

West has Taken Sides in Libyan Civil War – Says Annan

AllAfrica.com 18 May 2011 *During the course of two extensive interviews recently, Annan told **Alec Russell** of London's [Financial Times](#) that calls by presidents Barack Obama of the United States and Nicolas Sarkozy of France that "Gaddafi must go" were "not very helpful." He advocated a political solution to the Libyan crisis, saying that although "a future Libya without Gaddafi" should be part of negotiations, events were currently headed for a "messy" stalemate, with military victory an unlikely prospect.*

During the interviews, which lasted over a period of five hours, Annan also discussed Kenya, the "Arab Spring," peacekeeping in the Democratic Republic of Congo, his role during the Rwandan genocide,

the need for young African men and women to go into politics and his current passion for promoting agriculture in Africa. The following excerpts from the interviews are published by permission of the

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[#160;full text of the interview](#)

, in which Annan also discusses issues including the Iraq war and the Bush administration, Bosnia, his legacy, and the future of and reforms to the United Nations, can be found [here](#)

(...) AR: What about the bigger issue of the intervention? There are all sorts of historical parallels one can come up with. One analogy is, of course, 1991 after Iraqis had been pushed out of Kuwait and then the world's policymakers decided not to intervene to stop Saddam putting down the Shiite uprising. Should the policymakers have done the same thing, should they have hardened their hearts this time?

KA: I think the world has moved on. You're right to start with 1991 but one would also need to look at Srebrenica and Rwanda and the repetition of the phrase "never again," or "we will defend the helpless". And there was a situation where Gaddafi himself, he brought it on himself with some of the statements he was making about being "merciless" and "blood will flow" and all that. When a leader makes that sort of statement and you see him approaching populated areas with tanks and military gear and equipment, an international community that had been talking tough and talking of a no-fly zone and rushing to establish a no-fly zone would have had a lot to answer for if they had not intervened to protect the population.

The question is where you draw the line. Was every action taken by the coalition designed to protect helpless civilians or, in some cases, to support the weak, rebellious army? And how far do you go? And does it fit with the [UN] Security Council resolution and the mandate? And we should remember that it wasn't a unanimous decision and some pretty important countries abstained. So you start with a divided Council, which makes it even more important that those in

action respect the mandate otherwise the divisions widen. And the Council can get paralysed on future decisions on Libya.

AR: Is there implicit hypocrisy that there is intervention in Libya but not Ivory Coast where an awful conflict is raging?

KA: Yes. The timing of this [Libyan] initiative is very difficult and awkward. Even before you go to Ivory Coast, questions are going to be put as to whether, if there were to be a similar situation where civilians are at risk in some of the other countries, whether Syria or Yemen, what should the international community do? Should they consider going in? And then, of course, you have Ivory Coast where you have, in a way, international presence already on the ground, you have UN forces on the ground. They don't have the adequate numbers to do what they probably would like to do.

AR: You seemed to imply, from your earlier remarks, though, that you were in favour of the Libyan intervention.

KA: I'm in favour of the efforts that were made to protect the people. You see, the problem, the argument the Libyan intervention will lead to, is they quoted the "**responsibility to protect**" but it's a graduation. You sort of go through a whole series of events and as a last resort you use force; political pressure, sanctions and others.

Of course, one could claim that we were beyond that, that the way events were moving so fast, you couldn't influence a situation by applying political or diplomatic pressure, imposing sanctions, and that more effective measures had to be used, and this is the argument that has been made.

And I think the whole world saw that time was on the move with the people in Benghazi and they felt that action was taken to stop the tanks before they got to Benghazi and did lots of damage. I'm sure everyone will support that, or most people will support it. I can say most people will support that.

AR: Are you still being contacted from Tripoli and urged to get involved?

(...)

And, as I suspected, the rebels will not be ready to talk to Gaddafi. They want Nato to help remove him, and of course, I think eventually probably he will have to go, but you cannot put it

upfront the way people are saying: Gaddafi must go. A future Libya without Gaddafi must be part of the negotiations and handled properly. It should be part of the agenda, and this mantra of Sarkozy, Cameron, Gaddafi is one... Obama saying Gaddafi must go. Putting it upfront like that... it's not very helpful.

But, on the other hand, I see their problem. If, at the end of the day, he stays... how do you explain to the population – both the Libyan and the western populations – that you went through all of this and you leave them with Gaddafi? But on the other hand, I think they were right, as I have said, to get rid of the air defence systems. Most people forget that even in Iraq, by the time the air and no-fly zone was established, the air defence system had been removed through the first Gulf war. All of them had been neutralised.

They were right to stop the guns and the tanks from getting to Benghazi. The problem they have now is the sense that they've crossed a line and are now part of the civil war and fighting on one side of the civil war.

But here, I will tell you... you will find this interesting, because I said this to Samantha Powers [the academic and liberal interventionist in the White House] and she said: "How can one say a civil war? One side is so weak. The other side is so powerful." I just listened. I kept saying, but who told you in civil war, the sides have to be evenly matched? It never starts like that. But it is a civil war, and they are now perceived as having been sucked in, and where does it stop? How far... how much deeper do you get in? And if it drags on, how patient will the population be and the parliaments be? This is a problem. (...)

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