

China and Russia criticise Libyan bombing campaign

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The ongoing bombing of Libya by the US and its European allies has provoked increasingly strident criticisms from Russia and China. While pointing to the underlying American and European strategic interests involved, the objections are not driven by any genuine humanitarian concern or principled opposition to neo-colonial war. Rather Moscow and Beijing are concerned that Washington is once again using its military might to advance its strategic ambitions at their expense.

The sharpest criticism came from Russian Premier Vladimir Putin on Monday. He denounced the UN resolution as “defective and flawed”, and likened assaults on Libya to “medieval calls for crusades”. He said: “I am concerned by the ease with which decisions to use force are taken in international affairs. This is becoming a persistent tendency in US policy.” Putin recalled the NATO bombing of Serbia under the Clinton administration and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq under Bush. “Now it is Libya’s turn, under the pretext of protecting the peaceful population.”

A front page article on Tuesday in the *People’s Daily*—the official mouthpiece of Chinese Communist Party—criticised the UN resolution, declaring: “Historical experience has shown that humanitarian intervention is only an excuse for military intervention in other countries’ domestic affairs... They claim to be motivated by morality but in fact they are driven by narrow political and economic interests.”

It is certainly the case that the US and European powers have intervened militarily in Libya to protect their interests—not only in that country, but as a measure aimed against the revolutionary movements in neighbouring Egypt and Tunisia. However, China and Russia are seeking to do the same.

China and Russia both hold a veto in the UN Security Council and could have blocked the resolution, but instead they abstained, along with Germany, India and Brazil, effectively giving a green light for the US, UK and France to carry out their criminal project. Last month, China and Russia voted for a UN resolution imposing sanctions on Libya, thus largely accepting the bogus “humanitarian argument” that measures were needed to stop Gaddafi regime’s attack on civilians.

The manoeuvres of China and Russia in the UN were nothing more than an attempt to delay the impending Western intervention that would undermine their own interests. It was only after the US and its allies began to speak openly of ousting Gaddafi that China, Russia, India and Brazil issued statements expressing “regret” over the bombing of Libyan civilians and called for a ceasefire.

In fact, China and Russia are just as concerned as the US and European powers to suppress revolutionary upheavals in North Africa and the Middle East. Protracted unrest would not only threaten the world’s oil supplies but could inspire similar revolts including in China and Russia. However, the US-led military intervention threatens their vital economic and strategic interests.

China in particular is coming into conflict with the US and European powers as its economic growth drives it to scour the world—including Africa and the Middle East—for raw materials and markets. An unstated object of the military intervention by US and European powers into Libya is to undermine China’s growing influence in Africa.

On March 15, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi met the ambassadors of Russia, China and India and called for

their companies to invest in the Libyan oil industry. In the same week, Beijing announced that Chinese firms would soon return to Libya as pro-Gaddafi forces were on the verge of crushing their opponents. However, the US-European bombing campaign dashed China's prospects of expanding its already substantial interests in Libya.

In 2009, China displaced the US as Africa's top trading partner, and became a significant investor in mineral resources, infrastructure and manufacturing. Libya is a case in point. Since 2009, China has become Libya's largest trading partner and has invested heavily in the infrastructure and telecom sectors. The bombing campaign has threatened, according to a Chinese commerce ministry spokesman on Tuesday, 50 major Chinese projects worth \$18.8 billion in the country.

Although Chinese firms have not yet made major inroads into the Libyan oil sector, China imported 150,000 barrels of oil a day from Libya last year, about 11 percent of the country's output. Moreover, China is seeking to explore oil and other mineral resources in nearby Chad and its oil companies have transformed Sudan into a major oil supplier for China.

The scale of China's presence in Libya was underscored by the unprecedented evacuation of 36,000 Chinese workers from the country after the outbreak of protests against Gaddafi regime. For the first time, China sent a warship to the Mediterranean as part of the evacuation operation that included other ships and four military transport planes.

China is already building a blue-water navy and a troop airlift capacity that could be used to protect Chinese firms operating overseas and vital shipping lanes. Following the Libyan evacuation, General Ji Mingkui of National Defence University declared that the new tasks of the Chinese military were not just to send warships to extract nationals, but "to fulfill requirements of [protecting] overseas interests with other means"—in other words, by force if necessary.

Likewise Russia will be a major loser if Gaddafi is ousted. It is likely to lose major arms contracts with Libya, according to the Russian news agency Interfax. Libya has military contracts with Russia worth \$2 billion, with another \$1.8 billion deal for military aircraft and anti-air missiles in the final stages of negotiation. Russian oil

companies have hundreds of millions of dollars in investment in Libyan oil exploration, and a Russia Railway's €2.2 billion contract is also now in question.

Putin chose to voice his criticisms of the bombing campaign against Libya while visiting a ballistic missile factory. He announced the doubling of ballistic missile production starting from 2013, as part of a massive \$637 billion weapon procurement program covering 2011-2020. Like China, Russia is beefing up its military in response to the eruption of US militarism.

Putin made his statement while US Defence Secretary Robert Gates was in Moscow to improve relations with the Russian military. President Dmitri Medvedev took a softer line, publicly distancing himself from Putin's remarks by saying that it was "unacceptable to use expressions that in essence lead to a clash of civilizations, such as crusades and so forth." Medvedev sacked the Russian ambassador to Libya, Vladimir Chamov, who reportedly criticised Moscow's failure to veto the UN resolution as "a betrayal of Russia's interests." While there may be tactical differences, the political establishment as a whole is deeply concerned that Russian interests are being compromised by another US-led military intervention.

The reaction of China and Russia to the US and European military operations against Libya again highlight the fact that the scramble for resources, markets and geostrategic position ultimately leads to conflict and war between the major powers.



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