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Gaddafi's son Saif's ties to LSE and Britain



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By Matt Prodger
BBC Newsnight

On Sunday Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, son of Libya's leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, appeared on Libyan state television telling protesters to clear the streets or face rivers of blood.

The contrast to his appearance as a guest speaker at the London School of Economics (LSE) two years ago could not have been more stark.

Having just donated £1.5m to the university to fund its Global Governance Unit, he was introduced in glowing terms by the university's Professor David Held, who said:

"I've come to know Saif as someone who looks to democracy, civil society and deep liberal values for the core of his inspiration."

Donation rejected

But even Saif Gaddafi could not keep a straight face as he began giving a speech about democracy in Libya.

"In theory Libya is the most democratic state in the world," he said to laughter from the audience, before chuckling and adding, "In theory, in theory."

Fast forward to the present day and Prof Held is appalled by Saif Gaddafi's speech on Libyan TV, LSE students occupied offices at the university in protest at its relationship with him, and the university has been shamed into rejecting the bulk of the donation.

As a final embarrassment, the university has been forced to investigate allegations that parts of Saif Gaddafi's LSE PhD were plagiarised.

The irony of its title - The Role of Civil Society in the Democratisation of Global Governance Institutions - is lost on no-one.

'Failure to learn'

But Saif Gaddafi's examiner, the renowned economist Lord Desai, says that he had earned the PhD, and that the LSE had been right to accept his donation.

His only regret, Lord Desai said on Thursday, was that Saif Gaddafi had failed to learn enough about democracy:

"I read the thesis, I examined him



There have been protests at the LSE over its link with Gaddafi

"This is over-egging the pudding. The man is evil enough - you don't have to add that he's a plagiarist as well"

Lord Desai dismisses claims Saif Gaddafi plagiarised his LSE PhD

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along with an examiner, he defended his thesis very, very thoroughly, he had nobody else present there, and I don't think there's any reason to think he didn't do it himself."

"This is over-egging the pudding. The man is evil enough - you don't have to add that he's a plagiarist as well."

The LSE is not the only British institution Saif Gaddafi's name has been mentioned alongside, he has cropped up in all manner of meetings and mutual connections.

He described Tony Blair as a family friend, although the former UK prime minister says he has only met him once since leaving office and has no commercial relationship with him.

Playboy lifestyle

Britain's trade envoy, the Duke of York, has hosted Saif Gaddafi at Buckingham Palace, though a palace spokesman said he is no friend.

Then there is former business secretary Lord Mandelson, who met Saif Gaddafi a number of times - once at the Corfu villa of British financier Nat Rothschild.

Both Mr Rothschild and his business associate Russian oligarch Oleg Deripaska were invited to Saif Gaddafi's 37th birthday party in Montenegro.

In London, Saif Gaddafi has lived a playboy lifestyle. Two years ago he moved into a £10m house complete with suede-lined indoor cinema not far from an area of north London known as Billionaire's Row.

The Libyan Investment Authority also owns properties in the city, on Oxford Street and at Trafalgar Square.

'Economic stranglehold'

There has always been a thin line between Gaddafi money and Libyan money - one of the reasons that have made Saif Gaddafi so influential.

"The Gaddafi family controls everything in Libya and no deals are signed either for inward or outward investment without their approval," Conservative MP Daniel Kawczynski, who has written a book about the Gaddafi family and heads the All Party Parliamentary Group for Libya, told Newsnight.



In his TV speech Gaddafi blamed people outside Libya for the violence

“ The Gaddafi family controls everything in Libya and no deals are signed either for inward or outward investment without their approval ”

Daniel Kawczynski MP, head of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Libya

"They have had up until now a total stranglehold on the economy. I haven't seen anything like it around the world."



Two years ago Saif Gaddafi moved into a £10m house in north London

The fact is there was always a good reason for cosying up to the man who until recently was considered the heir to the throne of an oil rich wealthy country.

Sooner or later the old man, Col Gaddafi, was going to go and his avowedly pro-Western, and apparently reformist, son would take the reins.

Only it does not appear to be working out that way, and those associated with him are now counting the cost.

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