

Two Years Since the End of the US-NATO War in Libya

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Today, October 31, 2013, marks two years since the official end of the US-NATO war for regime change in Libya. It is highly unlikely that this second anniversary will be marked with any fanfare in Washington, the capitals of Western Europe or Libya itself.

The nearly eight-month-long war achieved its goal of toppling the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, whose murder by a mob of NATO-backed “rebels” prompted President Barack Obama to proclaim from the White House Rose Garden that this grisly event signaled the advent of “a new and democratic Libya.”

Two years later, there is no sign of any such Libya. The country bombarded by the US military and its European allies is in an advanced state of disintegration. It was reported Monday that oil production, which is responsible for virtually all of the country’s export earnings and over half of its gross domestic product, has fallen to 90,000 barrels per day, less than a tenth of the pre-war level.

Major installations have been seized by armed militias. In eastern Libya, these militias advocate the country’s partition into the three regional governorates—Cyrenaica, Tripolitania and Fezzan—maintained under the colonial regime of fascist Italy.

According to best estimates, there are nearly one-quarter of a million militiamen who are armed and paid by the Libyan government but operate with complete impunity under the direction of Islamist and regional warlords. The warlords constitute the principal power in the country.

Clashes between these militias, attacks on the government, and assassinations of its officials are routine. Earlier this month, Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan was himself abducted by an Islamist militia that acted in protest over the October 5 abduction of alleged Al Qaeda operative Abu Anas al-Liby by US Special Operations troops.

Thousands of Libyans as well as sub-Saharan African migrant workers are being held incommunicado in makeshift prisons controlled by the militias, subjected to torture and killings.

Conditions for the masses of the oil-rich nation remain abysmal, with a real unemployment rate estimated at over 30 percent. One million people, many of them supporters of the former regime, remain internally displaced.

The continuation of this chaos two years after the end of the war reflects the character of the war itself.

The US and its principal NATO allies, Britain and France, launched the war on the pretense that it was a humanitarian intervention, designed only to protect innocent lives. Based on unsubstantiated claims that a government massacre of a rebellious population in the eastern city of Benghazi was imminent without immediate intervention, the NATO powers pushed Resolution 1973 through the United Nations Security Council, authorizing them to impose a no-fly zone and “take all necessary measures” to protect civilians.

This served as the pseudo-legal fig leaf for an imperialist war of aggression that killed an estimated 50,000 Libyan civilians and wounded at least that number. This war was patently not about saving lives. Rather, it was a war of neocolonial plunder, its principal objective being to topple the Gaddafi regime and impose a more pliant puppet in its place.

Washington and its allies instigated the war in large measure as a strategic response to the outbreak of mass uprisings by the working class against Western-backed regimes in Tunisia, on Libya’s western border, and Egypt, on its eastern border. The aim was to halt the spread of revolution and reassert US and Western European hegemony in the region, while supplanting the economic and political influence of China and Russia and seizing a more direct hold on Libya’s energy reserves.

Of great significance is the fact that the attempt of the imperialist powers to mask the war’s neocolonial character was assisted by a whole layer of pseudo-left forces in both Europe and the US.

These elements, including groups such as the New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France, the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and the International Socialist Organization in the US, cast the imperialist war against Libya as not merely a “humanitarian” intervention, but a “revolution” by the Libyans themselves.

These elements remain silent on the present-day state of Libya, and for good reason. The country’s disintegration into fiefdoms of rival militia warlords, the paralysis of its economy, and the poverty of its people are all proof that what they supported in Libya in 2011 was not a “revolution,” but an imperialist rape.

The regime that was placed in power enjoys no authority, precisely because it owes its office not to a popular revolutionary uprising, but to a sustained US-NATO bombing campaign, supplemented by the operations of Islamist militia forces, many of them connected to Al Qaeda, which served under the direction of US, British, French and Qatari special forces operatives as NATO’s ground troops.

Two years after the war in Libya, this same pseudo-left layer has continued to promote the imperialist intervention for regime-change in Syria—once again celebrating the machinations of the CIA, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, together with the sectarian atrocities committed by Al Qaeda-led militias, as a “revolution.”

These groups use these wars to cement even closer connections to their own governments and ruling elites. Their politics—indistinguishable in all essentials from those of the CIA and the Obama administration—reflect the interests of a privileged upper-middle class layer that has become a new constituency for imperialism.

While the US-NATO war succeeded in toppling and murdering Gaddafi and reducing much of Libya to rubble, the imperialist aims of plundering the country’s oil wealth and turning it into

a platform for US hegemony in the region are far from realized.

Reflecting deep concerns within US ruling circles and Washington's intelligence agencies, *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius wrote last week that Libya represented "a case study of why America's influence has receded in the Middle East." He indicted the Obama administration for having failed to take "steps over the past two years [that] might have limited the country's descent toward anarchy."

Meanwhile, two years after the withdrawal of American troops, Iraq is descending into civil war, with casualties approaching the record levels reached during the US occupation. In Syria, the Obama administration found itself compelled to retreat from the direct use of US military force in the face of overwhelming popular opposition both at home and abroad, driven by the immense hostility to the previous wars waged, in the interests of the financial oligarchy, on the basis of lies.

While this crisis has interfered with Washington's timetable for war in Syria, in the final analysis, it makes even more catastrophic conflagrations not less, but more likely. This threat must be answered through the building of a new mass antiwar movement, based on the working class and directed against the capitalist profit system, the source of war and militarism.

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