

US and allies gear up for protracted war in Libya

Barry Grey
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The US-led war coalition rejected ceasefire offers by the Libyan government on Monday and reiterated its demand that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and his family leave the country as the precondition for any resolution to the crisis. As the US-NATO war entered its third week, the fig leaf of a “humanitarian” intervention to protect Libyan civilians was further exposed by the preparations of the imperialist powers for a protracted war aimed at ousting Gaddafi and installing a colonial-style vassal state.

British Prime Minister David Cameron made an unannounced visit Monday to an Italian air base that is being used to stage strikes by Royal Air Force (RAF) jets against pro-Gaddafi military forces as well as alleged military targets in Tripoli and other cities. He announced that Britain was sending four more Tornado ground attack jets, in addition to the eight already deployed.

The increase is meant to partly compensate for the imminent withdrawal of American jets from the air war against Libya. NATO requested that Washington delay the end of its direct role in air and missile strikes for 48 hours, and the Obama administration agreed.

Washington will continue to dominate the conduct of the war and dictate the outcome. It not only dominates NATO and provides essential military hardware for an air war, it exerts the dominant influence over the anti-Gaddafi opposition, which is led by former Gaddafi officials and former exiles with ties to the CIA. In addition, the US has CIA and special operations forces on the ground in Libya.

Also on Monday, British Foreign Minister William Hague told Parliament that the UK would provide “non-lethal” equipment to the so-called “rebel” forces, such as telecommunications and infrastructure, but would not provide them with arms. US officials have said that

Washington is still considering whether to arm the forces of the anti-Gaddafi Transitional National Council, but would likely take the initial step of providing “non-lethal” aid.

Hague also said that a total of 701 sorties and 276 strike sorties had been flown by the coalition since last Thursday.

Meanwhile, the head of the RAF, Air Chief Marshal Sir Stephen Dalton, told the *Guardian* newspaper that the RAF was planning to continue operations in Libya for at least six months.

The fighting on the ground between government forces and those of the imperialist-backed opposition remained deadlocked around two key cities—Misrata in the west and the oil port of Brega in the east. Without a major expansion of the Western military intervention, the “rebels” have little hope of defeating the pro-Gaddafi forces. The latter, for their part, are prevented from wiping out the poorly trained and disorganized insurgents by massive and lethal firepower from France, Britain and other NATO countries.

The stage seems to be set for a protracted civil war, unless, as the imperialist powers hope, Gaddafi’s regime implodes.

Gaddafi’s acting foreign minister, Abdelati Obeidi, held talks Sunday in Greece and Monday in Turkey and Malta to enlist those countries’ support in negotiating a ceasefire and beginning talks between the regime and the opposition. Obeidi met with Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou, after which a Greek official said, “The Libyan envoy wanted to convey that his country has the intention to negotiate.” The official added, “We don’t think that there can be a military solution to this crisis.”

The Greek foreign ministry said it was committed to seeking a “political, diplomatic solution” to the crisis in

Libya.

Athens and Istanbul, while backing the US-NATO war, are both seeking to play the role of moderator in brokering some kind of truce and settlement. They repeat the official United Nations line that Gaddafi must unilaterally enact a ceasefire and pull back his forces from contested areas, but they downplay demands for regime change.

The *New York Times* reported Monday that two of Gaddafi's seven sons, Saif al-Islam el-Gaddafi and Saadi el-Gaddafi, were floating a proposal for Gaddafi to turn over the reins of power to Saif, who would then preside over a transition to a more democratic regime.

However, officials from both Britain and Italy brushed aside any such proposal as well as the ceasefire offer from Obeidi. They solidarized themselves with a statement issued by the opposition Transitional National Council, based in Benghazi, that Gaddafi and his sons would have to leave "before any diplomatic negotiations can take place."

After meeting in Rome with Ali Essawi, a member of the Transitional National Council, Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini announced that Italy was recognizing the TNC as the sole legitimate government of Libya. Italy, the former colonial ruler of Libya, is the third country, after France and Qatar, to take this step.

Frattini told a press conference: "A solution for the future of Libya has a precondition—that Gaddafi's regime leaves and that Gaddafi himself and his family leave the country." He added that an interim government headed by one of Gaddafi's sons was "not an option."

In his report to Parliament, Hague adopted the same line. As the *Guardian* reported: "Hague said only a 'genuine ceasefire' with a withdrawal of armed forces from contested cities would end the coalition's air strikes." In other words, only Gaddafi's complete surrender would be sufficient to halt the air war.

Hague went on to say that Gaddafi "must go."



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