

# Gaddafi family members murdered by US and NATO

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The killing of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi's youngest son and three grandchildren is an act of political murder for which British Prime Minister David Cameron, French President Nicholas Sarkozy, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and US President Barack Obama are directly responsible. They sanctioned the missile attack on a private residence in Tripoli at which Gaddafi and members of his family had gathered on Saturday night. Saif al-Arab Gaddafi, 29, was the Libyan leader's youngest son and a man who was not considered a member of the Libyan government. Gaddafi family friends have reported that the slain children were aged between 12 months and four-years-old.

Following the missile strike, the Canadian commander of NATO's military operation in Libya, Lieutenant General Charles Bouchard, issued a statement that was as perfunctory as it was deceitful: "We regret all loss of life, especially the innocent civilians being harmed as a result of the ongoing conflict."

In an equally mendacious statement, Cameron sought to maintain the political fiction that the attack on the one-storey residence was permissible under the terms of UN Resolution 1973. The missile strike, he claimed, was aimed at "preventing a loss of life by targeting Gaddafi's war-making machine. That is obviously tanks and guns and rocket launchers, but also command-and-control as well."

Cameron, on the advice of his lawyers, referred to the private residence as a "command-and-control" centre in order to evade the charge that Muammar Gaddafi had been targeted by the missile strike. The targeting of a specific individual is an assassination and, even in war, may be defined as a criminal act. The attempt to kill Gaddafi, however, is taking place without either a

declaration of war by the US and European powers against Libya or even the invocation of the provisions of the War Powers Act by the Obama administration.

It is 35 years since the US Church Report disavowed assassination and revived the long-held position of the United States government, stretching back to the American Revolution, that it was not only a criminal and barbaric policy, but a reckless one that would legitimise every government seeking to assassinate the political leadership of rival states. After close to two decades of near continuous war to offset the economic and political decline of US imperialism, all such restraints and reservations have been repudiated.

Leading American politicians, contemptuous of the legalities of the issue, brazenly call for the Libyan leader's killing. Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, in an interview on Fox News on Sunday morning, again declared: "Wherever Gaddafi goes, he is a legitimate military target." With this statement, the American senator enshrined murder as official state policy.

Barely seven hours before the attack that killed Gaddafi's son and grandchildren, NATO aircraft had pounded targets in Tripoli where they thought the Libyan leader was making a live television address to call for a ceasefire. On April 24, a compound where NATO intelligence clearly believed Gaddafi was located was reduced to rubble, killing three civilians.

Gaddafi's death has become the overriding objective of the US and NATO war on Libya. The initial strategy of the assault, which began on March 19, has abjectly failed. Air strikes have slaughtered hundreds of Libyan soldiers and civilians but they have not, as was confidently expected in imperialist circles, triggered the collapse of the Gaddafi regime. On the ground, the pro-NATO Transitional National Council based in the

eastern city of Benghazi has proven incapable of making advances against, let alone defeating, Gaddafi's military forces.

The frustration and even desperation of the major powers is embodied in the inane belief that Gaddafi's death will end all resistance and enable the so-called "rebels"—a collection of former Gaddafi ministers, CIA assets and Islamic fundamentalists—to assume power over the country unchallenged and serve as a loyal puppet regime.

On the part of the American political and military establishment, the sadistic desire to kill Gaddafi is in line with its treatment of the leaders of a number of countries that have become the target of US military aggression. All have been dealt with in the most vindictive fashion.

Panama's strongman Manuel Noriega—a former CIA asset—was hauled to the US following the US invasion in 1989, tried for drug offences, imprisoned until 2007 and then transferred to France for another trial and seven years imprisonment.

Slobodan Milosevic—once a favourite of the major powers—was charged with war crimes following the 1999 US and NATO war on Yugoslavia and died in prison while on trial in The Hague.

The Taliban's elderly leader, Mullah Omar, who the US sought out for talks during the 1990s over the construction of pipelines, has been in hiding and on a "kill-on-sight" list since the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan.

Iraq's Saddam Hussein, who Washington actively backed during the Iran-Iraq War in the 1980s, was hauled before a kangaroo court and hung in a lynch mob manner. His sons were killed and their mutilated bodies displayed like trophies.

Gaddafi himself has lived a large part of his life under the threat of assassination by US or allied intelligence agencies. Within weeks of the military coup that brought him to power in 1969, then National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger advised "covert action" to eliminate him. British intelligence reportedly attempted to kill him in 1971. The Reagan administration ordered a massive bombardment of his personal residence in 1986—an action that resulted in the death of a child and numerous civilians. Britain's MI6 reportedly tried to murder the Libyan leader in 1996. There were more than likely other attempts that have never become

public.

The efforts to kill Gaddafi ceased in the 2000s after his regime reached a rapprochement with Washington and he became viewed as a useful economic and political collaborator of the US and its allies. Now that he is once again considered an obstacle to advancing imperialist interests in North Africa and the Middle East, Washington's vast intelligence apparatus has been unleashed to hunt him down and take his life.

There is a tremendous element of recklessness in the actions of the US government. For all its claims to be waging a "war on terrorism", the mass killings, torture, repression and assassinations over which it has presided have created a legacy of hatred that will not be easily extinguished. It is precisely these conditions that create the breeding ground for desperate and disorientated acts of retaliation, with unpredictable and potentially terrible consequences.



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