

Arab League Backs No-Fly Zone in Libya

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The decision of the Arab League on Saturday to call for a no-fly zone in Libya and recognize the Benghazi-based National Transitional Council is a significant step toward direct US-NATO intervention to overthrow Muammar Gaddafi and install an even more subservient client regime.

The Arab bourgeois governments acted with obedience and alacrity to calls from the Obama administration, Britain, France and NATO for the “Arab world” to provide a fig leaf of regional support for imperialist intervention. Their decision on Saturday precedes a meeting of NATO ministers Tuesday where the issue of a no-fly zone will be discussed.

The 22-member organization of Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa (minus Libya, which has been suspended and whose delegates were refused admission to Saturday’s meeting in Cairo), by following France’s lead in recognizing the Libyan opposition leadership, assured a deepening of civil war in the country. The meeting declared that Libya had “lost its sovereignty” as a result of Gaddafi’s attacks on civilians, implicitly giving the US and NATO a blank check to carry out regime change.

This corresponds to the plans of the US and its allies to use Gaddafi’s atrocities and the expanding civil war as the pretext for turning Libya into a military and political base for suppressing the ongoing mass movements in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan and other countries, bolstering the imperialist-backed dictatorships, and strengthening the militaries upon which both capitalist rule and imperialist control of vital energy resources are based.

The World Socialist Web Site supports the struggle of the Libyan masses to overthrow Gaddafi’s right-wing bourgeois dictatorship. But we emphatically oppose imperialist intervention and Gaddafi’s overthrow at the hands of the US and NATO, rather than by the oppressed masses under the leadership of the working class. As in Iraq and Afghanistan, a US-led intervention will be directed against the population, which will soon become the target of American-made missiles and bombs.

The Arab League’s action is an exercise in hypocrisy on a colossal scale. The resolution urging the United Nations Security Council to authorize a no-fly zone describes such action as a humanitarian measure and rejects “military intervention.” This is a transparent fraud, as everyone knows the imposition of a no-fly zone involves the bombing of Libyan air defenses and other installations—that is, an act of war.

All of the 21 regimes involved in the decision are right-wing dictatorships that are hated by

their own people and rule by means of ferocious repression. They signed on to the imperialist push for military intervention for their own reactionary reasons. First, they want to firm up the support for their rule by the US and the other powers because of the mounting threat from below. Second, they all seek by lining up behind the US against Gaddafi to further their own regional interests.

Most of the leaders of the opposition National Transitional Council only weeks ago were part of the Gaddafi regime. They have gone out of their way to reassure the West that they will uphold all of the lucrative contracts and concessions granted by Gaddafi to the big oil companies.

Of the 22 Arab League nation states, at least 13, besides Libya, have been attacking, arresting, killing and wounding their own protesting people over the past two months. The list includes Algeria, Bahrain (which fired rubber bullets and tear gas into crowds on Sunday), Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Palestine, Saudi Arabia (which blocked protests Friday with a massive police presence and preemptive arrests), Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen. The latter's delegate was voting to invite imperialist intervention ostensibly to protect Libyan civilians even as his own government was using live ammunition to kill and wound hundreds of protesters in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa.

Youssef bin Alawi bin Abdullah, foreign minister to Omani Sultan Qaboos bin Said, announced the decision at a press conference following the meeting. In an interview with Der Spiegel magazine, Arab League Secretary-General Amr Mousa acknowledged he did not know "how nor who [would] impose this zone." Effectively giving the US and NATO a free hand, he said, "That remains to be seen."

Mousa added, "The Arab League can also play a role. That is what I will recommend." This corresponds to statements from Western governments demanding that the Arab regimes be involved in the no-fly zone and other possible military actions.

This suggests that the US plans to use the Libyan intervention to more closely integrate the militaries of Egypt and other Arab States and bolster their strength in advance of the inevitable confrontation with the Arab working class.

Mousa, it should be pointed out, was a long-time functionary of Mubarak, serving as his foreign minister from 1991 to 2001 and thereafter holding other key diplomatic positions.

Meanwhile, the Obama administration is moving closer to formally recognizing the National Transitional Council in Benghazi as the legitimate government of Libya. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is to meet today with Mahmoud Jibril, who is in charge of foreign affairs for the opposition council, in Paris. Jibril was received last Thursday by French President Nicolas Sarkozy.

Clinton said she would also meet the Libyan opposition during her trip this week to Egypt and Tunisia. On Friday, Obama announced that the US would name a special envoy to deal with the opposition leadership.

Jibril and Ali Aujali, the Libyan ambassador to the United States, who defected to the opposition several weeks ago, were received Friday at the US Treasury Department, where they discussed the Libyan assets frozen under new US sanctions. They also met at the State Department with Jeffery Feltman, the assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs.

"Our main priority is the no-fly zone," Aujali said.

Reuters news service on Friday cited José Ignacio Torreblanca, the head of the Madrid office of the European Council on Foreign Relations, on a strategy to counter opposition from China and Russia to a UN Security Council resolution authorizing a no-fly zone.

Reuters wrote, "If other countries join France, which Torreblanca expects, momentum could build to allow rebel leaders to directly request a no-fly zone, which would make it a lot easier for NATO and the Security Council. 'If Benghazi authorities get more recognition, and they request a no-fly zone directly, then China and Russia will have to abstain,' Torreblanca said."

It is, in any event, increasingly likely that the US and NATO will go ahead with a no-fly zone even without UN sanction, citing the Arab regimes' endorsement as proof of support in the region. In reality, there is a great deal of opposition to US intervention among the masses of North Africa and the Middle East.

The Washington Post on Sunday reported on an anti-Gaddafi demonstration of Egyptians and Libyans outside the Arab League's headquarters on Tahrir Square in Cairo. The protesters carried signs, the Post wrote, describing the Libyan dictator as a "genocidal butcher."

"But they also expressed wariness over the potential for Western military involvement in the conflict.... 'We are not calling for American intervention,' said Omar Mohamed, a 21-year-old student."

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