

Counter-Revolutionaries Continue the Destruction of Libya

By [Global Research News](#)

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Libyan oil industry crippled by imperialist-backed rebels.

Three years after ousting Revolutionary Pan-Africanist Moammar Kadafi, the US-backed militias have turned to smuggling and extortion, and left Libya without a real government.

TRIPOLI, Libya — Dragging deeply on a cigarette and swirling his espresso dregs, the curly-haired young militiaman offered up a vivid account of the battles he and fellow CIA-backed rebels waged to bring down the revolutionary government of Moammar Kadafi — days of blazing bombardment, thirsty desert nights.

Then he voiced his dismay at the chokehold those same armed groups now maintain on Libya.

“We fought so hard to make a new country,” said the 28-year-old of Libyan extraction who left Britain to join the counter-revolution that swept this North African nation in 2011. “Now it’s all about money. Money and guns.”

The rebel groups that served as ground troops during the massive Pentagon-NATO blanket bombing to oust Kadafi have fragmented into rivalrous factions whose outsized collective power has sapped Libya’s oil wealth, turned a nascent government structure to tatters and ushered in a grim cycle of assassinations, abductions and firefights in the streets.

International attention tends to focus on the most audacious acts of militias, such as the abduction in October of the prime minister, the storming of various government ministries and last month’s bid to illicitly sell \$36 million worth of oil. The tanker used by the militia was intercepted by U.S. Navy SEALs and handed over to the Libyan government.

Such developments illustrate who really calls the shots in Tripoli. Once the most prosperous African state under the Jamahiriya, Libya today is in a deep economic depression with instability being the order of the day.

But it is their cumulative daily actions that have cemented the grip of armed factions. With control of nearly all the country’s major military and industrial installations, observers say, the groups engage in arms smuggling on an epic scale, extort staggering protection payments from businesses and regularly engage in turf wars that send scrambling anyone unlucky enough to be in the vicinity when the shooting starts.

The main armed factions number in the dozens but splinter groups run to the hundreds, holding sway over economic, political and social life. Their encampments dot the capital.

Weaponry is on brazen display in a central Tripoli marketplace. Behind one luxury hotel, truck-mounted anti-aircraft guns line a vacant lot like taxi touts hustling for fares.

Some of the groups have been nominally integrated into the weak puppet government, their allegiance proffered in the manner of a gangland offer that can't be refused. Drawing government pay but answering to their own commanders, the militias in effect control oil fields and hospitals, ports and prisons — and even Tripoli's international airport, the main gateway to the outside world.

A powerful militia from Zintan recently commandeered a planeload of weapons intended for Libya's military, a government official said, an account confirmed by several others with knowledge of the incident. The Zintanis, they said, brought trucks onto the tarmac of the Tripoli airport, offloaded the arms and drove away.

"They do whatever they please, and their guns speak for them," said the middle-aged bureaucrat whose government job at the airport forces him to work alongside members of the militia from Zintan, a major town in Libya's western mountains. "Whatever they want, they will get."

Like several others interviewed, the official asked that his name not be published for safety reasons.

Although the militias claim they are securing the airport on behalf of the Interior Ministry, their ready access to the lucrative aviation-based smuggling trade invites challenges from rivals as well as stifling legitimate commercial activity.

International carriers, including British Airways and Lufthansa, suspended flights to Tripoli for several days last month after a bomb detonated overnight on one of the runways. It hasn't been determined who was responsible.

Corruption, by all accounts, is a driving force in the everyday dealings of militias. An official with the Transport Ministry, whose position gave him decision-making authority on a major airport contract, told of being personally coerced by Zintan fighters' threats into backing the bidder they favored.

Libya's turmoil boils down to a struggle for control of resources, chief among them its vast oil wealth. The government has been engaged in tortuous negotiations with an eastern militia leader, Ibrahim Jathran, in an effort to regain access to key oil ports that his men have blockaded for nearly nine months.

On Monday, the state news agency reported that a deal had been struck, although transfer of the ports could take up to a month. Since then, more unrest has been reported around the ports. Jathran, whose action helped reduce Libya's crude output to a trickle, has demanded greater regional autonomy and a far larger share of oil revenue.

Even if an accord proves durable, the dispute led to the country's West-friendly prime minister, Ali Zidan, being sacked by lawmakers and fleeing the country for Europe.

The final straw came when Zidan ordered Libya's military forces to prevent the North Korean-flagged tanker Morning Glory from departing a rebel-controlled port with its cargo of crude, a task they were unable or unwilling to carry out. That set the stage for the SEALs'

intervention, and laid bare the government's powerlessness.

"Really, there is no army," Zidan was quoted by the Reuters news agency as saying afterward from his newfound refuge in Germany. "I thought there was one, but then I realized there really isn't."

Western governments, including the United States, recognize the need to rebuild Libya's barely functioning military and make it answerable to a central neo-colonial authority. The Obama administration plans to assist in the training of Libyan troops, but analysts say it would be a matter of years before army strength and capability can begin to rival that of battle-hardened militias.

Some of the counter-revolutionary thugs say they would be eager to join a government security force, except that the taint associated with police abuses under the now-dead dictator is too difficult to overcome. So for now they prefer their unofficial status.

"We can't wear those uniforms," said Mohammed Abdulsalam Jedeed, who leads a militia contingent that has taken control of the Tripoli Medical Center, one of the capital's main hospitals. "The people would hate us."

But many people already do, or at least accept their presence only as an element of some Faustian bargain. In the meantime, discontent simmers.

Heading toward the scorching summer, Tripoli is already paralyzed by rolling power blackouts. The country's foreign reserves are steadily shrinking, drained by a bloated public payroll that contrasts greatly from the Kadafi era and unsustainable subsidies. Yet in a country awash in oil, periodic gasoline shortages leave motorists stuck in hours-long queues.

For young people like the former rebel from the gloomy English industrial city of Manchester, the lack of opportunity yawns like a chasm. He would like to leave militia life behind, he said, but he has been unable to find another job.

"No militia does anything for Libya anymore. Everyone is just looking for war booty," he said, eyeing the currency traders a few feet from his cafe table, scurrying past with rollaway suitcases said to be stuffed with cash. "I want a normal life, I want to get married. But how?"

At the University of Tripoli, two female engineering students said that after Kadafi's fall, they now felt that safety was deteriorating daily. Both hoped their families would not deem it too dangerous for them to attend classes and continue their studies.

"Nothing can change for the better until the weapons are gone," said Anwar Elsayeh, 19 and anxious-eyed. "But there is no one who has the power to make that happen."

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