Obama and Libya

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The Obama administration has launched another barbaric war against a largely defenseless country in the Middle East. It has ordered cruise missiles and bombs to be dropped on cities and installations across Libya, already leaving scores dead and hundreds wounded.

Few in the corporate-controlled media, which once again is lending its services as a propaganda arm of the Pentagon, have bothered to note that this new war has begun on the eighth anniversary of the "shock and awe" campaign that inaugurated the war in Iraq. Having claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, that war continues to this day, with nearly 50,000 US troops still deployed on Iraqi soil.

President Barack Obama, who owed his November 2008 election largely to a cynical appeal to mass antiwar sentiment, has continued the Iraq war, escalated the war in Afghanistan and spread it into Pakistan, and carried out expanded military interventions in Somalia and Yemen. Now, he has begun his own shock and awe campaign, and there is every reason to believe that the results will be just as catastrophic.

Obama's claim that the US is merely assisting other nations in enforcing a United Nations resolution and carrying out a "limited military action" only underscores the cowardice, recklessness and hypocrisy of the Democratic administration in its headlong plunge into a new war of aggression. His repeated vows that Washington "will not deploy any US troops on the ground" are worthless, as is his reported statement to aides and promise to US legislators that the US attack on Libya will be over in "a matter of days, not weeks."

In such irresponsible rhetoric one finds an echo of the likes of Donald Rumsfeld, who on the eve of the Iraq war assured the media: "I can't tell you if the use of force in Iraq today would last five days, or five weeks, or five months, but it certainly isn't going to last any longer than that."

The so-called "Pottery Barn" rule—you break it, you own it—invoked by then-Secretary of State Colin Powell in warning George W. Bush of the consequences of a war on Iraq still apply. The logic of waging a war aimed at crippling and removing an existing regime is inexorable. The imperialist power carrying out such an attack is driven to fashion a new regime more to its liking. The results in Afghanistan and Iraq are plain to see: the revival of colonialism, endless war aimed at crushing the resistance of the occupied population, the elevation of political Frankenstein monsters like Karzai and Maliki.

Apologists for the Obama administration, many of them part of the pseudo-left, insist that the present war cannot be compared to those launched under Bush. In this case, we are told, the aims are purely humanitarian, to protect the Libyan people. Moreover, it is war sanctioned by the United Nations and even requested by the Arab League. Here we supposedly have the multilateralist "Obama doctrine" in contrast to the unilateralist "Bush doctrine."

All of this is so much eyewash. The scale and savagery of the bombing—attacking tanks, troops and urban targets as well as far-flung military installations—have already belied the assurances that military action would be limited to protecting civilian populations.

Every act of military aggression by the United States is routinely justified as a humanitarian effort to rescue a population under duress. Such was the case in the 1993 incursion into Somalia and the Bosnia intervention and air war against Serbia later in the decade. The invasion of Afghanistan was promoted in part as a crusade to protect the Afghan people against the Taliban and Al Qaeda, and the US government and media packaged the Iraq war as a mission to remove a leader who gassed and killed his own people and bring the blessings of democracy to the Iraqi masses.

Obama Saturday justified the war on Libya by proclaiming that "we cannot stand idly by when a tyrant tells his people that there will be no mercy, and his forces step up their assaults…"

Indeed, in Bahrain, where the ruling dynasty has gunned down unarmed protesters in the streets and unleashed sectarian terror against the oppressed Shia majority, Washington hasn't stood idly by. It has supported the repression and the intervention of Saudi Arabia and the other dictatorial monarchies and emirates to crush the popular uprising.

Similarly, after the regime in Yemen massacred at least 52

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peaceful demonstrators Friday and imposed a state of emergency, the Obama administration merely "regretted" the violence, urged "dialogue," and reiterated its commitment to the "stability" of the US-backed dictatorship of Ali Abdullah Saleh.

The criteria used by the Obama administration to determine what acts of repression demand US intervention are not universal moral principles, but naked imperialist interests.

Libya, like Iraq before it, becomes a target, in the first instance, because of its oil reserves—estimated at more than 40 billion barrels—and the implications of this oil wealth for both corporate profits and US strategic interests.

The immediate impulse for US military action was not, as reports in the *Wall Street Journal* and elsewhere have made clear, escalating repression by the Gaddafi regime in Libya or the supposed legitimacy lent by the statement of the Arab League.

Washington has shown unconcealed contempt for that body in the past when it has issued pro forma statements condemning Israeli aggression. Only when it demanded what the imperialist powers wanted to do anyway did it become an authoritative voice.

Once the bombs and missiles begin striking Libya, the League's chief, Amr Musa, condemned the action, declaring: "What we want is the protection of civilians and not the bombardment of more civilians." Musa, who plans to run for president in Egypt, is trying to cover his tracks. He knows that the US-led attack is opposed by the vast majority of the population in Egypt and throughout the Arab world.

The Obama administration felt compelled to act, the *Journal* reports, out of fear that it would be "outmaneuvered by the UK and especially France, both more aggressive advocates of intervention." Washington was not about to accept the region's two former colonial powers acting on their own, an implicit challenge to the hegemony that US imperialism has asserted over the region since it pulled the rug out from under the last Anglo-French military intervention in the Suez Crisis of 1956.

At the heart of the Libyan war lie not democratic altruism, but rather imperialist interests and escalating inter-imperialist conflicts. More and more the global situation resembles the series of increasingly malignant crises that gripped world capitalism on the eves of World War I and World War II.

In 1937, as World War II loomed, Franklin Delano Roosevelt delivered a speech calling for a "quarantine" of fascist aggression. He told the American people:

"Without a declaration of war and without warning or justification of any kind, civilians, including vast numbers of women and children, are being ruthlessly murdered with bombs from the air. In times of so-called peace, ships are being attacked and sunk by submarines without cause or notice. Nations are fomenting and taking sides in civil warfare in nations that have never done them any harm. Nations claiming freedom for themselves deny it to others. Innocent peoples, innocent nations, are being cruelly sacrificed to a greed for power and supremacy which is devoid of all sense of justice and humane considerations."

Roosevelt was preparing for the implementation of his own imperialist aims, but his remarks nevertheless reflected an awareness of democratic principles that is wholly absent today. His indictment of the crimes of the Nazi and fascist regimes could be applied virtually without alteration to the crimes of the Obama administration as it launches a war of aggression without congressional approval, much less the consent of the American people, "murders with bombs from the air" and takes sides in a civil war in a country that has done nothing to the US.

American working people will pay the price for this aggression through redoubled attacks on their living standards, social conditions and basic rights. The cost of the 112 Tomahawk cruise missiles fired in a matter of hours is well over $100 million. The amount of wealth being squandered on the massive deployment of US warplanes and warships is far greater. Not a word is raised about the costs of this operation, under conditions where politicians and the media endlessly declare that the government has no money and schools must be shut down, teachers fired, vital social programs drastically curtailed and the wages, pensions and health coverage of public employees slashed.

The struggle against war, smothered by the official "antiwar" movement dominated by ex-left protest groups that back Obama, can be revived only on the basis of an independent movement of the working class against both the Democrats and Republicans and the capitalist system that is the source of militarism.

We urge all those who want to take up a struggle against imperialist war in Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq to attend the series of conferences being held across the US in April by the Socialist Equality Party, *World Socialist Web Site*, and International Students for Social Equality on "The Fight for Socialism Today."

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