

Exit NATO, Enter Libyan War

By [Farirai Chubvu](#)

Global Research, November 04, 2011

[The Herald](#) 4 November 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

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On May 1, 2003, then US president George Walker Bush jetted onto the aircraft carrier USS Abraham Lincoln in a Lockheed S-3 Viking, dubbed Navy One, as the carrier returned from combat operations in the Persian Gulf.

The self-proclaimed “war president” resplendent in a flight suit posed for photographs with pilots and members of the ship’s crew before delivering a speech announcing the end of major combat operations in the Iraq invasion. High above him flapped a banner with the legend, “Mission Accomplished.”

While this statement did coincide with an end to the conventional phase of the war, Bush’s assertion and the sign itself became controversial after guerrilla warfare in Iraq intensified with the bulk of the casualties, both military and civilian, occurring since the speech.

Bush’s photo opportunity that was supposed to be his crowning moment as “war president” became a symbol of his administration’s unrealistic goals and he retired as the war president who did not finish any war. Anti-war activists questioned the integrity and realism of Bush’s “major combat” statement.

The banner came to symbolise the irony of Bush giving a victory speech only a few weeks after the beginning of a relatively long war which is still with us today, more than eight years after Bush claimed the war had ended. Many in his administration came to regret the slogan with his spin doctor Karl Rove publicly confessing, “I wish the banner was not up there.”

Well, NATO formally announced an end to its seven-month predatory war against Libya at midnight Monday, having achieved its aim of effecting regime change and opening up Libya to unrestrained exploitation by Western oil companies.

Speaking in Tripoli at a joint news conference with Mustafa Abdul Jalil, head of the NATO-backed National Transitional Council, Nato’s secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, described the war as “a successful chapter in NATO’s history,” claiming that it had created “a new Libya based on freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.”

“Free Libya” lies in ruins. Much of its infrastructure has been destroyed and whole cities, like Sirte, the target of a barbaric NATO siege that ended barely one week ago, have been turned into ghost towns. The war was launched in March of this year based on Resolution 1973, pushed through the United Nations Security Council on the false pretence that it was needed to authorise the imposition of a no-fly zone and other measures to protect civilians from repression by the Gaddafi regime.

At the time, the US and Western powers, echoed by the media and a whole layer of human rights organisations, liberal academics and pseudo-left groups, claimed that such an authorisation was required to forestall an imminent massacre of thousands in the eastern city of Benghazi, the centre of opposition to Gaddafi. There was no evidence substantiating the claims of an imminent massacre.

But the intervention launched in the name of saving human lives served to unleash a bloodletting in Libya that has surpassed even the worst predictions of those proclaiming the need for an immediate “humanitarian” military intervention.

According to the estimates given by the NATO-backed NTC, anywhere between 30,000 and 50,000 Libyans have lost their lives in the last eight months.

Another 50,000 are said to have been wounded. Many of these dead and wounded are victims of the relentless bombing campaign by NATO, which flew some 26,000 sorties during the war, demolishing entire buildings, with their residents buried in the rubble.

Others have died in bitter fighting between NATO-backed “rebels” – armed, trained and led by special forces units and intelligence operatives from France, Britain, the US and Qatar – and forces loyal to the Gaddafi regime. Still more have been massacred in tribal revenge killings.

In Sirte alone, hundreds of bodies have been discovered over the past week in mass graves or left out in the open to rot, many of them with their hands tied behind their backs and bullet holes in their heads. In Sirte, the predictions of the Western powers of a massacre in Libya have been fully realised, but it is NATO and its local agents that have carried it out.

As Rasmussen was extolling the virtues of a “free Libya” based on “human rights and the rule of law,” Human Rights Watch issued a report providing a chillingly detailed account of the mass racist pogroms that have been carried out against black-skinned Libyans and immigrant workers from elsewhere in Africa.

The report centres on the fate of the people of Tawergha, a predominantly black town of 30 000 south of Misrata, whose residents have been ethnically cleansed from the area, many of them murdered, detained and tortured at the hands of NATO-backed militias for their suspected sympathy for Gaddafi.

Tawergha has been emptied of its inhabitants, its buildings vandalised, burned and looted, with its residents still hunted down wherever they go. The report describes the brutal fate of a number of Tawerghans who were tortured to death with whips, clubs, electric shock and other means of inflicting agony.

Human Rights Watch said that the scars all over the man’s body substantiated his account. Others who had fled Tawergha described being hunted down by militiamen in the places they had taken refuge, with the gunmen calling them “slaves” and “monkeys.”

No one knows with any certainty how many have been killed in this manner or exactly how many thousands more are still being held in makeshift prison camps run by the NATO-backed “rebel” torturers.

Stop NATO e-mail list home page with archives and search engine:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stopnato/messages>

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Articles by: [Farirai Chubvu](#)

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