

Obama demands regime change in Libya

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In an open letter issued printed simultaneously in the *Washington Post*, the *Times* of London and *Le Figaro*, the Obama administration, together with the heads of government in France and Great Britain, openly acknowledged that the purpose of the NATO bombing of Libya was regime change, i.e., the forcible expulsion of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi from power.

On March 28, Obama made a speech in Washington in which he denied that the aim of the current NATO war against Libya was regime change. Obama was subsequently criticized for his remarks by John McCain and other leading members of the US Senate Armed Services Committee. Obama's comments at that time were welcomed by supporters of his government at home and abroad, including a layer of former leftists, who have repeatedly sought to justify the savage NATO bombing campaign against Libya as a "humanitarian action."

Now, in his open letter on Friday, co-signed by the French and British leaders, Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron, Obama has made his most explicit call for the overthrow of Gaddafi.

The three leaders write that the world would have committed an "unconscionable betrayal" if the Libyan leader is left in government. If Gaddafi is left in place, they continue, then Libya risks becoming a failed state.

The letter also indicates that the US and its closest Western allies in the Libyan campaign are digging in for a prolonged war. The letter declares: "So long as Gaddafi is in power, NATO and its coalition partners must maintain their operations so that civilians remain protected and the pressure on the regime builds. Britain, France and the United States will not rest until the UN Security Council resolutions have been implemented and the Libyan people can choose their own future...."

The remark "Britain, France and the United States will not rest..." should be seen as a clear warning that

these nations are prepared to go to any lengths, including an invasion of Libya, in order to secure their oil interests and establish a base of reaction against the Arab revolution. So much for the widely vaunted "humanitarian aims" of the NATO mission.

The letter was originally drafted by the British and French leaders Nicolas Sarkozy and David Cameron, who met on Wednesday to decide upon their joint strategy prior to the two-day NATO meeting in Berlin.

The publication of the letter on Friday with the support of Obama was clearly aimed at increasing pressure on the majority of NATO alliance members attending the two-day summit in Berlin, who have declined from any direct involvement in the NATO bombing mission.

This point is confirmed by the *Wall Street Journal* in an article dealing with the open letter: "Since the US has shifted the onus of leading day-to-day enforcement of the no-fly zone to its European partners, Thursday's joint letter also could raise pressure on NATO allies who have so far been reluctant to take direct part in the air strikes. Those contributions will be needed in order to sustain the pace of operations longer-term, officials said."

The goal of regime change is clearly not covered by the original United Nations Security Council resolution that provided the mandate for NATO operations against Libya. In order to provide additional political cover for their illicit undertaking, the Obama administration organized appearances in Berlin on Thursday with leading NATO members to justify the war.

Following the Thursday session of the NATO summit in Berlin, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stood alongside German Chancellor Angela Merkel at a press conference. Both Clinton and Merkel declared that they were working closely together to end the conflict in Libya and shared the same goal of ending Gaddafi's regime. Germany abstained on the original

UN vote and has so far refused to make troops available for the NATO mission.

At the same time the US administration has made it clear that it that it would not increase its own military engagement in the NATO operation. On Thursday evening the French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé met with Clinton and asked her if the United States was prepared to contribute additional fighter planes to the NATO mission. According to Juppé's remarks after the meeting, Clinton's reply was negative.

Meanwhile inside Libya, NATO warplanes continued pounding the capital city. On Thursday NATO jets launched missiles in the vicinity of the central university in Tripoli. Up to 10 people were reported injured in the attack. NATO officials at the conference in Berlin declared that the attacks on Thursday had been carried out against military targets 40 miles south of Tripoli, but a BBC journalist on the spot in Tripoli confirmed that the bombing attack had been carried out close to the city center and had led to civilian casualties.

On Friday Libyan state television reported that further NATO bombing raids had been carried out against the city of Sirte—the birthplace of Gaddafi—and again at targets south of Tripoli.

Parallel to the daily air assaults, right-wing Arab bourgeois regimes have stepped up the arming of the reactionary, pro-imperialist opposition movement in the east of the country, acting as the agents of the main NATO powers.

According to press reports, boats laden with weapons and fighters were making regular trips to Misrata harbor to supply the rebel forces. Crates labeled “aid supplies” actually contained Grad rockets, machine guns, ammunition, SAM-7 anti-aircraft missiles, rocket-propelled grenades and other weaponry. Cardboard boxes containing flak jackets and helmets had labels identifying their source as the Ministry of Defense in Qatar.

On the same day as Obama's open letter confirmed that the aim of the NATO operation against Libya was regime change, his policy was given a ringing endorsement by the *New York Times*. An editorial headlined “Stop the Blame Game” enthusiastically endorsed the stance of the White House, declaring, “With the United States bogged down in two other wars, President Obama was right to step back quickly

and let the Europeans take the lead. Other countries—including Italy, Spain, Germany and the Netherlands—should do more to help. So far only six of the alliance's 28 members are striking targets.”

The editorial then cynically declares that Britain and France could use the issue of Arab migrants fleeing the fighting to Europe as a lever to force Italy and other European countries to take part in the NATO aggression.

The editorial also repeats, however, its call for the White House to step up the slaughter and adopt the demand of Republican Senator John McCain for increased use of US firepower, in particular the use of American A-10 antitank aircraft and AC-130 ground attack gunships.

The combination of intensified war rhetoric and bullying from Washington, plus the administration's insistence that European countries step up their involvement in the Libyan offensive has hugely intensified the tensions and conflicts already raging among NATO members.



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