

The Truth About the Situation in Libya: Cutting through Government Propaganda and Media Lies

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Libya is a small country of just over 6 million people but it possesses the largest oil reserves in all of Africa. The oil produced there is especially coveted because of its particularly high quality.

The Air Force of the United States along with Britain and France has carried out 7,459 bombing attacks since March 19. Britain, France and the United States sent special operation ground forces and commando units to direct the military operations of the so-called rebel fighters – it is a NATO- led army in the field.

The troops may be disaffected Libyans but the operation is under the control and direction of NATO commanders and western commando units who serve as “advisors.” Their new weapons and billions in funds come from the U.S. and other NATO powers that froze and seized Libya’s assets in Western banks. Their only military successes outside of Benghazi, in the far east of the country, have been exclusively based on the coordinated air and ground operations of the imperialist NATO military forces.

In military terms, Libya’s resistance to NATO is of David and Goliath proportions. U.S. military spending alone is more than ten times greater than Libya’s entire annual Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which was \$74.2 billion in 2010, according to the CIA’s World Fact Book.

In recent weeks, the NATO military operations used surveillance-collecting drones, satellites, mounting aerial attacks and covert commando units to decapitate Libya’s military and political leadership and its command and control capabilities. Global economic sanctions meant that the country was suddenly deprived of income and secure access to goods and services needed to sustain a civilian economy over a long period.

“The cumulative effect [of NATO’s coordinated air and ground operation] not only destroyed Libya’s military infrastructure but also greatly diminished Colonel Gaddafi’s commanders to control forces, leaving even committed fighting units unable to move, resupply or coordinate operations,” reports the New York Times in a celebratory article on August 22.

A False Pretext

The United States, United Kingdom, France, and Italy targeted the Libyan government for overthrow or “regime change” not because these governments were worried about protecting civilians or to bring about a more democratic form of governance in Libya.

If that were the real motivation of the NATO powers, they could start the bombing of Saudi Arabia right away. There are no elections in Saudi Arabia. The monarchy does not even allow women to drive cars. By law, women must be fully covered in public or they will go to prison. Protests are rare in Saudi Arabia because any dissent is met with imprisonment, torture and execution.

The Saudi monarchy is protected by U.S. imperialism because it is part of an undeclared but real U.S. sphere of influence and it is the largest producer of oil in the world. The U.S. attitude toward the Saudi monarchy was put succinctly by Ronald Reagan in 1981, when he said that the U.S. government “will not permit” revolution in Saudi Arabia such as the 1979 Iranian revolution that removed the U.S. client regime of the Shah. Reagan’s message was clear: the Pentagon and CIA’s military forces would be used decisively to destroy any democratic movement against the rule of the Saudi royal family.

Reagan’s explicit statement in 1981 has in fact been the policy of every successive U.S. administration, including the current one.

Libya and Imperialism

Libya, unlike Saudi Arabia, did have a revolution against its monarchy. As a result of the 1969 revolution led by Muammar Gaddafi, Libya was no longer in the sphere of influence of any imperialist country.

Libya had once been an impoverished colony of Italy living under the boot heel of the fascist Mussolini. After the Allied victory in World War II, control of the country was formally transferred to the United Nations and Libya became independent in 1951 with authority vested in the monarch King Idris.

But in actuality, Libya was controlled by the United States and Britain until the 1969 revolution.

One of the first acts of the 1969 revolution was to eliminate the vestiges of colonialism and foreign control. Not only were oil fields nationalized but Gaddafi eliminated foreign military bases inside the country.

In March of 1970, the Gaddafi government shut down two important British military bases in Tobruk and El Adem. He then became the Pentagon’s enemy when he evicted the U.S. Wheelus Air Force Base near Tripoli that had been operated by the United States since 1945. Before the British military took control in 1943, the facility was a base operated by the Italians under Mussolini.

Wheelus had been an important Strategic Air Command (SAC) base during the Cold War, housing B-52 bombers and other front-line Pentagon aircrafts that targeted the Soviet Union.

Once under Libyan control, the Gaddafi government allowed Soviet military planes to access the airfield.

In 1986, the Pentagon heavily bombed the base at the same time it bombed downtown Tripoli in an effort to assassinate Gaddafi. That effort failed but his 2-year-old daughter died along with scores of other civilians.

The Character of the Gaddafi Regime

The political, social and class orientation of the Libyan regime has gone through several stages in the last four decades. The government and ruling establishment reflected contradictory class, social, religious and regional antagonisms. The fact that the leadership of the NATO-led National Transition Council is comprised of top officials of the Gaddafi government, who broke with the regime and allied themselves with NATO, is emblematic of the decades-long instability within the Libyan establishment.

These inherent contradictions were exacerbated by pressures applied to Libya from the outside. The U.S. imposed far-reaching economic sanctions on Libya in the 1980s. The largest western corporations were barred from doing business with Libya and the country was denied access to credit from western banks.

In its foreign policy, Libya gave significant financial and military support to national liberation struggles, including in Palestine, Southern Africa, Ireland and elsewhere.

Because of Libya's economic policies, living standards for the population had jumped dramatically after 1969. Having a small population and substantial income from its oil production, augmented with the Gaddafi regime's far-reaching policy of social benefits, created a huge advance in the social and economic status for the population. Libya was still a class society with rich and poor, and gaps between urban and rural living standards, but illiteracy was basically wiped out, while education and health care were free and extensively accessible. By 2010, the per capita income in Libya was near the highest in Africa at \$14,000 and life expectancy rose to over 77 years, according to the CIA's World Fact Book.

Gaddafi's political orientation explicitly rejected communism and capitalism. He created an ideology called the "Third International Theory," which was an eclectic mix of Islamic, Arab nationalist and socialist ideas and programs. In 1977, Libya was renamed the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. A great deal of industry, including oil, was nationalized and the government provided an expansive social insurance program or what is called a welfare state policy akin to some features prevalent in the Soviet Union and some West European capitalist countries.

But Libya was not a workers' state or a "socialist government" to use the popular if not scientific use of the term "socialist." The revolution was not a workers and peasant rebellion against the capitalist class per se. Libya remained a class society although class differentiation may have been somewhat obscured beneath the existence of revolutionary committees and the radical, populist rhetoric that emanated from the regime.

As in many developing, formerly colonized countries, state ownership of property was not "socialist" but rather a necessary fortification of an under-developed capitalist class. State property in Iraq, Libya and other such post-colonial regimes was designed to facilitate the social and economic growth of a new capitalist ruling class that was initially too weak, too deprived of capital and too cut off from international credit to compete on its own terms with the dominant sectors of world monopoly capitalism. The nascent capitalist classes in such developing economies promoted state-owned property, under their control, in order to intersect with Western banks and transnational corporations and create more favorable terms for global trade and investment.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the "socialist bloc" governments of central and Eastern

Europe in 1989-91 deprived Libya of an economic and military counter-weight to the United States, and the Libyan government's domestic economic and foreign policy shifted towards accommodation with the West.

In the 1990s some sectors of the Libyan economic establishment and the Gaddafi-led government favored privatization, cutting back on social programs and subsidies and integration into western European markets.

The earlier populism of the regime incrementally gave way to the adoption of neo-liberal policies. This was, however, a long process.

In 2004, the George W. Bush administration ended sanctions on Libya. Western oil companies and banks and other corporations initiated huge direct investments in Libya and trade with Libyan enterprises.

There was also a growth of unemployment in Libya and in cutbacks in social spending, leading to further inequality between rich and poor and class polarization.

But Gaddafi himself was still considered a thorn in the side of the imperialist powers. They want absolute puppets, not simply partners, in their plans for exploitation. The Wikileaks release of State Department cables between 2007 and 2010 show that the United States and western oil companies were condemning Gaddafi for what they called "resource nationalism." Gaddafi even threatened to re-nationalize western oil companies' property unless Libya was granted a larger share of the revenue for their projects.

As an article in today's New York Times Business section said honestly: "'Colonel Qaddafi proved to be a problematic partner for the international oil companies, frequently raising fees and taxes and making other demands. A new government with close ties to NATO may be an easier partner for Western nations to deal with.'

Even the most recent CIA Fact Book publication on Libya, written before the armed revolt championed by NATO, complained of the measured tempo of pro-market reforms in Libya: "Libya faces a long road ahead in liberalizing the socialist-oriented economy, but initial steps— including applying for WTO membership, reducing some subsidies, and announcing plans for privatization—are laying the groundwork for a transition to a more market-based economy." (CIA World Fact Book)

The beginning of the armed revolt on February 23 by disaffected members of the Libyan military and political establishment provided the opportunity for the U.S. imperialists, in league with their French and British counterparts, to militarily overthrow the Libyan government and replace it with a client or stooge regime.

Of course, in the revolt were workers and young people who had many legitimate grievances against the Libyan government. But what is critical in an armed struggle for state power is not the composition of the rank-and-file soldiers, but the class character and political orientation of the leadership.

Character of the National Transition Council

The National Transitional Council (NTC) constituted itself as the leadership of the uprising in Benghazi, Libya's second largest city. The central leader is Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, who was Libya's Minister of Justice until his defection at the start of the uprising. He was one of a

significant number of Western-oriented and neoliberal officials from Libya's government, diplomatic corps and military ranks who joined the opposition in the days immediately after the start of the revolt.

As soon as it was established, the NTC began issuing calls for imperialist intervention. These appeals became increasing panicky as it became clear that, contrary to early predictions that the Gaddafi-led government would collapse in a matter of days, it was the "rebels" who faced imminent defeat in the civil war. In fact, it was only due to the U.S./NATO bombing campaign, initiated with great hurry on March 19 that the rebellion did not collapse.

The last five months of war have erased any doubt about the pro-imperialist character of the NTC. One striking episode took place on April 22, when Senator John McCain made a "surprise" trip to Benghazi. A huge banner was unveiled to greet him with an American flag printed on it and the words: "United States of America - You have a new ally in North Africa."

Similar to the military relationship between the NATO and Libyan "rebel" armed forces, the NTC is entirely dependent on and subordinated to the U.S., French, British and Italian imperialist governments.

If the Pentagon, CIA, and Wall Street succeed in installing a client regime in Tripoli it will accelerate and embolden the imperialist threats and intervention against other independent governments such as Syria and Venezuela. In each case we will see a similar process unfold, including the demonization of the leadership of the targeted countries so as to silence or mute a militant anti-war response to the aggression of the war-makers.

We in the ANSWER Coalition invite all those who share this perspective to [join with us](#), to mobilize, and to unmask the colonial agenda that hides under the slogan of "humanitarian intervention."

Brian Becker, National Coordinator, ANSWER Coalition

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