"Western Insanity": Momentum Grows to Bomb Libya Again … This Time against the "Islamic State" (ISIS)

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In-depth Report: NATO'S WAR ON LIBYA

Despite the catastrophic effects of the 2011 military intervention, momentum seems to be growing among western governments for further air strikes in Libya, this time against ISIS.

When asked by the Telegraph last month if Libya could be the next target for British military intervention, a British Government source said: "Things are moving in that direction. We are taking it one step at a time." Military sources subsequently briefed the media that US and British Special Forces were in Libya gathering intelligence to prepare for a possible deployment of up to 6,000 US and European troops (this despite the oft-repeated line 'we never talk about Special Forces'). More recently, the New York Times reported that surveillance flights over Libya were to be stepped up and US diplomats and officials have been meeting with European and North African governments to ask them to join a new coalition against ISIS in Libya.

Unity Government

These military and diplomatic moves coincide with an international push to persuade various factions within Libya to form a new unity government. The new government is intended to replace the two governments already vying for control: the internationally recognised government, the House of Representatives, based in Tobruk in the northeast, and the General National Congress, based in Tripoli in the northwest. It appears that once the unity government is installed, it will call for security assistance which will then give legal cover for strikes against ISIS.

NATO bombing of Sirte, Libya in 2011

The UN-brokered deal to set up a unity government, signed at Skhirat in Morocco in December, created a Presidential Council – based in Tunisia – which will form a Government of National Accord. However, this week the House of Representatives the current recognised government has rejected the new government put forward by the Presidential Council. This has caused huge consternation and there will now be enormous pressure brought to bear to ensure they back down and accept a new government.

However, even if the moves to form a new unity government fail (and there is then no subsequent call for security assistance) it is likely that US would still push for military intervention. Last week General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, reiterated the need for "decisive military action" against ISIS in Libya. The Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni, while arguing that the forming of a unity government was still the priority, signalled that even if this failed military action should take place:

> If in a few months we will sombrely have to admit that the Libyans have renounced this scenario then surely an anti-Isis coalition such as the one in Iraq and Syria will have to be formed…

Drones over Derna

Although the push for military intervention in Libya against ISIS has ratcheted up since the Paris attacks, US military operations have been on-going in Libya, with US drones flying over the country since the end of the NATO intervention. In 2013, the Libyan government reportedly came under "intense American pressure" to allow drones strikes against Al Qaeda in the east of the country. Although permission was refused, drone surveillance flights continued and the US has recently been seeking to locate its drones nearer to Libya so they can have even more time over the country. Last year, photographs purporting to show a crashed Predator drone in Libya circulated on social media and US military reported one of its had drones ditched in the Mediterranean after it encountered problems

flying on "a mission in Africa."

The Italian air force have also operated its Reaper drones – based in Amendola in Southern Italy – over Libya. Publicly at least we know about flights during the [NATO intervention in 2011](#) and more recently during the [evacuation of the Italian embassy](#) in February 2015. In November 2015 the US agreed to Italy's request to [arm its Reaper drones](#).

Other US intervention in Libya post-2011

But it's not just drones that have been active over Libya. In October 2013, [US Special Forces entered Libya to capture Al Qaeda suspect Anas al Libi](#). He was subsequently charged with terrorism offenses but died in prison before standing trial. A few months later in June 2014, the US undertook another [raid and captured Ahmed Abu Khattala](#), wanted in connection with the attack on the US diplomatic compound in Benghazi.

Last year the US launched two bombing raids in Libya to kill specific individuals. In June, two US F-15 flew from the UK on a mission to kill Mokhtar Belmokhtar, an Algerian veteran jihadist. The F-15s dropped "[multiple 500-pound bombs](#)" on a building outside the Libyan town of Ajdabiya, reportedly killing seven men in the strike but leaving Belmokhtar alive. In November– coincidentally on the same day as the ISIS attack in Paris – a further bombing raid [targeted Abu Nabil](#), named as the ISIS leader in Libya. In December, photographs of US Special Forces [arriving at Wattiya airbase in Libya](#) appeared. The Pentagon confirmed the deployment but stated (apparently with a straight face) that the US forces had subsequently [left Libya "to avoid conflict"](#)

Insanity

[Einstein's aphorism](#) as to the insanity of doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results undoubtedly applies to the US military interventions in Iraq and Libya. The actions to topple Saddam Hussein and Mummar Gaddafi, supposedly to enhance the safety and security of their populations and the world beyond, failed spectacularly.

Rather than accepting the failure of military intervention, it's argued that the Iraq mission failed because western forces [stayed too long](#), while the Libya mission failed because western forces [did not stay long enough](#). The denials and buck-passing by those responsible (witness the recent [cross-examination](#) of former British ministers about the 2011 Libyan intervention and its disastrous aftermath by the Foreign Affairs Select Committee) is embarrassing.

No one doubts the real threat of ISIS to the people of Iraq, Libya and beyond. Yet no one can doubt that ISIS was in part created by the US intervention in Iraq (as even arch-military interventionist [Tony Blair accepts](#)) and had [no presence in Libya](#) before the NATO intervention of 2011.

The alternative to such military intervention is to undertake real and lasting political change that addresses the underlying problem of global political and economic inequality which feeds terrorism and insecurity. But calls for such structural changes are rejected and resisted by those who benefit from the current system, in favour of 'bombing the bad guys' – [lidism](#) as Professor Paul Rogers rightly describes it. Such a strategy, as we have seen over the past 25 years does far more harm than good. And is only likely to do so again.

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