

American media silent on CIA ties to Libya rebel commander

Patrick Martin
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It has been six days since Khalifa Hifter was appointed the top military commander for the Libyan rebel forces fighting the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. His appointment was noted by reporter Nancy Youssef of McClatchy Newspapers, a US regional chain that includes the *Sacramento Bee* and the *Kansas City Star*.

Two days later, another McClatchy journalist, Chris Adams, wrote a brief biographical sketch of Hifter that left the implication, without saying so explicitly, that he was a longtime CIA asset. It headlined the fact that after defecting from a top position in Gaddafi's army, Hifter had lived in northern Virginia for some 20 years, as well as noting that Hifter had no obvious means of financial support.

The *World Socialist Web Site* published a Perspective column March 28 taking note of both the McClatchy articles and earlier reports providing more details of Hifter's connections to the CIA. These included a 1996 article in the *Washington Post* and a book published by the French weekly *Le Monde diplomatique*. (See *A CIA commander for the Libyan rebels*)

Both the McClatchy sketch of Hifter's background and the WSWWS Perspective have been widely circulated on the Internet. The WSWWS perspective has been linked to by a myriad of left-liberal and antiwar web sites, although, significantly, there has been no mention of Hifter in the press of the International Socialist Organization and other pseudo-socialist groups that adapt themselves politically to the pro-Obama liberal milieu.

Hifter has been interviewed and his appointment reported by the European press, including the *Independent* of Britain, the German weekly *Stern*, and newspapers in Spain, France, Italy and Turkey (with variant spellings, including Heftar and Haftar). But not in America.

Hifter's name has not appeared in the bulk of the corporate-controlled US media. The *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Los Angeles Times* have all been curiously silent, despite having more journalists in the war zone than McClatchy. The US television networks have likewise kept quiet on the identity of the Libyan rebel commander, with the exception of a brief interview with Hifter on ABC News March 27, which made no reference to his previous long-term residence within five miles of CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

There is no credible explanation for this silence from the standpoint of journalism. There is no security reason to keep the name of the Libyan commander secret—it was publicly announced by the Transitional National Council in Benghazi, and Hifter is certainly well known to Gaddafi, who employed him as a commander of Libyan-backed forces in the civil wars in Chad in the 1980s.

The obvious conclusion is that the American media is keeping silent in order to deprive the American people of information that would help clarify the nature of the US military intervention in Libya—and trigger opposition to it. The selection of a longtime CIA collaborator as commander of the rebels makes nonsense of the official claim that the United States is intervening militarily in Libya to protect civilian lives, rather than taking sides in a civil war in order to gain control of Libya's oil assets and strengthen the position of American imperialism in the region.

Two words that were notably absent from Obama's Monday night speech on national television were "rebels" and "CIA." Both the Obama administration and the US intelligence apparatus want to downplay their role in the direction of the rebel ground forces. For the American media, that amounts to a direct order, to

which the editors of the *Times*, *Post*, etc., salute and say, “Yes, sir, Mr. President.”

Only two months ago, *Times* editor Bill Keller penned a lengthy screed against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange in the newspaper’s Sunday magazine section. In the course of his denunciation of a genuine journalist, this courtier of the American state declared that the role of “an independent news organization” was “to exercise responsible judgment about what to publish and what not to publish ...” (See “The *New York Times*’ Bill Keller on WikiLeaks: A collapse of democratic sensibility”)

In the case of Khalifa Hifter, this responsibility “not to publish” extends beyond the concealment of the documentary evidence of American war crimes and diplomatic conspiracies uncovered by WikiLeaks. The American media is withholding from the American public basic facts about the war in Libya, widely reported overseas and easily available to those who know where to look. There is no other word for this but censorship.



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