

US, NATO attempt assassination of Gaddafi

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With the attack Monday morning on the Bab al-Azizyah complex in Tripoli, the US-NATO war on Libya has entered a criminal new phase that incorporates the policy of state-organized assassination.

Two large precision-guided bombs reduced buildings in the complex to rubble. Libyan officials reported three people killed and 45 wounded, 15 of them critically.

This was the third such attack on the complex where Libya's Colonel Muammar Gaddafi lives and works. The compound was hit by a cruise missile fired from a British submarine on March 20, the second day of the US-NATO assault, and again on April 23, when warplanes struck a parking lot just outside of Bab al-Azizyah that reportedly was above an underground bunker.

With each strike, the objective is ever more naked: the murder of Gaddafi and members of his family.

The building struck on Monday housed the Libyan leader's offices and library and a meeting room where earlier this month he had held talks with South African President Jacob Zuma and other African leaders on an African Union proposal for a ceasefire in Libya's ongoing civil war. The proposal was quickly quashed by the US-NATO alliance and the so-called rebels who are being backed by the US and Europe.

Despite claiming legitimacy for their military actions on the basis of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which authorizes "all necessary measures" to protect civilians, Washington, London and Paris have made no secret of the fact that their real aim is "regime change," i.e., the imposition of a puppet government that will be more subservient to their interests (and those of the energy conglomerates) than the Gaddafi regime. To that end, they are prepared to carry out whatever bloodletting is required.

After five weeks of bombing, and with the US military command claiming to have "attrited"—in plain English, slaughtered—up to 40 percent of the military forces loyal to Gaddafi, they appear no closer to realizing their aim. The "rebels," a fractious coalition of ex-Gaddafi officials, aging CIA "assets" and Islamists, have proven wholly

incapable of advancing west toward Tripoli. Moreover, the openly stated hopes of the imperialist powers that the bombs and missiles dropped on Tripoli would trigger a palace coup resulting in Gaddafi's ouster have gone unanswered.

Last week, the top US uniformed military commander, Adm. Mike Mullen, warned that the US-led intervention in Libya was "moving towards stalemate."

The Obama administration and its European accomplices, increasingly frustrated by the failure of their tactics, are not willing to accept such an outcome. This is what has placed the policy of assassination at the center of their calculations.

Mullen's warning was accompanied by the announcement that armed US Predator drones have been deployed over Libya. The pilotless warplanes have been employed with ever growing frequency by the Obama administration to carry out its dirty war against the population on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. Pakistan's Conflict Monitoring Center in Islamabad has documented 2,200 civilian deaths over the past five years from drone attacks.

The CIA and its apologists defend the drone attacks as remote control extrajudicial executions of "terrorists," simply dismissing evidence of the horrific civilian death toll. Now, these same methods are being employed in Libya under the pretext of protecting civilian lives.

Meanwhile, within official Washington, there has been a steady drumbeat for Gaddafi's assassination, with leading US senators going on television talk shows and sounding as if they had cribbed their remarks from the script of "The Godfather."

Thus, one program had Senator Lindsey Graham, a member of the Senate Armed Services committee demanding that the US-led intervention "cut the head of the snake off" and urging, in reference to Gaddafi, "Let's get this guy gone."

What is striking is that such language evokes not a hint of disagreement, much less protest, from within the US political establishment and the corporate-controlled

media.

One would hardly guess that such methods mark a fateful shift from what had long been considered essential tenets of international law. While the assassination of foreign rulers as a tool of statecraft was well known in the Middle Ages, from the 18th century and the dawn of the bourgeois revolutions it was regarded as beyond the pale.

There were, of course, wholly pragmatic considerations, among them the fear of “chickens coming home to roost,” with the resort to assassination by leaders of major powers legitimizing the practice and creating the conditions for someone to murder them as well. There was also the calculation by those with the world’s more powerful militaries that the use of assassination would tend to level the playing field with their less well-armed rivals.

But there were also, particularly in the history of the United States, other arguments, rooted in principles of democracy.

Thomas Jefferson in a 1789 letter to James Madison described assassination as one of the “legitimate principles in the dark ages which intervened between ancient and modern civilizations, but exploded and was held in just horror in the eighteenth century.”

The US Army’s code of conduct signed by Abraham Lincoln at the height of the Civil War in 1863 warned that “civilized nations look with horror upon” the method of assassinating one’s enemies, regarding such practices as “relapses into barbarism.”

This prevailing attitude toward assassination—defined as “treacherous killing”—was written into the international laws of war adopted at the Hague Convention of 1907 and has been continued in largely the same form in subsequent treaties and conventions.

As recently as 1976, the Church Committee, which conducted the US Senate investigations into the CIA’s organization of assassination plots against world leaders ranging from Cuba’s Fidel Castro to Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, concluded that this bloody practice “violates moral precepts fundamental to our way of life...[and] traditional American notions of fair play.”

Today, the outlook expressed in the committee’s reports seems, in the context of official discourse in Washington, as anachronistic as if it had been written in the 18th century.

After nearly a decade of the so-called “war on terror,” begun by Bush and escalated under Obama, assassination—together with wars of aggression, torture, extraordinary rendition, detention without charges—has become just one more accepted tool of American foreign

policy.

Indeed, the executive order issued in the wake of the Church Committee probe that barred US-sponsored assassinations was overridden by the Bush administration in the name of eliminating alleged terrorists—a right to kill that has been extended under the Obama administration to US citizens. Now, the case is being made that assassination is a legitimate tool for pursuing “humanitarian” missions or whatever other pretext is invented for imperialist looting.

The ongoing war in Libya marks a further escalation in the criminalization of the American ruling elite, which extols the methods of murder and thuggery to achieve its aims abroad while relying on financial swindling, political fraud and state intimidation to enforce its interests at home.

Its open embrace of assassination stands as a stark warning. There is no section of the financial and corporate oligarchy that rules the United States that maintains the slightest adherence to democratic principles. Under conditions of an unrelenting crisis of the world capitalist system, combined with an unprecedented polarization between its obscene accumulation of wealth and the increasingly desperate conditions facing masses of workers, it is compelled to defend its class rule through the use of unrestrained violence.

The struggle against war and the fight against the increasingly grave threats to democratic rights within the US itself can be waged only through the independent political mobilization of the working class in its own party, fighting for workers’ power and the socialist transformation of society.

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