pre-stressed concrete cylinder pipes for the Great Manmade River (GMR) project, an ingenious irrigation system transporting water from aquifers beneath Libya's southern desert to about 70% of the population.

On 18th July, a rebel commander boasted that some of Gaddafi's troops had holed up in industrial facilities in Brega, but that rebels had blocked their access to water: *"Their food and water supplies are cut and they now will not be able to sleep."*

In other words, the rebels, not Gaddafi loyalists, had sabotaged the GMR water pipeline into Brega. On 22nd July, NATO followed up by bombing the Brega water-pipes factory on the pretext that it was a Gaddafi *"military storage"* facility concealing rocket launchers.

"Major parts of the plant have been damaged", said Abdel-Hakim el-Shwehdy, head of the company running the project. *"There could be major setback for the future projects."*

Legitimate military target left untouched in the attack

When asked to provide concrete evidence of Gaddafi loyalists firing from inside the water-pipe factory, NATO officials failed to answer. Instead, NATO satellite images shown to journalists confirm that a BM-21 rocket launcher identified near the facility days earlier, remained perfectly intact the day after the NATO attack.

Earlier, NATO forces had already bombed water facilities in Sirte, killing several *"employees of the state water utility who were working during the attack."*

> ***"The deliberate destruction of a nation's water infrastructure, with the knowledge that doing so would result in massive deaths of the population as a direct consequence, is not simply a war crime, but potentially a genocidal strategy."***

By August, UNICEF reported that the conflict had *"put the Great Manmade River Authority, the primary distributor of potable water in Libya, at risk of failing to meet the country's water needs."*

The same month, Agence France Presse reported that the GMR *"could be crippled by the lack of spare parts and chemicals"* - reinforced by NATO's destruction of water installations critical to the GMR in Sirte and Brega.

The GMR is now *"struggling to keep reservoirs at a level that can provide a sustainable supply"*, UN officials said. *"If the project were to fail, agencies fear a massive humanitarian emergency."*

Christian Balslev-Olesen, UNICEF Libya's head of office, warned that the city faced *"an*

absolute worst-case scenario" that *"could turn into an unprecedented health epidemic"* without resumption of water supplies.

Stratfor email: 'So much shit doesn't add up here'

While pro-rebel sources attempted to blame Gaddafi loyalists for the disruption of Libya's water supply, leaked emails from the US intelligence contractor Stratfor, which publicly endorsed these sources, show that the firm privately doubted its own claims.

"So much shit doesn't add up here", wrote Bayless Parsley, Stratfor's Middle East analyst, in an email to executives. *"I am pretty much not confident in ANY of the sources ... If anything, just need to be very clear how contradictory all the information is on this project ... a lot of the conclusions drawn from it are not really air tight."*

But the private US intelligence firm, which has played a key role in liaising with senior Pentagon officials in facilitating military intelligence operations, was keenly aware of what the shutdown of the GMR would mean for Libya's population:

"Since the first phase of the 'river's' construction in 1991, Libya's population has doubled. Remove that river and, well, there would likely be a very rapid natural correction back to normal carrying capacities."

"How often do Libyans bathe? You'd have drinking water for a month if you skipped a shower", joked Kevin Stech, a Stratfor research director. *"Seriously. Cut the baths and the showers and your well water should suffice for drinking and less-than-optional hygiene."*

The truth - government officials were trying to keep water flowing

Meanwhile, UNICEF confirmed that Libyan government officials were not sabotaging water facilities, but in fact working closely with a UN technical team to *"facilitate an assessment of water wells, review urgent response options and identify alternatives for water sources."*

Nevertheless, by September, UNICEF reported that the disruption to the GMR had left 4 million Libyans without potable water.

The GMR remains disrupted to this day, and Libya's national water crisis continues to escalate.

The deliberate destruction of a nation's water infrastructure, with the knowledge that doing so would result in massive deaths of the population as a direct consequence, is not simply a war crime, but potentially a genocidal strategy.

It raises serious questions about the conventional mythology of a clean, humanitarian war in Libya - questions that mainstream journalists appear to be uninterested in, or unable to ask.

Nafeez Ahmed *PhD is an investigative journalist, international security scholar and bestselling author who tracks what he calls the 'crisis of civilization.' He is a winner of the Project Censored Award for Outstanding Investigative Journalism for his Guardian reporting on the intersection of global ecological, energy and economic crises with regional geopolitics and conflicts. As well as writing for The Ecologist, he has also written for The Independent, Sydney Morning Herald, The Age, The Scotsman, Foreign Policy, The Atlantic, Quartz, Prospect, New Statesman, Le Monde diplomatique, New Internationalist. His work on the root causes and covert operations linked to international terrorism officially contributed to the 9/11 Commission and the 7/7 Coroner's Inquest.*

See also Nafeez Ahmed's blog: nafeezahmed.com/.

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Why Qaddafi had to go: African gold, oil and the challenge to monetary imperialism

Ellen Brown | 14th March 2016

What was NATO's violent intervention in Libya really all about? Now we know, writes Ellen Brown, thanks to Hillary Clinton's recently published emails. It was to prevent the creation of an independent hard currency in Africa that would free the continent from economic bondage under the dollar, the IMF and the French African franc, shaking off the last heavy chains of colonial exploitation.

Think California's drought is bad? Try Palestine's

Laith Shakir | 23rd August 2015

As World Water Week kicks off in Stockholm today with a theme of 'Water for Development', the drought being deliberately inflicted on Palestinians is firmly off the agenda, writes Laith Shakir. While Israelis water their lawns, irrigate crops and swim in Olympic-sized pools, Palestinian communities a few kilometers away are literally dying of thirst.

Don't mention climate change! Europe's response to the refugee crisis is doomed to fail

Assaad W. Razzouk | 24th April 2015

The more EU politicians try to look in control of the Mediterranean refugee emergency, the more it's obvious they aren't, writes Assaad W. Razzouk. A key driver of the crisis is climate change, which is causing drought across North Africa. Europe must now tackle the root causes of the crisis, and admit its own culpability in precipitating it.

Genocide: Burma's Rohingya sacrificed in global scramble for oil and gas

Nafeez Ahmed | 13th November 2015

As Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy takes a strong lead in Burma's elections, Nafeez Ahmed warns that the military will remain the real power in the land. And as UK, EU, US, Chinese and Gulf state energy corporations compete to exploit Burma's hydrocarbons, don't expect them to denounce the ongoing genocide of the Rohingya, and anyone else in the way of their oil and gas infrastructure.

GMO study finds 'indications of harmful and adverse effects'

Nafeez Ahmed | 15th July 2015

A new biosafety report for the Norwegian Environment Agency says GM foods cannot be declared safe due to major gaps in the science, writes Nafeez Ahmed. Indeed research clearly indicates harmful and adverse impacts to both health and environment. But Monsanto insists that GMOs are just as safe as, or even safer than, conventional crops.

Rebellion and hunger - how drought and food scarcity are fanning the flames of war

Nafeez Ahmed | 13th May 2015

Food and water shortages and sharp price hikes in the necessities of life are driving civil unrest and rebellion across the Middle East and North Africa, writes Nafeez Ahmed. Adding to the problem, many of the afflicted countries are of strategic importance for their oil and gas, putting them on the front line of destabilizing 'counter-terrorism' operations.