

NATO bomb attack on Libya kills Misrata “rebel” fighters

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A NATO airstrike reportedly killed 12 anti-Gaddafi fighters and badly injured three others in the contested port city of Misrata on Wednesday evening. The “friendly fire” incident—the second of its kind since the bombing campaign began on March 19—again underscores the bogus character of the various statements issued from Washington and Brussels claiming their “precision” bombing raids are aimed at protecting the Libyan people.

In reality, the allied imperialist powers are engaged in an increasingly reckless “regime change” campaign that now involves assassination attempts against Gaddafi and the bombing of public infrastructure targets, which will inevitably see more civilian casualties.

NATO issued a statement which neither confirmed nor denied the incident, but cynically declared “deep regret for any loss of human life.” The *Guardian*, citing local doctors in Misrata and one of the survivors, reported that the bombing occurred around 5 p.m., close to Misrata’s port. A 15-member “rebel” unit gathered near a salt factory with three “improvised battle wagons”, each with a special identifying mark painted on them, as ordered by NATO. Despite this, after the men had just finished having tea with an ambulance crew, a NATO bomb hit them. Twelve men, aged between 20 and 40, were killed instantly.

Others were taken to hospital. One of the men, 20-year-old Ahmed Swesi, lost four fingers, had his arm and leg shattered, and suffered shrapnel wounds to the stomach and face.

The Misrata “transitional council”, allied with the

Benghazi-based opposition leadership, attempted to cover up the incident. Anti-Gaddafi gunmen refused to allow journalists near the site of the NATO bombing. This response raises the question as to whether there have been other airstrikes involving civilian casualties that the so-called rebels have hushed up to avoid embarrassing their NATO partners.

Khalifa al-Zwawi—a judge who is the nominal head of the so-called transitional council in Misrata—blamed the victims for their own plight. He insisted that the coordinates of where the fighters were supposed to have been were provided to NATO, and that the men must have “exceeded the limits that we gave them.” These remarks underscore the contempt with which the “rebel” leadership holds its own followers.

The Transitional National Council (TNC) in Benghazi is comprised of recently defected Gaddafi regime ministers, Islamist forces, including Al Qaeda aligned terrorists, and numbers of long-standing CIA assets. It functions as the proxy force for the US and European imperialist powers, which are attempting to oust Gaddafi in order to install a puppet administration to advance their geo-strategic and commercial interests.

Gene Cretz, the US ambassador to Libya, said Wednesday that an American diplomatic team sent to Benghazi had concluded that the TNC was a “serious group” and “a political body which is worthy of our support”. Cretz made no attempt to explain the criteria on which this assessment had been made. However, he made little attempt to disguise the role of TNC leaders as pro-US stooges, saying they “continue to say the right things” and “are talking to the international community in a very sophisticated way.”

The ambassador further explained that the Obama administration was still considering whether to extend formal diplomatic recognition as have France and Italy, but emphasised that failing to yet do so “has not stopped us from doing everything that we could to support the TNC”.

NATO is preparing to dispatch a “diplomatic contact person” with the self-appointed Benghazi administration. A NATO spokesperson said the move would “improve and enhance political contacts” through “informal political exchanges” with the TNC. In reality, the move follows the deployment of British and French military “advisers” to Benghazi and underscores the “rebel” leadership’s proxy status.

France and Britain are continuing their preparations for the deployment of ground forces. British Defence Secretary Liam Fox said Wednesday that troops could be deployed to the Tunisian-Libyan border, on the pretext of protecting fleeing civilians. An estimated 30,000 people have crossed the border to escape the fighting. Fox told a parliamentary defence select committee that British forces may be necessary to establish “safe havens” to protect refugees from attacks by Gaddafi’s forces.

There is no evidence that these forces are in fact attacking civilians. There have been ongoing clashes between pro- and anti-Gaddafi fighters on Libya’s western border. “Rebel” fighters were driven from a key border outpost yesterday near the Libyan town of Wazen. The *Wall Street Journal* described the loss of the crossing as “severing the rebels’ only paved road to the outside world.” The British government is no doubt concerned over the military implications of this gain by the Gaddafi regime—any foreign ground forces deployed to the area would no doubt be ordered to lead the fight to regain the lost ground.

In his testimony before the parliamentary committee, Liam Fox stressed that the war would continue indefinitely. He admitted the bombing could continue for months. “It is essential that the international community gives a very clear signal to the Libyan regime that our resolve isn’t time-limited,” he

declared, adding that “we are not going to be limited by pounds, shillings and pence.”

The US and European powers are engaged in ever more desperate efforts to maintain the “humanitarian” pretext for their attack on Libya.

During a meeting of the UN Security Council in New York yesterday, the US envoy to the UN, Susan Rice, reportedly accused the Gaddafi regime of providing the anti-impotence drug Viagra to its forces as part of a systematic campaign of sexual violence. No evidence has been provided for this allegation. A spokesman for Human Rights Watch—an organisation which has boasted of its support for the NATO bombing campaign—acknowledged that it had investigated the charges and found “a few credible cases of gender based violence and rape, but the evidence is not there at this point to suggest it is of a systematic nature, or an official policy.”



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