

How Humanitarian is Western Intervention in Libya?

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A rebel fighter looks at burning vehicles belonging to forces loyal to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi after an air strike by coalition forces, along a road between Benghazi and Ajdabiyah March 20, 2011. (Xinhua/Reuters)

For days, British, French and U.S. forces have been conducting air strikes in Libya. Despite coalition claims that their actions have made steady progress, voices of dissatisfaction and opposition are increasingly louder due to casualties caused by a strike ostensibly carried out in the name of humanitarianism.

According to the U.S. Army, the operation “Odyssey Dawn,” which started on the afternoon of March 19, has largely weakened the capability of Libyan air defense. The first phase of the coalition’s mission to control Libyan air territory has achieved success, said Michael Glenn Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the United States, on March 20.

The Western coalition emphasized that the first wave of the strike is “limited in scope,” but in fact it turned out otherwise, triggering great questions and doubts. Libya’s state-run TV station reported that 64 people died and 150 people were injured in the first day of the air strike. Such numbers are definitely going to increase with the ongoing strike.

The two main purposes of the current air strike are to destroy Libyan air defense facilities and lay the groundwork for setting up a no-fly zone, which will allow Western fighters to cruise on one hand. On the other hand, it aims to stop Gaddafi's eastern aggression and force military troops loyal to Gaddafi to evacuate from Benghazi and other places occupied by Libyan rebels. However, neither of the purposes has been achieved as of now, and Gaddafi is not compromising, either.

The action implemented by the coalition was authorized by the U.N. Security Council in the name of "humanitarianism" to stop the killing of civilians by Gaddafi. However, the real situation is that casualties might be much higher than before Western interference. Aside from the deaths and injuries caused by the air strike, it will eventually turn into a humanitarian disaster because the interference might turn the civil conflict into a severe protracted civil war.

Poor Libya is not the first "trial target" that the Western has attacked in the name of "humanitarianism." Bosnia and Herzegovina, Iraq and so on are all the former "targets." Sadly, the "experiment" never really succeeded. As seen from the other two countries, this so-called "humanitarianism" is actually just the first step toward overthrowing of another country's political power.

The historical experience also tells us that such military interference is only for self-serving political and economic interests or even just out of dislike for some leaders, such as Saddam and Gaddafi, though it is veiled by a humanitarian guise.

However, it is definitely not under the pure name of "humanitarianism." Then, who is going to clear the name of this cause?

Therefore, we could see the turning of Arab League's sides from supporting to waving and "regretting" within just a few days. In order to stop the bombing of civilians by Gaddafi, the Arab League appealed to the U.N. Security Council to set up a no-fly zone over Libya and provided a "legal" excuse for France and Britain to advance the 1973 no-fly ban.

But, Arab League never expected the air strike on Libya could cause such a big disaster, and they may have to share the burden of deaths first. So, the Arab League started to condemn the military attacks on Libya on March 20.

Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa said what is currently happening in Libya has strayed away from the purpose of setting up no-fly zone approved by the U.N. Security Council. The council's decision was done in order to protect civilians but not at the expense of sacrificing more civilians. The no-fly zone is expected but not bombs.

Apart from the Arab League, Russia strongly appealed all sides to cease fire to avoid hurting more civilians and opposes to use of military forces indiscriminately. Iran condemns the air strike on Libya and questions Western countries' improper purposes. Chávez, the President of Venezuela, said the air strike could only cause more bleeding. Also, Turkey, as one member of NATO, opposes the behavior of its "partners" and warns NATO that the military interference would result in very dangerous consequences.

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