

Contact Group meeting in Doha plans imperialist carve-up of Libya

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The Contact Group, an assembly of foreign ministers from Western and Arab countries backing the Benghazi-based Libyan rebels of the Interim Transitional National Council (INC), met yesterday in Doha, Qatar. The meeting highlighted the INC's role as a stooge of the imperialist powers, particularly the US, Britain and France, who are promoting it as their proxy force in a bitter civil war in Libya.

Qatar and Britain hosted the conference, with British Foreign Secretary William Hague issuing a statement in the early evening demanding that Colonel Muammar Gaddafi step down as Libyan head of state. Hague declared, "Gaddafi and his regime have lost all legitimacy and he must leave power."

The conference praised the continued bombing of Libya by NATO forces, declaring: "These have exerted significant pressure on Gaddafi, protected civilians, including Benghazi, from violent attack and averted a humanitarian disaster."

The conference also agreed to fund the INC: "Participants agreed that a Temporary Financial Mechanism could provide a method for the INC and international community to manage revenue to assist with short-term financial requirements and structural needs in Libya."

INC member Mahmoud Chammam called on the US government to "liberate the funds" of the Gaddafi regime—that is, an estimated \$30 billion of Libyan oil earnings held by Western banks. Normally used to pay for Libyan social spending and public sector workers' salaries, these funds would be stolen by the major banks to pay for INC weapons and supplies.

The INC hijacked parts of Libya's cell phone network yesterday with assistance and equipment provided by the US and Persian Gulf countries. The network was originally run by Huawei, a Chinese

company that refused to assist the INC. Chinese companies have a number of infrastructure contracts with Gaddafi and stand to lose large sums if a Western-dominated INC regime in Libya cancels these contracts.

INC representatives in Doha refused to meet with Gaddafi's former foreign minister, Musa Kusa, who had traveled to Doha. Kusa asked that "all parties concerned prevent Libya from collapsing into civil war," warning that it could become a "new Somalia."

As reports from inside Libya made clear, the country is already in a civil war, and the attacks of the NATO powers aim not to protect the Libyan population but to exterminate as large a part as possible of the Libyan armed forces. NATO announced yesterday that it had destroyed 16 Libyan tanks, an anti-aircraft gun and a pick-up truck in air raids the day before. British officials said their Eurofighter-Typhoons dropped 1,000-pound bombs on Libyan tanks yesterday.

Amid a continuing standoff between small groups of rebels backed by NATO air power and the regular Libyan forces, NATO bombed Tripoli, Misurata, Al-Aziziya and Syrte. Fighting continued in Ajdabiya, a critical logistical choke point south of the oil port of Brega, which is reportedly still held by pro-Gaddafi forces.

Launched under the pretense of averting a humanitarian disaster, the war is reportedly becoming one itself. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said that up to 3.6 million people, or roughly 60 percent of the population, might need humanitarian aid. Ban estimated that a further 330,000 people have fled their homes inside Libya.

The UN High Commission for Refugees estimated that a further 498,000 people (8 percent of the pre-war population) had fled Libya, with 236,000 fleeing to Tunisia, nearly 200,000 to Egypt, and smaller numbers

going to Algeria, Chad, and Niger.

These figures could be cynically exploited to justify plans for escalating the war and introducing Western ground troops into Libya—that is, invading the country. The European Union publicly made such proposals on April 10 with a plan to send over a thousand troops nominally to escort humanitarian aid destined for Misurata.

The major imperialist powers continued to vie for influence and connections to the INC—a narrow clique of former Gaddafi regime officials, Islamists and foreign intelligence assets through which the Western powers aim to transform Libya into a de facto colony.

Britain and France, the countries that initially pressed hardest for the war, criticized the US and Germany. The US has scaled back its role in the fighting, amid fears that weapons provided to the INC might fall into the hands of Al Qaeda. Germany abstained in the United Nations Security Council vote on UN Resolution 1973, passed to sanction war with Libya.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé criticized NATO as not sufficiently aggressive in backing the rebels militarily since the US withdrew fighter planes that had been providing close air support for the INC. “It’s not enough,” he said. “NATO must play its role fully. It wanted to take the lead in operations.”

British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy met last night in Paris for a “working dinner” that was reportedly dedicated exclusively to the war in Libya. There was no public statement on the content of their discussions.

Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborne attacked Germany’s abstention in comments to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, noting that it made it appear that Europe was divided between “belligerents and do-gooders.”

With its troops deployed in the NATO occupation of Afghanistan, Berlin is hardly a “do-gooder.” However, the war has highlighted one undeniable reality: Britain, France and the US rushed to war against Libya, using right-wing forces as their proxy to take over the country and prevent the spread of the mass popular protests that have shaken Tunisia, Egypt and other North African countries.

The stooge forces in the leadership of the INC opposition include rebel military leader Khalifa Hifter, who spoke to the *Washington Post* on April 12,

confirming his close connections to the CIA. (See: A CIA commander for the Libyan rebels). A former officer who fled from Libya in 1987 and lived for years in northern Virginia, near CIA headquarters, he is reportedly vying for leadership of the INC’s small military forces with Abdul Fattah Younis, Gaddafi’s former interior minister.

He said, “I used to lead the biggest force in eastern Libya; I’m known amongst the people and to the United States. Throughout the years, I’ve been waiting to seize a moment like this.”

The *Post* added, “Before he left his Falls Church home in mid-March, Hifter said, he was contacted by the CIA and the US ambassador to Libya as officials in Washington, keen to find out what they could about the opposition, learned of his plans to return.”

Washington is continuing its active negotiations with the INC. State Department sources announced yesterday that Deputy Secretary of State Jim Steinberg and US congressmen would meet today with Majmud Jibril, foreign affairs chief for the Transitional Council. Jibril and the former Libyan ambassador to Washington, Ali Aujali, are also scheduled to meet the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, according to its chairman, John Kerry.



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