

US, France and Britain launch war of aggression against Libya

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The United States, France and Britain began air strikes and missile attacks on Libyan targets Saturday, initiating a war of aggression that threatens to destabilize North Africa and the entire Middle East. The first two days of bombing have already claimed many lives among the Libyan population that the imperialist powers falsely claim to be protecting.

The war is the first step in a campaign by Washington and its partners in crime to strike back against the popular movements that have overthrown US stooge regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and are threatening US-backed monarchies and dictatorships in Bahrain, Oman, Yemen and Saudi Arabia.

Press accounts from Benghazi, the headquarters of the rebel forces in eastern Libya, suggest that hundreds have already been killed in the air and missile strikes. There were reports of seven to ten smoldering hulks of tanks on a road outside the city. Libyan army troops are virtually defenseless against attacks with high-tech weaponry, including cruise missiles and smart bombs.

French warplanes reportedly struck the first blow, with 20 Mirage and Rafale jets hitting Libyan army forces outside Benghazi. The Royal Air Force deployed Tornado GR4 fast jets, which flew 3,000 miles from Britain to Libya and back, the longest-range British air strike since the Falklands War in 1982.

The US attacks included cruise missiles fired by two guided-missile destroyers and three submarines, as well as bombs dropped by B2 stealth fighter bombers which flew from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri to strike Libyan airfields in a 36-hour round trip.

On Sunday, it was reported that US Air Force F-15s and F-16s were attacking Libyan troop concentrations in coastal cities that have been the focus of recent fighting with rebel forces, including Ras Lanuf, Ajjibiya and Brega, as well as around Misurata, Libya's third-largest city.

Forces from Canada, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway were also said to be in action.

The claims by President Obama, Secretary of State Clinton and other US spokesmen that the military intervention will be limited to "days, rather than weeks" have no credibility. The scope of the attacks on Libya has widened enormously in the first 48 hours of military action.

There is a logic to military action, and the initial bombardment leads inexorably to the dispatch of "advisers" for the Libyan rebel forces, and then the deployment of imperialist troops to occupy the former Italian colony.

Admiral Michael Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the top military adviser to Obama, appeared on all five television network interview programs Sunday morning to give the Pentagon's evaluation of the initial bombardment.

On Fox News Sunday, he confirmed that the air and missile strikes had gone well beyond those required for enforcement of a no-fly zone on the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. "We hit a lot of targets," he said, "focused on his command and control, focused on his air defense, and actually attacked some of his forces on the ground in the vicinity of Benghazi."

On several of the programs, Mullen was asked about the double standard of the Obama administration, which claims to be attacking Libya in order to prevent Gaddafi from "slaughtering his own citizens," while supporting other Middle East regimes that are equally engaged in bloody repression, most notably Bahrain and Yemen.

"Each one of these countries, I think, is different," Mullen said on NBC, emphasizing the strategic interests of imperialism, not the humanitarian baloney used to dupe American public opinion. "We've had a great friendship with Bahrain for many, many decades. We've got one of our main naval bases there."

On NBC's Meet the Press, Mullen dredged up one of the oldest and most discredited of propaganda ploys, claiming that any deaths caused by US and allied attacks were the fault of the Libyan leader. He said, "What Gaddafi has done is—has put in place both human shields in some cases, as well as...said that we have generated civilian casualties."

US government spokesmen have advanced such claims after every atrocity perpetrated by American bombs and missiles in the past quarter century. The only thing new is that the top US military officer is announcing ahead of time that when hundreds die from US military action, the blame should be placed on the victims.

Mullen also suggested that US air strikes would be aimed not merely at overtly military targets but at Gaddafi's supply lines and logistic capabilities. This means that all of Libya's

economic resources—with the exception of the oil industry, which the imperialist powers hope to seize intact—are likely targets for bombs and missiles.

Mullen denied that the attack was aimed at the assassination of Gaddafi and his family. But within a few hours of his television interviews, journalists in Tripoli reported huge explosions near Gaddafi's family compound in the Libyan capital city. Antiaircraft batteries opened up throughout the city, responding to a new and more widespread aerial attack.

While the Obama administration has been at pains to declare the assault on Libya the common venture of a "broad coalition," seeking to distinguish it from the Bush administration's unilateral decision to go to war in Iraq, there is no question that American imperialism is playing the leading and decisive role.

An American commander, General Carter Ham, head of the Pentagon's African Command (AFRICOM), is in charge of all allied operations against Libya, giving directives to French and British warplanes, British submarines, and Italian naval vessels, as well as an array of US warships, submarines and bombers.

And despite the claims by Obama of "no boots on the ground," there is little doubt that American, British and other special forces operatives and intelligence agents are already in action inside Libya, helping direct fire at critical targets, particularly the Libyan political leadership and the field commanders of the Libyan army.

Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi vowed resistance, making an appearance on national television Sunday morning and calling the US-European attack "simply a colonial crusader aggression that may ignite another large-scale crusader war." Libyan state television reported that a hospital in Tripoli had been hit in the bombardment, with 48 dead and over a hundred wounded.

Gaddafi meanwhile continued to plead with the imperialist powers to resume the alliance he forged with them in 2004, when he shut down his nuclear research program, turned over his nuclear assets to the United States, and agreed to pay compensation to the victims of the 1988 airliner bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland.

He reiterated his declaration that the Libyan rebels consist exclusively of Al Qaeda supporters, sending a letter to Obama that addressed the US president as his "son" and offered his collaboration in the US struggle against terrorism.

At the same time, Libyan Oil Minister Shukri Ghanem announced that the country's oil resources were still open to Western exploitation and urged the big oil companies to send their technicians and administrative personnel back to the country. He said that despite the open warfare, Libya would honor all its obligations to foreign companies, including its most recent \$900 million contract with BP.

The ferocity of the initial air attacks on Libya has produced widespread shock and anger throughout North Africa and the Middle East. Officials of the Arab League, who last week

acceded to French, British and American pressure and issued a call for a no-fly zone in Libya, said Sunday they were reconsidering their support.

Five Arab countries—Morocco, Iraq, Jordan, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates—sent representatives to the meeting Saturday in Paris that ratified the use of military force. Only Qatar agreed to participate directly.

The African Union, which groups 53 countries on the continent, including Libya, Egypt and Tunisia, issued a public condemnation of the war at a meeting of its panel on Libya in Nouakchott, the capital of Mauritania. Three members of the African Union—South Africa, Nigeria and Gabon—voted for the UN Security Council resolution Thursday that gave the green light for the attack.

There are serious divisions within the imperialist camp as well—demonstrated by the abstention of Germany in the UN Security Council vote, along with Russia, China, Brazil and India.

Despite their common military engagement, there are significant tensions between the United States, France and Britain, each of which seeks to insure a major role in a post-Gaddafi Libya and in North Africa as a whole.

The Obama administration only finally made up its mind to push for military action at a late-night meeting Tuesday, March 15, according to several media reports. The *Wall Street Journal* wrote: "A lot of factors drove the shift, they say, including the administration's concern about being out of step with the changes sweeping the Arab world and of being outmaneuvered by the U.K. and especially France..."

What lies behind the war against Libya is not the common front of "civilization" against "barbarism," as Obama administration spokesmen claim, but the struggle of rival imperialist powers to dominate one of the world's major sources of oil and gain control of a key strategic location and base of operations against the mass movements erupting throughout North Africa and the Middle East.



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