US-NATO Policy Underlines Instability in Libya and Tunisia

Imperialist states debate over future course of action in dominating region

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Attacks on March 18 at the Bardo Museum in Tunis resulting in the deaths of 24 people have been credited to the Islamic State.

Just two days prior to the 59th anniversary of the national independence of Tunisia from France in 1956, two gunmen took over a major tourist destination resulting in a police response that led to another high profile incident that was utilized as propaganda to escalate the so-called "war on terrorism" in North Africa.

Of the 24 people killed almost all of them were foreign nationals from Poland, Germany, Spain, Italy and other states. The recently-elected veteran politician President Beji Caid Essebsi criticized the security forces for being lax in their efforts to protect the museum which is a vital resource in the tourism sector, one of the most lucrative industries for earning hard currencies.

"There were failures...the police and intelligence [services] were not systematic enough to ensure the safety of the museum", the president told the Paris Match weekly in an interview on March 21. Nonetheless, he went on to praise the police by saying they "responded very effectively to quickly put an end to the attack at the Bardo, certainly preventing dozens more deaths if the terrorists had been able to set off their suicide belts."

However, the Deputy Speaker of Parliament Abdelfattah Mourou reportedly told the French Press Agency on March 20 that the guards hired to protect the museum and the parliament building located close by were drinking coffee at the time of the firing of gunshots by the assailants. Prosecution spokesperson Sofiene Sliti said that "There are developments in the case, but to protect the secrecy of the investigation we prefer not to provide any details." (AFP)

Although Tunisia is often cited by the western media as the most stable state among those which experienced upheavals and regime-changes in 2011, the country has experienced political unrest and assassinations. Two leading left-wing politicians, Mohamed Brahmi and Chokri Belaid, members of the same Popular Front alliance, were killed by gunmen just months apart during 2013.

In the aftermath of the assassination of Brahmi the country erupted in mass demonstrations led by youth and workers demanding the resignation of the government which took over after the forced exile of Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. Although the-then Prime Minister Ali Larayedh refused to resign, the post-uprising government dominated by the Ennahda Party

did eventually dismiss the cabinet setting the stage for new elections and the appointment of a so-called "technocratic" administration.

During the period after the assassination of the two leftist leaders, Interior Minister Lotfi Ben Jeddou stated in a press conference that "The same 9mm automatic weapon that killed Belaid also killed Brahmi." The individual targeted in both assassinations was said to have been Boubacar Hakim, a Salafist who was sought in connection with the illegal transport of weapons from Libya.

Post-Gaddafi Libya is a Major Source of Instability

With reference to the March 18 attacks in Tunis, the government and western states have linked the museum assault with Islamic State fighters based in neighboring Libya. Since the beginning of the war of regime-change against the government of Col. Muammar Gaddafi the North African state has fallen into political instability and internecine conflict.

IS forces are said to have training camps in Libya while engaging in several high-profile attacks in the capital of Tripoli as well as in the eastern and southern regions of the country. The two men involved in the museum incident were killed when security forces stormed the building.

One of the gunmen involved in the attack, Yassine Laabidi, was said to have been known to intelligence services although they claim he had no formal links to a particular organization. These extremist organizations based in Libya are a direct outcome of the foreign policy of Washington, London, Paris, Ottawa and their allies which coordinated the advances of these groups across Libya in 2011 through its massive aerial bombardments which lasted for over seven months.

During the course of the war between Feb. 17 and Oct. 31, some 26,000 sorties were flown and approximately 10,000 bombs were dropped on Libya. Tens of thousands were killed and millions more were displaced amid the destruction of the national infrastructure and the plundering of the country's wealth.

Yet the western states which carried out the destruction of Libya and empowered the extremist groups now wreaking havoc on the country are never cited for their culpability in the current western media reports which ponder how stability can be restored to the oil-rich state on the Mediterranean. These armed rebel groups are spreading out from Libya into neighboring and regional states in North and West Africa.

European Union Denies Plan for Military Intervention

At present the European Union (EU) is deliberating over whether it should establish another military force to supposedly secure the Libya-Tunisia borders and challenge IS and other rebels in operating in both countries. The EU plan as reported in the media would involve a stronger naval presence in the region as well as the deployment of ground troops backed up by air power.

However, it was announced on March 20 that the EU would continue to seek a political solution to the Libyan crisis and plans to send in troops were unsubstantiated. United Nations brokered talks between the two competing rebel regimes in Libya have failed to bring about the creation of a government of national unity.

Adherents to the former Jamahiriya political system under Gaddafi are barred from participation in the current U.S.-imposed political dispensation in Libya. Neither faction based in Tripoli or in the eastern city of Tobruk represents the aspirations of the workers and youth inside the country or throughout Africa, which under Gaddafi was the focus of the nation's foreign policy.

An article published by the globalpost.com on March 20 revealed that "The High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, said on Friday [March 20] that the EU is not planning a military intervention in Libya, but advocated the 28 EU countries to devote all possible means of support to the country, including security and defense measures, if Libya can create a unity government. Upon arriving at the European Council held in Brussels on Friday, the senior representative said that there is no plan for a European military intervention, but that Europe is 'planning all possible ways of supporting, even on the plan of security,' all of which is contingent on whether Libya can create a national unity government."

Yet a progressive national unity government can only come about with the advancement of the revolutionary democratic forces inside the country to establish a political system that places the interests of the majority within Libyan society above those of the bourgeois classes which are allied with multi-national oil interests and financiers. Such a system of national self-reliance and regional integration was the basis of the Jamahiriya which was destroyed by imperialist intervention.

The EU along with NATO and led by the U.S. are responsible for the current chaos in Libya. This pattern of sanctions, massive bombings, ground interventions through direct occupation or proxy forces have failed throughout the entire region of North Africa and the Middle East. Any real reversal of the political crisis in the regions must take on an anti-imperialist character stressing the necessity of genuine political independence and territorial sovereignty designed to break with the legacy of imperialism.

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