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Dirty business: Khadafi and the Bulgarian nurses

By Keith Spicer

PARIS. Kristiana, Valentina, Snezhana, Valia, Nasya, Cécilia. The first five are Bulgarian nurses. The sixth, the volatile wife of Nicolas Sarkozy, France's here-there-and-everywhere "omnipresident." Tortured and terrorized, along with a Palestinian doctor-colleague named Ashraf, the nurses were for over eight years hostages to the vicious, half-crazy dictator of Libya, Muammar el-Gaddafi. His pretext? A trumped-up charge of injecting HIV-AIDS into 426 children as part of a so-called CIA-Mossad plot.

The six medics went to Benghazi to help children. They ended up being accused of murdering children, and got death sentences. The true story – verified by international experts – is that Libyan staff of the Benghazi hospital spread HIV-AIDS via tainted blood and dirty needles. But this made oil-rich, "modernizing" Libyan "Guide" Qaddafi lose face. So he cooked up his obscene lie and made the lives of six innocent professionals a nightmare. As foreigners and Christians, they made perfect scapegoats.

Nurses and doctor finally flew to freedom last week. In the rescue plane: Cécilia Sarkozy. Surfing on a ready-to-go, money-for-medics understanding negotiated by the European Union, and last-minute "bridging" finance from the Emir of Qatar, Cécilia had charmed the hostage-taker, playing her husband's deal-clinching card: let the hostages go or I won't visit your pariah country.

A murderous thug earlier tied to Irish terrorism, foreign assassinations, and blowing up airliners (Panam at Lockerbie in 1988, UTA over Africa in 1989), Gaddafi had been trying in recent years to creep back into the West's good graces. Fearing another U.S. attack (President Ronald Reagan bombed his Tripoli home in 1986), he began cooperating on anti-terrorism and gave up his Pakistan-assisted start on developing nuclear weapons. Sarkozy's visit promised Europe's forgiveness and acceptance, and a flood of western investment.

Gaddafi used the medics as pawns to extort a fortune in blood money. His payoff for extortion: \$1-million U.S. per stricken child, plus hospitals, France-Libya defence and monetary agreements, debt-forgiveness, support for Gaddafi's dream of leading Africa, various technology transfers (including at least one nuclear reactor), and likely one billion euros a year to isolate Chadian and Nigerian immigrants.

Ah yes, he also won effusive gratitude from a West welcoming him back to "respectability." In effect, thanking him for being a successful blackmailer. Reality: European Union nations, mainly Britain, Germany, France and Italy (Libya's former colonial power) had worked on this file largely to snag huge contracts to develop Qaddafi's desert slum and to access his large oil reserves.

Gutsy Italian journalist Oriana Fallaci once claimed Gaddafi had “the I.Q. of a chicken.” Some chicken: in the nurses’s scandal, he squeezed the West for money and recognition until he could grab no more. The crazy colonel looks and acts nuts, but he is as crafty as Rommel’s desert fox. His big win with the Bulgarian medics has set a new low for cruelty, cynicism and greed.

What lessons can we draw from this disgusting story?

Tactically, a mixture of secret multilateral diplomacy, cold calculation of interest, and sudden, high-profile daring assured the medics’ liberation. For the past three years, the EU had coordinated negotiations with Gaddafi and his more rational son, Saif al-Islam, whose foundation provided a handy non-state vehicle for masking blackmail payments. Meanwhile, as Interior minister, Sarkozy developed close relations with Libya’s anti-terrorism chief and knew the nurses’ file well. When it looked ripe this month, he charged in solo, without consulting the EU, to send his wife to “pull off” a deal.

Therein lies a tale. Sending Cécilia to enchant the Guide was a brilliant move – Gaddafi, surrounded by female body-guards, appreciates the fairer sex. Sarko sent his chief assistant as backup and directed the whole operation by cell-phone. Still, Cécilia is a risky lady. She left Sarko” for a lover before, and rumours abound about her lust for freedom. Even the sober daily *Le Monde* recently called her “distant, cold, reserved, rebellious, independent, elegant – and now conquering and famous.” Clearly Sarkozy is scrambling to cement his unpredictable wife into a First Lady role she will stay with – “marriage therapy,” cracked an adversary.

A deeper lesson? The need to stop the West’s insane addiction to oil – especially in the U.S. Americans make a religion of low taxes and cheap gasoline. But having a White House up to its eyeballs in oil-industry complicity ensures that hundreds of billions of dollars a year flow to states opposing western interests. Terrorist-funding Persian Gulf states gain most. Oil also empowers corrupt regimes in Nigeria, Venezuela -- and Libya.

In the Bulgarian tragedy, a kidnapper-torturer got a huge ransom for his innocent victims, including re-admission to the civilized world. The West got easier access to Libya’s oil and gas. This was win-win for everybody, realists will tell the traumatized nurses and infected children. Sighs the old Arab saying, “the dogs may bark, but the caravan moves on.”