

# Rape in Libya: America's Recent Wars have all been Accompanied by Memorable Falsehoods

When the war-going get tough, the professional P.R.Campaigns get Going

By [Prof Peter Dale Scott](#)

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It is a troubled *Time* for NATO's campaign against Libya. President Obama has seen a near-revolt in Congress against the costly war, while Defense Secretary Gates in Brussels has warned his European allies that their tepid response "is putting the Libya mission and the alliance's very future at risk."<sup>1</sup> Back home, according to the London *Daily Mail*, "Mr Gates has requested extra funds for Libya operations, but has been rebuffed by the White House."<sup>2</sup>

The past history of American wars tells us that, when the war-going begins to get tough, the professional p.r. campaigns get going, often with wholly invented stories. For example, when in 1990 Defense Secretary Colin Powell was expressing doubts that the United States should attack Kuwait, stories appeared that, as revealed by classified satellite photos, Saddam had amassed 265,000 troops and 1500 tanks at the edge of the Saudi Arabian border. Powell then changed his mind, and the attack proceeded. But after the invasion a reporter from the *St. Petersburg Times* viewed satellite photos from a commercial satellite, and "she saw no sign of a quarter of a million troops or their tanks."<sup>3</sup>

Hawks in Congress, notably Tom Lantos and Stephen Solarz, secured support for the attack on Iraq with a story from a 15-year-old girl, that she had seen Kuwaiti infants snatched from their incubators by Iraqi soldiers. The story was discredited when it was learned that the girl, the daughter of the Saudi ambassador in Washington, might not have visited the hospital at all. She had been prepped on her story by the p.r. firm Hill & Knowlton, which had a contract for \$11.5 million from the Kuwaiti government.<sup>4</sup>

The history of American foreign interventions is littered with such false stories, from the "Remember the Maine" campaign of the Hearst press in 1898, to the false stories of a North Vietnamese attack on U.S. destroyers in the so-called Second Tonkin Gulf incident of August 4, 1964. We know furthermore that in their Operation Northwoods documents, the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1962 proposed a series of ways, some of them lethal, to deceive the American people in order to engineer a war against Cuba.<sup>5</sup>

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Since the fiasco of the false Iraqi stories in 1990-91, these stories have tended to be floated by foreign sources, usually European. This was conspicuously the case with the forged yellowcake documents from Italy underlying Bush's misleading reference to Iraq in his 2003 State of the Union address.<sup>6</sup> But it was true also of the false stories linking Saddam Hussein to the celebrated anthrax letters of 2001. (Their anthrax was later determined to have come from a U.S. biowarfare laboratory.)<sup>7</sup>

This recurring history of falsified stories to justify interventions should be on our minds as we now face the allegations, as yet neither proven nor disproven, that Gaddafi has been using rape as a method to fight insurrection, and may have been guilty of raping victims himself. These charges were made on June 8 by Luis Moreno-Ocampo, chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), who claimed (according to *Time* Magazine

there were indications that Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi had ordered the rape of hundreds of women during his violent crackdown on the rebels and that he had even provided his soldiers with Viagra to stimulate the potential for attacks.<sup>8</sup>



Luis Moreno-Ocampo

According to *Time*, the rape stories are being circulated by doctors who claim to have met and treated patients but do not have patients' permission to reveal their identities. Earlier, according to a Libyan doctor interviewed in an Al Jazeera video, "many doctors have found Viagra and condoms in the pockets of dead pro-Gaddafi fighters, as well as treated female rape survivors. The doctor insists this clearly indicates the Gaddafi regime is using rape as a weapon of war."<sup>9</sup>

But what of Moreno's charge that "Now we are getting some information that Gaddafi

himself decided to rape, and this is new.”<sup>10</sup> This is a sensational charge: until we learn there is a reliable source for it, one can suspect it was made to grab headlines.

One problem in investigating these charges is that Libyan culture is so unkind to rape victims that they are reluctant to come forward. Researchers for Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International were unable to find one woman who said she had been raped. A U.N. human rights investigator, Cherif Bassiouni, told Agence France-Presse that the rape and Viagra stories were being circulated by the Benghazi authorities as “part of a ‘massive hysteria.’” In fact he had discovered only three cases.<sup>11</sup>

Military conflict of course is normally accompanied by rape. What might constitute a war crime would be whether (to quote *Time*) Gaddafi “had provided his soldiers with Viagra.” Moreno actually said, according to the Associated Press, that “some witnesses confirmed that the [Libyan] government was buying containers of Viagra-type drugs ‘to enhance the possibility to rape.’”

Others have objected that the purchase of Viagra-type drugs falls far short of indicating a war crime. Former U.S. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney, in Tripoli on an investigative mission, has pointed out in her emails that to date the one army known to have distributed Viagra as part of its war operations is the U.S. Army – as a bribe to entice information from aging tribal leaders in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

*Time’s* subtle enhancement of Moreno’s claim – from purchasing Viagra to providing it to soldiers, reminds us of the sorry record of the U.S. mainstream media in circulating past false stories to justify war. It is painful to say this, but virtually every major U.S. military intervention since Korea has been accompanied by false stories. Mr. Moreno-Ocampo should be pressed to come forward quickly with the supporting evidence for his charges, which should be based on more than the testimony of doctors working for the Benghazi regime.

*Peter Dale Scott, a former Canadian diplomat and English Professor at the University of California, Berkeley, is the author of [Drugs Oil and War](#), [The Road to 9/11](#), and [The War Conspiracy: JFK, 9/11, and the Deep Politics of War](#). His most recent book is [American War Machine: Deep Politics, the CIA Global Drug Connection and the Road to Afghanistan](#). Peter Dale Scott is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research on Globalization (CRG).*

## Notes

1 “[Gates rebukes NATO allies, warns of ‘dismal’ future](#),” Agence France-Presse, June 10, 2011.

2 “The billion dollar war? Libyan campaign breaks Pentagon estimates costing U.S. taxpayers \$2 million a day,” London *Daily Mail*, June 9, 2011.

3 “No Casus Belli? Invent One,” Guardian (London), February 5, 2003.

4 Ted Rowse, “[Kuwaitgate – killing of Kuwaiti babies by Iraqi soldiers exaggerated](#),” Washington Monthly, September 1992.

5 Scott, *American War Machine*, 195-201.

6 Terry H. Anderson, *Bush’s Wars*, 97.

7 Consider the following story in the London *Daily Mail* by Simon Reeve:

8 Iraq has been identified as the most likely source of the anthrax used to terrorise

9 America during recent weeks. New plans are now being considered for retalia-

10 tory military strikes against Saddam Hussein, according to American govern-

11 ment officials. Although studies of the anthrax spores sent through the mail are

12 continuing, American scientists have discovered “hallmarks” that point to Iraqi

13 involvement. American investigators are increasingly convinced that the anthrax

14 was smuggled into the US and mailed to a number of targets by unidentified

15 “sleeper” supporters of Osama Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda organization

16 (Simon Reeve, “Scientists Link Iraq to Anthrax Terror Attacks,” Sunday Mail

17 [London], October 28, 2001; discussed in Peter Dale Scott, [American War Machine](#),  
194-95). [The example is also interesting in its fusing of Saddam and Al Qaeda, in fact bitter  
rivals]

18 Karen Leigh, “[Rape in Libya: The Crime That Dare Not Speak Its Name](#),” *Time*, June 9,  
2011.

19 [Washington Post Blogpost](#), March 29, 2011.

20 [Agence France-Presse](#), June 9, 2011.

21 “UN investigator casts doubt over Libya mass rape claims,” Agence France Presse, June  
9, 2011.

22 Toby Hamden, “[CIA give Afghan warlords Viagra in exchange for information on Taliban](#),”  
Telegraph [London], December 26, 2008.

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