

UN vote clears way for US-NATO attack on Libya

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The United Nations Security Council Thursday night approved a resolution that paves the way for the United States and other major imperialist powers to conduct a direct military intervention in Libya under the pretense of a “humanitarian” mission to protect civilian lives.

The resolution, sponsored by the US, France, Britain and Lebanon, goes far beyond earlier proposals for a no-fly zone, authorizing the use of military force including “all necessary measures ... to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack.” These “areas” include Benghazi, the city of one million which remains the sole stronghold of the revolt that began against the Gaddafi dictatorship one month ago. The sole limitation placed by the resolution is its exclusion of “a foreign occupation force on any part of Libyan territory.”

The vote sets the stage for a bombardment of Libya by US, French and British warplanes. French Prime Minister Francois Fillon told France-2 Television that military action could begin within hours of the resolution’s approval. And the Associated Press cited an unnamed member of the British Parliament as saying, “British forces were on stand by for air strikes and could be mobilized as soon as Thursday night.”

American military officials have already warned that even the imposition of a no-fly zone entails the prior destruction of Libya’s air defense capabilities, meaning a major bombing campaign against Libya that will undoubtedly entail “collateral damage” measured in the killing and maiming of Libyan civilians.

The *Wall Street Journal* quoted Pentagon officials as saying, “Options included using cruise missiles to take out fixed Libyan military sites and air-defense systems ... Manned and unmanned aircraft could also be used against Col. Gaddafi’s tanks, personnel carriers and infantry positions, with sorties being flown out of US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization bases in the southern Mediterranean.”

Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee Thursday, Gen. Norton Schwartz, the chief of the US Air Force, said that a no-fly zone would take “upwards of a week” to prepare, signaling a sustained bombing campaign. He also warned that in addition to US warplanes based in the US and Europe, aircraft would also have to be diverted from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Like other military officials, Schwartz said that the imposition of the no-fly zone would “not be sufficient” to halt the advance of forces loyal to the dictatorship of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, which have swept steadily eastward toward Benghazi over the past 10 days. Clearly, what is being prepared are air strikes against Gaddafi’s ground forces. The prospect of carrying out a bombing raid aimed at

assassinating Gaddafi has also been broached.

These plans for war are motivated not by any desire to protect the Libyan people or further the cause of democracy, as its proponents within the UN Security Council proclaimed. The impending intervention in the oil-rich North African country is driven by profit interests and geopolitical imperatives that have nothing to do with the “humanitarian” pretenses of the major powers. The aim is to exploit the civil war in Libya to impose a regime that is even more subordinate to these powers and to the major Western oil conglomerates intent on exploiting the country’s resources.

The gross hypocrisy and cynicism of the imperialist powers backing the intervention was underscored by the choice of French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé to motivate the UN resolution. Juppé, who invoked the “Arab spring” as one of the “great revolutions that change the course of history,” recently assumed his post after his predecessor, Michèle Alliot-Marie, was forced to resign over a scandal involving her close political and private relations with the ousted Tunisian dictator Ben Ali. Juppé’s government was in the process of shipping anti-riot gear to its former colony when the mass protest forced the dictator to flee.

US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, who had worked to insert the “all necessary measures” language allowing for an open-ended military assault on Libya, praised the passage of the resolution, declaring, “The future of Libya should be decided by the people of Libya.”

This is unquestionably the case. The task of overthrowing the right-wing dictatorship of the Gaddafi clique is that of the workers and oppressed of Libya, who had begun to carry it out. The aim of the US-backed intervention, however, is precisely to abort any genuine revolution and ensure that any regime that replaces Gaddafi serves not the interests of the Libyan people, but rather the demands of Washington and Big Oil. The US hopes to use Libya, moreover, as a base of operations for suppressing revolutionary movements of workers throughout the region.

The Security Council vote was 10 in favor and five abstentions. The countries abstaining included Russia, China, Germany, Brazil and India. While, as permanent members of the council, both Russia and China had the power to defeat the resolution by casting “no” votes, they chose not to do so, ensuring that the UN continued to fulfill its function as a rubber stamp for the demands of the major imperialist powers.

In their statements explaining their abstentions, however, the ambassadors of the five countries made clear that the impending attack on Libya has nothing to do with any consensus by the “world community” to protect the Libyan people, but rather is the outcome of

a conspiracy worked out in secret between Washington, London and Paris.

Russia's UN ambassador Vitaly Churkin said that the measure "opens the door to large scale military intervention" and stressed that questions had been raised in the prior discussions of the resolution as to how it would be enforced, by what military forces and under what rules of engagement, but there had been "no answers."

India's ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri noted that while the UN Security Council had appointed a special envoy on the situation in Libya, it had received "no report on the situation on the ground" and was acting despite having "little credible information." He said that there had been no explanation as to how the resolution was to be enforced, "by whom and with what measures." He expressed concern over the fate of Libya's "sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity."

Singh also voiced reservations about a range of new economic sanctions, which target, among other entities, Libya's national oil company. He said that the measures could disrupt trade and investment by member states.

Germany's ambassador, Peter Wittig, warned that the authorization of the use of military force increased the "the likelihood of large-scale loss of life" and said that Germany's armed forces would take no part in the intervention.

China's ambassador Li Baodong, the acting president of the Security Council, also voiced reservations, but then justified Beijing's failure to veto the measure by invoking the vote last weekend of the Arab League calling on the UN to implement a no-fly zone.

NATO has also claimed this vote as somehow legitimizing intervention by demonstrating "regional support." The reality is that the Arab League is itself composed of a collection of dictatorships, monarchies and emirates that in no way represent the desires or interests of the Arab people. Many of them are actively engaged in the violent suppression of popular upheavals.

While Washington has stressed that any intervention against Libya should include direct participation by the Arab countries, it appears that their involvement will be minimal. Following the visit to Cairo by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, a spokeswoman for the Egyptian Foreign Ministry told Reuters: "Egypt will not be among those Arab states. We will not be involved in any military intervention. No intervention, period."

On Thursday, the Arab League could name only two countries prepared to join the US-NATO assault: Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. Both ruled by royal dynasties, the two emirates are direct participants in Saudi Arabia's intervention in Bahrain to suppress the mass movement against the ruling monarchy. While security forces have shot protesters dead in the streets, invaded hospitals and carried out a reign of terror in Shia villages, none of the supposed champions of democracy in Libya are proposing any UN intervention in Bahrain, the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet.

The Gaddafi government warned that any attack on Libya "will expose all air and maritime traffic in the Mediterranean Sea to danger and civilian and military facilities will become targets of Libya's counter-attack."

US Secretary of State Clinton set the new strident US tone towards Libya in a statement made in Tunisia denouncing Gaddafi as "a man who has no conscience and will threaten anyone in his way. ... It's just his nature. There are some creatures that are like that."

As recently as April 2009, the same Hillary Clinton warmly welcomed Gaddafi's son and minister of national security to the US State Department, declaring, "We deeply value the relationship

between the United States and Libya. We have many opportunities to deepen and broaden our cooperation and I am very much looking forward to building on this relationship."

Like her European counterparts, only months ago Clinton was currying favor with the Gaddafi regime in pursuit of oil profits and the collaboration of his secret police apparatus in prosecuting Washington's "global war on terrorism."

Now, under the cover of a crescendo of human rights propaganda, with sections of the media claiming that the repressive actions of the Gaddafi regime amount to "genocide", Washington together with French and British imperialism are intervening in a civil war in Libya which they themselves had no small part in provoking.

No amount of rhetoric about "saving lives" can mask the fact that what is being carried out is an act of out and out imperialist banditry, comparable to the attempts to partition the Congo and Nigeria during the second half of the 20th century. In those cases, as in Libya, behind the interventions was the drive for control of strategic resources.

The justifications given for the Libyan intervention are full of grotesque contradictions. Washington, which professes to be outraged over the killing of Libyan civilians and bent on saving lives, is itself responsible for the slaughter of hundreds of thousands in Iraq and Afghanistan and, on the very eve of the UN vote, carried out the cold-blooded murder of some 40 civilians in a drone attack in Pakistan.

The US and its allies have shown no inclination to seek a resolution authorizing the use of military force in the Ivory Coast, where a conflict comparable to that in Libya is unfolding. The obvious explanation is that cacao is not considered to have the same strategic importance as oil.

And, while claiming that the intervention in Libya is needed to ensure the triumph of democracy in the Middle East, Washington continues to back the regimes in Bahrain and Yemen as they mow down protesters demanding democratic rights.

There is an element of extreme recklessness in the US-NATO intervention. What will it produce? One likely variant would be Libya's partition and the resurrection of Cyrenaica, the colonial territory set up by Italy in Benghazi in the 1920s. Any elements coming to power under such a regime would be right-wing puppets of imperialism, comparable to Karzai in Afghanistan or Maliki in Iraq, and would inevitably carry out an even bloodier slaughter of the Libyan people.



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