

NATO bombs kill Libyan civilians in Tripoli

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A NATO airstrike in a working class suburb of Tripoli early on Sunday morning killed and injured a number of civilians. Western journalists, who have treated previous evidence of Libyan civilian casualties dismissively, were taken to the site and confirmed seeing at least five bodies, including those of a nine-month-old baby and a child. Libyan officials reported that at least four more people had been killed and another 18 injured.

The *New York Times* reported: “There were no indications of any military facility in the area. Children’s shoes, diapers, a woman’s dress and kitchen tools lay amid the wreckage early Sunday. The blast knocked the top off the structure, leaving a concrete staircase reaching into the air. Several carports on the block collapsed, crushing the vehicles within. A neighbour a block away invited reporters into his home to show shattered glass from windows and doors, and said his wife had been taken to the hospital with wounds from the shards.”

According to the *Los Angeles Times*: “Scores of people in pyjamas and sandals gathered on the rubble strewn street well into the early morning hours. Volunteers carted out chunks of concrete as they searched for survivors or the deceased. The body of a woman was found and taken away on a stretcher as the search continued. Bulldozers moved huge pieces of concrete and twisted wire. Children’s clothing was seen in the rubble.”

One man, who had no political sympathy for the Libyan regime, told the newspaper: “This is a purely civilian street. I think the sooner [Libyan leader Muammar] Gaddafi goes the better. But for NATO to bomb a street like this is criminal. There is no military here anywhere.” The house was home to members of

an extended family named al-Ghrari in a working class suburb in the Souq al-Juma area of the capital.

NATO spokesmen have acknowledged only that its warplanes might have hit a civilian area. “We take all reports of civilian casualties very seriously and we will continue to look into the facts of this event,” a statement declared late Sunday. While regretting any loss of civilian life, Lieutenant General Charles Bouchard, commander in chief of the NATO mission, blamed a possible “weapons system failure.”

Likewise, the Western media played down the significance of the deaths, declaring the raid to be the first to have claimed civilian lives. It is inconceivable, however, that this was the only NATO strike out of more than 11,000 to have killed Libyan civilians.

The previous day, a NATO airstrike hit a column of tanks and military vehicles belonging to anti-Gaddafi forces as it was moving toward the front near the eastern oil city of Brega. At least 30 fighters were killed and many more injured. At least two other “friendly fire” incidents have taken place in recent weeks.

If NATO is bombing its own Libyan allies, it is certainly making similar “mistakes” in attacking the heavily-populated Libyan capital of Tripoli, where anything connected to the Libyan military is considered a target, regardless of its location. The criminal character of the bombing campaign is underscored by the repeated attacks on Gaddafi family residences in an attempt to assassinate the Libyan leader and his relatives.

The Libyan government has put the number of civilians killed in air raids at more than 800. It recently

claimed that a NATO bomb destroyed a hotel and another struck a bus southwest of Tripoli, killing a dozen people. Just as similar reports of civilian deaths in Afghanistan and Iraq were routinely ignored by the US, so NATO, supported by the Western media, has dismissed previous Libyan accounts as “government propaganda.”

Libyan spokesmen were quick to point to the absurdity of NATO claims to be protecting civilians through its nearly four month-long aerial campaign. Speaking to journalists at the site of the latest bombing, deputy foreign minister Khalid Kaim said: “We have seen who is attacking civilians. They are targeting houses and flats. Tomorrow they will target schools and hospitals.”

The war on Libya is not being waged to defend civilians, but is a neo-colonial operation to further the strategic and economic aims of the US and its European allies in North Africa and the Middle East. Its objective is to remove Gaddafi and install a pro-Western puppet regime that will allow the imperialist powers to exploit the country’s energy reserves and provide a base for suppressing revolutionary movements throughout the region.

The venal character of the various bourgeois regimes in the Middle East and Africa was on display at a summit over the weekend in Cairo attended by representatives of the UN, African Union (AU), Arab League and Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OCI) to find a “political solution” to the conflict.

All these organisations are colluding with the NATO allies to fashion a pro-Western regime in Libya, out of the dubious collection of ex-Gaddafi ministers, Islamist leaders and exile figures that form the self-appointed Transitional National Council (TNC), as well as elements of the Libyan government. The cynicism of all those present was summed up in the remarks of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon who expressed “strong concerns” about the worsening humanitarian crisis in Libya, while supporting the bombing campaign that is creating these conditions.

Each one of these organisations and the governments

they represent bear responsibility for the crimes being carried out by the US and its allies in Libya.



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