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

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."

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
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.

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

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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