

By Ben Norton

From [Salon](#) | Original Article



“Unless we take the oil from Libya, I have no interest in Libya,” said Donald Trump in an April 2011 [interview](#) on CNN’s “Newsroom.”

The U.S. government was considering military intervention in the oil-rich North African nation at the time. Trump said he would only participate if the U.S. exploited Libya’s natural resources in return.

“Libya is only good as far I’m concerned for one thing — this country takes the oil. If we’re not

taking the oil, no interest," he added.

NATO claimed its U.S.-backed bombing campaign was meant to protect Libyans who were protesting the regime of longtime dictator Muammar Qadhafi. Micah Zenko, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, used NATO's own materials to show that this was false.

"In truth, the Libyan intervention was about regime change from the very start," Zenko [wrote](#) in an exposé in Foreign Policy in March.

Trump was not the only figure to propose taking Libya's oil in return for bombing it, however. Neera Tanden, the president of the pro-Clinton think tank the Center for American Progress, proposed this same policy a few months after Trump.

"We have a giant deficit. They have a lot of oil," Tanden wrote in an October 2011 [email](#) titled "Should Libya pay us back?"

"Most Americans would choose not to engage in the world because of that deficit. If we want to continue to engage in the world, gestures like having oil rich countries partially pay us back doesn't seem crazy to me," she added in the message, which was [obtained](#) by The Intercept.

Tanden is a close ally of Hillary Clinton, and is [frequently named](#) as a likely chief-of-staff in a Hillary Clinton White House. The Center for American Progress, which Tanden leads, was founded by John Podesta, a key figure in the Clinton machine.

Podesta is the [chairman](#) of Hillary's 2016 presidential campaign, and he previously served as chief of staff under President Bill Clinton. With his brother Tony, John also co-founded the Podesta Group, a public affairs firm that has [lobbied for the draconian Saudi Arabian regime](#), among others.

Tanden is quite hawkish, like Hillary — whom The New York Times, which endorsed her for president, described as [more hawkish than her Republican rivals](#) .

The Center for American Progress president [invited](#) hard-line right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to speak in Washington, D.C. in November, after he had spent months aggressively trying to jeopardize the Iran nuclear deal.

Tanden does not comment on international affairs much, but her tweets provide some insight into her hawkish views.

In September 2013, when the Obama administration was preparing to bomb Syria, she [tweeted](#) support, writing, “On Syria, while I don’t want to be the world’s policeman, an unpoliced world is dangerous. The US may be the only adult in the room left.” Just over a week later, the administration [backed off](#) of its plans, in response to enormous backlash — and in fear that it would end up with another Libya on its hands.

During the lead-up to the war in Libya, Tanden expressed support for military intervention. She [suggested](#) that Americans should be “chanting” for Qadhafi’s ouster.

Days after the NATO operation was launched, she [wrote](#) , “To liberal friends worried re Libya, is there better reason 4 use of US power than 2 protect innocent civilians from slaughter by a madman?”

Less than a month later, Tanden [conceded](#) , “This whole Libya thing doesn’t seem to be working out so well.”

Like many liberal figures who supported the NATO bombing of Libya, she [stopped](#) talking about the country between 2011 and 2014, while it was roiled by violent chaos and extremism.

These tweets came before the October email in which Tanden suggested taking Libya's oil in return for bombing it. Trump made the same proposal several months before, in April.

Leftist critics have long lambasted the Democratic Party's militaristic foreign policy, arguing it is not much different than the GOP's. This exploitative idea proposed by both Trump and Tanden lends further credence to the argument that, when it comes to the U.S. empire, the Democratic and Republican parties are much more similar than their adherents make them out to be.

At the time of his April 2011 CNN interview, Trump was considering running as a Republican in the 2012 election. His nationalistic rhetoric then was very consistent to that of today.

Trump lamented that the U.S. was "just not respected" and had become "a laughing stock throughout the world." He hoped that he could reverse this supposed trend, just as he now promises to "make America great again."

Trump's proposal on Libya was consistent with his views on Iraq. He [declared](#) at the American Conservative Union's 40th Conservative Political Action Conference, in 2013, that the U.S. should "take" \$1.5 trillion worth of Iraq's oil to pay for the illegal war.

In his presidential campaign today, Trump has made similar proposals. His foreign policy is a strange mix of skeptical non-interventionism and hawkishness.