

## OPEN LETTER TO SECRETARY OF STATE HILARY RODHAM CLINTON

March 8, 2011

The Honorable Mrs. Hilary Rodham Clinton,  
Secretary of State of the United States of America,  
Washington, D.C.

RE: INACTION IN LIBYA: A QUEST FOR TIMELY INTERVENTION

Your Excellency,

First of all, please accept my highest respect and admiration, Madame Secretary.

The world is fixatedly watching the news unfolding in Libya that it has even overshadowed raging civil wars in Somalia and elsewhere and a budding genocide in the Ivory Coast. The on-going exceptional popular movements in North Africa and the Middle-East, led mainly by enlightened young revolutionaries that aspire for a dignified life, democracy and human decency have been phenomenal and an inspiration to people everywhere. Young men and women, standing together shoulder to shoulder, are making history. These dignified young people through slogans written both in English and Arabic are letting the world know of their aspirations for a better and peaceful life, and are showing their admirable determination to achieve their goals by peaceful means and are begging the world, especially the United States, to be with them at this critical and pivotal time in human history.

The world would be a much better and a more peaceful place if the popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle-East are allowed to succeed. If that were to be so, the biggest losers would be radical ideologies and organizations whose existence depends on chaos and societal tension and strife that result from the misery, despondency, hopelessness and dissatisfaction of local populations, especially the youth. As such, this would be the best chance to win over hearts and minds of the Arab youth and people everywhere that long for democracy and aspire to be free, and its significance in the advancement of peace and stability could not be underestimated.

According to reports, the ill-advised US military involvement in Iraq for the express purpose of toppling one dictator, Saddam Hussein, cost the United States over a trillion Dollars, the lives of thousands of its men and women, resulted in the death of tens of thousands of Iraqis, festered anti-American sentiments in the Arab and Muslim world to an unprecedented degree and served radical elements and groups as a good recruiting tool. In stark contrast to that, in the last couple of months alone dictators that ruled for decades with iron fists, unfortunately with the knowledge and "blessing" of the US, have been toppled in short order and with minimal cost.

If this fledgling revolution is given bold but strategically thought-through and carefully planned assistances on many fronts; applying enough pressure on and assisting transitional authorities to be more accountable, inclusive and transparent, encouraging and constructively engaging the agents of change – the youth- building civic society, etc., I would say that stability, peace and democracy will have won over a seeping radicalization of societies across the region. Obviously, some of the measures may stand in the way of current and immediate interests, particularly economic ones; but the

strategic significance and importance of being on the right side of history will be immeasurably invaluable.

Madame Secretary,

I am deeply concerned about the situation in Libya. I believe Libya at the moment is the tail that wags the dog. Appropriate and timely action or the lack thereof would be very detrimental and consequential first to the Libyans, then to oppressed peoples of the region and elsewhere and finally to American foreign policy and its security interests.

Three groups are particularly paying closer attention to the fluid developments in Libya. The first group is decaying monarchies, archaic theocrats, despotic rulers and bloody dictators who have ruled (and continue to rule) with iron fists and without any sense of accountability. Ironically, but sadly, because of political expediency and security exigencies or economic interests, most of them happen to be close allies and friends of Western democracies, particularly the US.

It is indeed encouraging that the UN Security Council, in response to the atrocious and belligerent acts of Colonel Gaddafi, has passed a precedent-setting unanimous resolution to freeze the assets of the Libyan dictator, his family members and close associates, and that the ICC is looking into possible indictments against these butchers. Nonetheless, Gaddafi appears to be convinced that major powers are unable to muster a UN-sponsored resolution that would allow immediate intervention of a military nature. And absent that critical element, and the only factor at this time that could play a pivotal role in directly affecting the balance of power on the ground, he seems to believe that indictments alone would not prevent him from continuing to torment his people. He is aware of, and seems to take solace in the fact that Al Beshir of Sudan is still free to do whatever he has been doing despite indictments by the ICC.

If Muammar Gaddafi, through brute force and by massacring his people, is allowed to suppress, albeit temporarily, the revolutionary popular movement in Libya - primarily and as a direct result of inaction by the world's major powers, those dictators who are currently under intense pressure and who are being shaken by similar popular movements and those that are on the verge of facing the same fate from their subjects, would be emboldened to play by that unwritten rule of Gaddafi's ruthlessness and definitely resort to similar barbaric tactics of slaughtering their own people in a vain attempt to sustain their undemocratic rule as much as they possibly could. Any similar acts by these dictators may temporarily thwart popular uprisings that could immediately remove them from power. But their further stay in power would not be peaceful but one that is replete with vicious reprisals. And the result would be an entrenchment of these dictators that would only lead them to resort to a cycle of vindictive retaliatory measures on whoever "failed" to stand with them.

If Hitler were properly challenged and stopped when he started invading his immediate neighbors or when he started to scapegoat German Jews for Germany's ills, the world could have avoided the unnecessary loss of the lives of millions. Every time a dictator gets a breathing space, he would only get emboldened. From archaic monarchies of the bygone era to bloody dictators like Meles Zenawi, Isaias Afewerki, Al Bashir, etc. are closely watching the Libyan phenomenon and gleefully, but vainly, hoping that the inaction and ineptness of the great powers to impose "no fly zones" drags on until Gaddafi reverses the tide. If Gaddafi is allowed to continue to unleash his

destructive power on innocent civilians and somehow stays in power any longer, I would not be surprised if some maniacal dictators that depend on his financial backing to sustain their undemocratic rule surreptitiously send armed contingents of their own in order to help him stay in power. Therefore, any inaction in Libya sends the wrong message to every dictator of the world that by resorting to brute force and violence to crush the aspirations of their own people, they would assume that the worst they could face could only be mere condemnations and would not face an imminent severe reaction including military intervention at the behest of the population. Thus, the decision of Western powers as regards to the Libyan situation would have ramifications that would directly impact the aspirations of people the world over and affect their quest for freedom and human dignity.

The second group wistfully watching what the reaction of Western powers would be the Libyan people themselves. Included in this group are also oppressed people everywhere, from Iran to Asia to Africa that aspire to empower themselves, be free and change their lives for the better. All the Libyan revolutionaries are asking for is for the major powers to deny Gaddafi the ability to use airpower against them. Although it is not as simple as it sounds, the reluctance of these powers to answer the call of the Libyan people in a timely and decisive manner to impose "no fly zone" in Libya is a grave mistake the consequences of which would be highly regrettable. This apparent reluctance has sent the wrong message to Gaddafi that Western powers are incapable of standing for their principles and that they are unable to quickly react to prevent him from "punishing" his "ungrateful" people for his 42 years of "service". That dismal failure by Western powers (US and Europe) to act promptly and decisively has emboldened him not only to redouble his effort to change the military equation on the ground by using his aerial advantages to do as much harm as possible to achieve that goal, but also has the audacity to send his diplomats to foreign capitals.

If Gaddafi is allowed to even partially crush the popular movement and the Libyan people are let down, it could lead to the disillusionment of the young generation of Libyans that is at the very center of this popular movement for freedom and human dignity, and could lead them to lose hope all together in the political ideals that Western societies hold dear. The reaction of Western powers to the Libyan situation, either active or passive, would, therefore, send a powerful and unequivocal message that would reverberate far beyond one may think and could be detrimental to the peace of the region and the long term interests of democratic nations.

The third group that is very closely watching and eagerly hoping for Gaddafi to succeed - obviously not out of love for him, but expecting to benefit from ensuing resentment of the Libyan people, especially the youth, because of the West's failure to assist them in their fight to free themselves from this dictator - would be hardliners and radical groups. Failure by Western democracies to assist the people of Libya in every possible way would be a boon to these groups as they would use it as proof that all Western powers care about is Libyan oil and not the wellbeing and aspirations of the people, and that the West is colluding with Gaddafi to suppress them. As oppression, suppression and absence of freedoms and closed political space create fertile recruiting grounds for radical groups, Gaddafi's violent measures and the West's lack of a timely, active and decisive response would benefit these groups and enable them to get a foothold in Libya. Once these groups have a viable presence there, and in view of the possibility of disillusionment of the youth, if their quest for democracy does not get appropriate assistance from Western powers in the form of imposing a "no fly zone", for example,

the eagerness and fervor of the young Libyans to espouse democracy could fade fast and an irreparable despondency could set in and most may look elsewhere for deliverance from Gaddafi. In that unfortunate case, it is feasible that radical groups will fill the void. And that would not be to anybody's liking except those radical groups themselves. As strange as it sounds, if the situation goes Gaddafi's way – I believe it will not - some may even entertain the idea of seeing in Gaddafi a "necessary devil" in the fight against radicalism. We already have seen him trying to use that card. That very notion would, indeed, be an unforgivable travesty.

It appears that Western powers are prisoners of their own power; they either overplay it and squander their resources by acting unnecessarily as in the case of Iraq, or are oblivious to human suffering and become too timid and hesitant to act to intervene in defense of human life as in the case of Ruanda earlier and now Libya.

Would the West's economic interests (oil in this case) override the very tenets of their democratic values and common human decency? How many people will have to unnecessarily die for the world powers to come to their senses and act decisively?

Your Excellency, Madame Secretary,

I pray and hope that the world is not once again going to bear witness to the massacre of innocent civilians. Refraining from or hesitating to take decisive action to stop Gaddafi would be inexcusable and morally reprehensible. There is a moral imperative to stop him, and stop him now. But it is also in the best interest of the United States and democracy to side with the Libyan people; not in words but in deeds. I cannot see how this tragedy could be allowed to unfold under your watch and that of President Obama's.

As an Ethiopian political activist living in the United States and enjoying the freedoms it accords to all, and someone fighting for democracy and human rights in my country of birth, I plead with you, Madame Secretary, to use your good offices to positively influence the situation in Libya by denying the Libyan dictator the use of aircraft and heavy artillery that he is callously deploying to massacre civilians and prevent his diplomats from venturing outside the country. Mere credible threat that he should stop any use of military aircraft and heavy artillery in 36 hours, and directly addressing his pilots and military commanders (if possible by naming names) that they should immediately stop complying with Gaddafi's orders to massacre the Libyan people under any pretext or they would be held accountable for their criminal acts, would have immediate impact on the battlefield and Gaddafi's torture chambers. That stern warning and direct message coupled with deployment of reconnaissance flights (AWACS) could boost the morale of the Libyan people and spare the world witnessing yet another human tragedy.

Failure to do so, Madame Secretary, would amount to letting the Libyan people down, and the US and other major powers should be ready to assume responsibility for allowing this preventable human tragedy to take place. And it, no doubt, would be a big strategic mistake and at the West's peril.

Respectfully,

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