

US-NATO war crimes in Libya

Human Rights Report: Evidence of war crimes by US, NATO and proxy “rebel” forces

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A report released last week by Middle East human rights groups presents extensive evidence of war crimes carried out in Libya by the United States, NATO and their proxy “rebel” forces during last year’s war, which brought down the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The “Report of the Independent Civil Society Fact-Finding Mission to Libya” presents findings of an investigation carried out last November by the Arab Organization for Human Rights, together with the Palestinian Center for Human Rights and the International Legal Assistance Consortium.

Based on interviews with victims of war crimes as well as with witnesses and Libyan officials in Tripoli, Zawiya, Sibrata, Khoms, Zliten, Misrata, Tawergha and Sirte, the report calls for the investigation of evidence that NATO targeted civilian sites, causing many deaths and injuries. Civilian facilities targeted by NATO bombs and missiles included schools, government buildings, at least one food warehouse, and private homes.

The report also presents evidence of systematic murder, torture, expulsion and abuse of suspected Gaddafi loyalists by the NATO-backed “rebel” forces of the National Transitional Council (NTC). It describes the forced expulsion of the mostly black-skinned inhabitants of Tawergha and the ongoing persecution of sub-Saharan migrant workers by forces allied to the NTC and its transitional government.

The investigators report savage and repeated beatings of prisoners held without trial or charges, the summary execution of pro-Gaddafi fighters, and witness reports of “indiscriminate and retaliatory murders, including the ‘slaughter’ (i.e., throat slitting) of former combatants.”

The report exposes the human rights and democratic pretexts employed by the United States, France, Britain and their NATO accomplices to carry out a colonial-style war of conquest. It makes clear that last March’s United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, imposing a “no-fly zone” and arms embargo on Libya supposedly to protect civilians from repressive actions by Muammar Gaddafi, was in fact used to carry out a ruthless air war waged in coordination with “rebel” forces on the ground.

The report suggests that soon after the outbreak of anti-Gaddafi protests in Benghazi and other cities, opposition forces were receiving training from Western armed forces as well as weapons from NATO powers and allied Arab states. Popular opposition to Gaddafi that erupted last February following the fall of Mubarak in Egypt was rapidly taken into hand by the US, France, Britain and their agents within Libya to launch a pro-imperialist civil war.

As the report states: “From first-hand information available to the Mission, and secondary sources, it appears that NATO participated in what could be classified as offensive actions undertaken by the opposition forces, including, for example, attacks on towns and cities held by Gaddafi forces. Equally, the choice of certain targets, such as a regional food warehouse, raises *prima facie* questions regarding the role of such attacks with respect to the protection of civilians.”

The report gives only the palest picture of a brutal onslaught whose purpose was to turn the clock back 43 years to the conditions that prevailed under the US-UK stooge King Idris, who turned the country’s oil resources over to American and British conglomerates and allowed the two powers to maintain large military bases on Libyan soil. The mass destruction and killing, which culminated in the leveling of Sirte and lynching of Gaddafi, make the UN-sanctioned claims of a war for “human rights” and the “protection of civilians” not only absurd, but obscene.

The rape of Libya was the response of US and European imperialism to the revolutionary uprisings that ousted long-time pro-Western regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, two countries that border Libya. The aim of this imperialist war was to impose complete control on the country’s oil resources, divert and suppress the growth of working class struggles throughout North Africa and the Middle East, and deal a blow to China and Russia, which had established close economic relations with the Gaddafi regime.

The war devastated the country. The NTC—an unstable coalition of ex-Gaddafi regime officials, Islamists, including some with links to Al Qaeda, and Western intelligence assets—itself estimates that the war took 50,000 lives and injured another 50,000 people. Rising infighting between the NTC’s factions is opening the door to full-scale civil war between rival clan-based and regional militias.

Just this weekend, amid warnings from NTC Chairman Mustafa Abdel Jalil of looming civil war, a crowd demanding the resignation of the transitional government forced its way into the NTC’s headquarters in Benghazi. Abdel Hafiz Ghoga, the vice president of the NTC, promptly resigned.

The report on US-NATO war crimes is also a further indictment of the assortment of “left” parties, intellectuals and academics who parroted the human rights pretexts of Washington and NATO and thus gave open or backhanded support to the war in Libya. It underscores that these forces—from social democrats, Greens and ex-Stalinists such as the German Left Party to pseudo-radicals such as France’s New Anti-Capitalist Party and the International Socialist Organization in the US—have moved into the camp of imperialism.

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