

London conference highlights imperialist power grab in Libya

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International discussions on Libya surrounding the March 29 conference in London underscore that the Western-led war on Libya is a blatant power grab, aiming to install the rebel National Council clique as an imperialist puppet regime in Tripoli.

The National Council released a statement titled “A vision of democratic Libya,” ostensibly to outline the democratic and social rights it will guarantee if it succeeds in taking power in Libya. A careful reading of the document, however, reveals its right-wing character.

The statement suggests that the National Council, which includes Islamist parties and fighters in its ranks, might consider forming a religious state, as opposed to Gaddafi’s secular regime. It calls for “a state that draws strength from our strong religious beliefs in peace, truth, justice, and equality.”

This follows the admission last week by Libyan rebel commander Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi to the Italian daily *Il Sole 24 Ore* that he had recruited Al Qaeda members into his forces. Al-Hasidi claimed that “members of Al Qaeda are also good Muslims and are fighting against the invader.” US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has claimed that Washington does not have “specific information about specific individuals from any organization who are a part of” the National Council.

The National Council statement also specifies: “The interests and rights of foreign nationals and companies will be protected.” The statement does not bother to say what foreign companies will operate in Libya, and what “interests and rights” it would seek to protect.

It is well known, however, that Libya’s economy is dominated by its oil sector and its 46 billion barrels of proven oil reserves. Since Gaddafi’s nationalization of the Libyan oil industry in the 1970s, the major oil firms have had to negotiate contracts and prices with the Libyan National Oil Company (LNOC). Western firms have not been able to fully dictate prices for Libyan oil and take

full control of the resulting profits.

By including this statement, the National Council—which is utterly dependent on Western military support—is signaling that it aims to remove any legal or political barriers to the pillage of Libyan oil by major energy corporations.

For the rest, however, the document is stuffed with the buzzwords of contemporary official politics. One such passage reads, “The state to which we aspire will denounce violence, terrorism, intolerance, and cultural isolation; while respecting human rights, rules and principles of citizenship and the rights of minorities and the most vulnerable. Every individual will enjoy the full rights of citizenship, regardless of color, gender, ethnicity, or social status.”

This absurd document seems calculated to excite the moral glands of pro-imperialist “humanitarians” who populate bourgeois press and pseudo-left circles and now support the war of aggression against Libya.

Thus, *Guardian* columnist Simon Tisdall wrote: “Vision statements come and go, usually unremarked and always unfulfilled. But today’s effort by the self-styled Libyan Interim National Council, the western-backed government-in-waiting, is a masterpiece of the genre. The two-page declaration, published to coincide with the international conference on Libya’s future hosted in London by [British Prime Minister] David Cameron, aspires to all that is correct, admirable, and fashionable in the booming nation-building and nation-shaping business.”

Tisdall’s comment begs the question: if the ex-Gaddafi regime officials, Islamist parties, and Al Qaeda fighters who make up the National Council wrote a document condemning “violence, terrorism, intolerance, and cultural isolation,” did they have some help?

The pillage of Libya’s oil wealth is, in fact, already proceeding. The National Council announced on March

28 that it is marketing Libyan oil via Qatar. US-based academic Ali Tarhouni, who is working for the National Council, told Reuters: “We contacted the oil company of Qatar and thankfully they agreed to take all the oil that we wish to export and market this oil for us. Our next shipment will be in less than a week.”

The Qatari firm declined to comment on the transaction. It is unclear whether recent rebel defeats around the major oil port at Ras Lanuf will interrupt these oil sales.

Tarhouni also said that the National Council plans to seize Libya’s “sovereign fund,” the series of accounts—largely in Western banks—in which most of Libya’s oil revenues are kept. He explained, “We would keep the fund frozen until the entire country is liberated. Instead, what we will do is take loans backed by the sovereign fund.”

By seizing these revenues, the rebels are in effect financing their takeover of Libya by stealing from the Libyan people. As energy industry web site *upstreamonline.com* noted, Libya “relies heavily on oil exports, which pay the state salaries on which most families depend.”

It is precisely because powerful competing interests, and not bogus democratic sentiments to which every NATO government pays lip service, are at stake that significant divergences have emerged among the major powers over strategy in Libya.

A debate has emerged over the legality of arming Libyan rebel groups, with the countries that first launched the war—the United States, Britain, and France—taking the more aggressive positions. At the London conference itself, Clinton and British Foreign Secretary William Hague suggested that UN resolution 1973 provided them with the authority to do so.

On the other hand, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said, “The UN mandate authorizes the enforcement of an arms embargo. We are not in Libya to arm people.” Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov of Russia—which abstained on the UN resolution 1973 vote against Libya—said that “here, we completely agree with the NATO Secretary General.”

German government spokesman Cristoph Steegmans dismissed the question of whether Germany would arm the rebels, saying Berlin was not discussing “such hypothetical issues.”

Instead, the German and Italian governments are reportedly considering plans to negotiate an agreement whereby Gaddafi would step down, averting a full-scale confrontation between Libyan and Western forces.

Perhaps not coincidentally, Germany and Italy are among the largest importers of oil from Libya and stand to lose a great deal if the Libyan oil industry changes hands or suffers major damage. German oil firm Wintershall is the largest foreign oil producer in Libya.

The London conference also marked a rapid verbal turnaround by the Turkish government. Ankara condemned the initial French attack on Libya, with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan commenting: “I wish that those who only see oil, gold mines, and underground treasures when they look in [Libya’s] direction, would see the region through glasses of conscience from now on.”

President Abdullah Gül also attacked the air campaign, correctly noting: “The aim is not the liberation of the Libyan people. There are hidden agendas and different interests.”

At the London conference, however, the Turkish regime explained that it did not oppose attacking Libya, but feared the political consequences of appearing to endorse another US-led act of military aggression in the Muslim world.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu explained: “Our reservations were about unilateralism. As the only Muslim country [in NATO] for many decades, we have certain sensitivities regarding NATO operations in neighboring countries’ Muslim societies. We said that NATO can participate if there are two principles fulfilled. One is a UN Security Council resolution; second is regional ownership, especially participation of the Arab League and individual Arab countries.”

With the Arab League having supported the no-fly zone and Qatar participating in military operations against Libya, Turkish forces—including four frigates, a submarine, and a supply ship—are now participating in enforcing the embargo against Libya.



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