

US, Britain press two-track policy in Libya war

Patrick Martin
1 April 2011

The United States and Britain are pursuing efforts to incite an internal coup against the Libyan regime of Muammar Gaddafi, while at the same time deploying CIA agents and military special operations forces to bolster the flagging military fortunes of the anti-Gaddafi rebel forces.

The two-track policy became evident with the highly publicized defections of Moussa Koussa, the Libyan foreign minister and former intelligence chief, who fled to Britain late Wednesday, and Ali Abdessalam Treki, the former foreign minister and U.N. General Assembly president, who announced his defection Thursday in postings on several opposition web sites.

Al Jazeera, reporting rumors circulating in Tripoli, said that a number of other top officials were believed to be negotiating terms for defection, including intelligence chief Abuzed Omar Durda, Mohammed Zwei, the Secretary of the General People's Congress, the country's parliament, oil minister Shokri Ghanem, and Deputy Foreign Minister Abdulati Al Obeidi, who accompanied Moussa Koussa to Tunis on the trip that led to his flight to Britain.

The list of names was supplied to *Al Jazeera* and to several British newspapers by British government officials, in a transparent effort to provoke a political crisis within the Gaddafi regime and offset the impact of the military setbacks suffered by the Libyan rebels over the last two days.

The full list of names was published by the British liberal newspaper *The Independent*, which has enthusiastically backed the war on Libya (and which published a column in its Friday edition calling for Gaddafi's assassination).

The Independent and the *Guardian*, another pro-war British newspaper, also gave front-page treatment to claims by British government officials that they are

negotiating with Mohammed Ismail, a senior aide to Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam, on the terms of Gaddafi's own removal from power.

British foreign minister William Hague claimed the defection of Moussa Koussa showed that the Gaddafi regime "is fragmented, under pressure and crumbling from within." He continued, "Moussa Koussa is one of the most senior members of the Qaddafi regime and has been my channel of communication to the regime in recent weeks."

The Obama administration also hailed the Koussa defection. A spokesman for the US National Security Council said Koussa "can help provide critical intelligence about Gaddafi's current state of mind and military plans."

Numerous US officials, including Robert Gates, the secretary of defense, and Hillary Clinton, the secretary of state, have suggested that the ouster of Gaddafi by his own inner circle would provide the fastest way out of the crisis.

Despite the attempts by the Obama administration and its European allies, with the assistance of the media, to portray the Gaddafi regime as uniquely monstrous, the predatory aims of the US-NATO intervention would be served by a political coup that would merely remove Gaddafi and perhaps his sons.

Washington and London are then quite prepared to scrap the propaganda barrage about massacres of civilians and claims of "genocide" and do a deal with Gaddafi's closest aides to secure imperialist interests in Libya.

There would be little difference between such a post-Gaddafi cabal in Tripoli and the leadership of the Transitional National Council in Benghazi, the Libyan rebel group recognized by France and backed by the US and Britain. The TNC is headed by two former

Gaddafi aides, interior minister Abdel Fattah Younis and justice minister Mustafa Mohamed al-Jalil.

Official Washington was engaged in intense internal discussions Wednesday and Thursday over the evident disarray of the rebel military forces and what could be done about it. There were closed-door briefings for House and Senate committees, given by top military and intelligence officials.

Intelligence officials confirmed press reports that CIA operatives have been on the ground in eastern Libya for the past two weeks and that President Obama secretly authorized covert operations to provide intelligence and technical assistance to the rebel forces.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported Thursday, “The CIA has been in rebel-held areas of Libya since shortly after the U.S. Embassy in the capital, Tripoli, was evacuated in February, U.S. officials say. Agency officials have been meeting with rebels to learn more about them, and in some cases they are providing them with information about Kaddafi’s forces. The CIA officers in Libya are part of a contingent of operatives from Western nations.”

The *Wall Street Journal* reported that the intelligence agents were playing a direct tactical military role, writing, “The Central Intelligence Agency has placed covert operatives on the ground in parts of Libya, feeding intelligence on ground targets to the U.S. military and coalition forces for airstrikes and reaching out to rebels aligned against Col. Moammar Gadhafi, officials say.”

The deployment of CIA agents is widely regarded as a transitional step, to be followed by such measures as the use of Predator drones, and the dispatch of American special forces, which would be portrayed by the Obama administration as not violating its pledge of no military “boots on the ground.”

That pledge, too, is likely to be scrapped on one pretext or another. The NATO commander, Admiral James Stavridis, seemed to hint as much at a congressional hearing when he suggested that as part of the resolution of the Libyan crisis, “the possibility of a stabilization regime exists.” He was referring to the US-backed stabilization force deployed in Bosnia in the mid-1990s, which included ground forces from the US and NATO countries.

British special forces are already on the ground, according to the *National Journal*. The Washington-

based magazine reported Thursday, “There are no U.S. military personnel on the ground in Libya yet, though the United Kingdom, America’s closest battlefield ally, has several dozen Special Air Service commandoes and M16 agents already operating there.”

The magazine added: “a U.S. military official said that British special forces troops have provided on-the-ground targeting information for NATO airstrikes. A covert British unit, the Special Reconnaissance Regiment, has been tasked to operationally ‘prepare the battlefield.’ A second U.S. military official said that Britain also had teams of personnel from the SAS, one of its most elite special-operations units, and MI6 operating inside Libya.”

The *Washington Post* explained the CIA intervention in eastern Libya as an effort to gather more information about the Libyan rebels. It cited “a senior administration official” who told the newspaper “we know well” some of the leaders in Benghazi.

This is a remarkable understatement, given that the top commander of the rebel forces, General Khalifa Hifter, is a longtime CIA collaborator who defected from the Gaddafi regime in 1987 and lived in the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington DC for the past 20 years. He returned to Libya last month and was named to head the rebel military effort on March 14.

The *Post* has not published Hifter’s name since he was named the top rebel commander, a silence shared by the *New York Times* and the bulk of the American corporate media. This political censorship is aimed at concealing from the American people the fact that the man now commanding the anti-Gaddafi forces is a veteran CIA asset who the *Post* itself once described (in 1996) as the head of a “contra-style group” run by the CIA.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact