

# NATO attack kills 19, including women and children

Chris Marsden  
22 June 2011

Monday night's air strike on a compound west of Tripoli that killed 19, including women and children, puts an end to any pretence that NATO is not deliberately targeting civilians in its ongoing bombardment of Libya.

NATO was unapologetic, describing the attack on the estate of Khweildy al-Hamidy, a close ally of Libyan leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi, as a "precision strike on a legitimate military target—a command-and-control node which was directly involved in coordinating systematic attacks on the Libyan people".

It said it had carried out "a rigorous analysis" of the target "over a prolonged period of time".

This was a deliberate act of murder. The estate was hit by eight rockets and the main building "pulverised". Reporters were taken to a hospital where all the beds in one ward had been filled with the dead. They could not be identified. But subsequent reports stated that Hamidy's two small grandchildren and his pregnant daughter-in-law were among 19 victims that included eight children.

A Libyan government spokesman, Moussa Ibrahim, said of NATO's response to the atrocity, "This is very twisted logic, so you kill children, you kill mothers, you kill fathers, aunts and uncles, and then you try to explain it by twisted political military logic".

The previous day, a NATO missile had struck a two-storey block of flats in the Al-Arada residential area of Tripoli, killing nine, including a woman, a nine-month-old baby and two toddlers. There is no military facility anywhere near the working class neighbourhood. NATO admitted having caused civilian casualties, but cynically blamed a "weapons failure" during a strike targeting a "missile site".

Libyan officials have stated that NATO forces have killed more than 700 civilians. The stepped-up NATO bombardment of Tripoli will inevitably produce a growing number of civilian deaths.

By exposing the lying claims of the United States, Britain, France and other powers to be waging a war to "protect civilians", the civilian deaths are creating mounting difficulties for the NATO alliance. The latest incidents prompted Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini, at a European Union meeting in Luxembourg, to warn that NATO's credibility was in

danger.

"You can't run the risk of killing civilians, this is something that is absolutely unacceptable", he said. "We cannot continue our shortcomings in the way we communicate with the public, which doesn't keep up with the daily propaganda of Gaddafi".

Initially a member of the Italian Socialist Party before joining Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing government in 2001, Frattini is an inveterate careerist—aware that public sentiment in Europe and internationally is hardening against the war in Libya. His concerns were endorsed by US State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland, who said, "It's always an issue in any NATO mission to maintain popular support, to maintain public understanding for why we are there".

The real "issue" for the US is to maintain the smokescreen used to conceal the reality of a predatory and illegal war of conquest to bring about regime change in Libya, secure control of Libyan oil and set up a military bulwark against a popular uprising of the Arab masses.

The BBC's Jonathan Marcus noted that, "[T]here has long been some unease in certain quarters within NATO about the Libya mission. This has consistently been papered over, with all nations agreeing to extend the mission for a further three months from the end of June. But is this fragile consensus going to be undermined if incidents of civilian casualties increase?"

More nervous than Washington and Rome are the various Arab and African regimes, whether or not they have backed the war.

The Arab League, which endorsed United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 legitimising war in the name of protecting civilians, has been exposed as a rotten vehicle for imperialist intrigues in the Middle East. Deputy Secretary-General Ahmed Ben Helli complained pathetically to his political masters in Washington, "When the Arab League agreed on the idea of having a no-fly zone over Libya, it was to protect civilians. But when civilians get killed this has to be condemned with the harshest of statements".

Interviewed by the *Guardian* in Brussels yesterday, the outgoing head of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, called for a ceasefire and a negotiated settlement with Gaddafi. "When I

see children being killed, I must have misgivings”, he said.

Asked whether that meant a halt to NATO air strikes, he said, “A ceasefire is a ceasefire”.

Moussa feels politically exposed by his support for NATO, at a time when he is seeking to become president of Egypt after the fall of Hosni Mubarak. But he is not alone. A senior European official told the *Guardian*, “The Arab League is telling us that we’re losing the support of the Arab world”.

Other African states are in an equally precarious position. Many were closer allies of Gaddafi than the Arab powers. They see in his transformation from a valued Western ally, courted for his oil riches and support of the so-called “war on terror”, into a target for assassination, their own possible fate at some future point.

On June 13, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned a meeting of the African Union to back the war in Libya or risk facing overthrow like Gaddafi, Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak and Tunisia’s Zine Abidine Ben Ali. In April, the African Union tried to organise a ceasefire that was rejected out-of-hand by NATO and the Benghazi opposition, which insisted that nothing short of regime change would do.

However, at a June 15 meeting between the UN Security Council and the African Union High Level Ad hoc Committee on Libya, Dr. Ruhakana Rugunda, Uganda’s permanent representative to the United Nations, issued a statement insisting, “An attack on Libya or any other member of the African Union without express agreement by the AU is a dangerous provocation that should be avoided”.

Calling for dialogue without precondition, he added that “sovereignty has been a tool of emancipation of the peoples of Africa...after centuries of predation by the slave trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism.... Ignoring the AU for three months and going on with the bombings of the sacred land of Africa has been high-handed, arrogant and provocative”.

US dictates have nevertheless had the desired effect on some states.

President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal has visited Benghazi, where he called upon Gaddafi to step down, “The sooner the better”.

The president of the Transitional National Council in Benghazi, Mustafa Abdel Jalil, also made a visit to the Tunisian capital of Tunis Saturday, invited for talks with Prime Minister Beji Caid Sebti’s government. When asked whether Tunisia had recognised the TNC, he replied, “We’ve gone past that stage. The fact that we are received here is implicit recognition”.

Tunisia’s position comes as no surprise. Sebti’s government was formed with the backing of Washington, with the specific aim of curtailing the mass movement that led to the downfall of President Zine Abedine Ben Ali.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen took a hard-line against those questioning the viability of its Libyan offensive. “We have seriously degraded the military capacity of

the Gaddafi regime, and the combination of this military pressure and the reinforced political pressure will eventually lead to the collapse of the Gaddafi regime”, he said. “It’s not a question of if, but when”.

However, the next day, Rasmussen received an embarrassing rebuke from the Benghazi opposition, which complained of a failure of the NATO powers to supply any of the one billion dollars promised. Claiming to need more than \$3 billion to cover “salaries and other needs” for the next six months, the TNC’s Finance Minister Ali Tarhouni told Reuters, “We are running out of everything. It’s a complete failure. Either they (Western nations) don’t understand or they don’t care. Nothing has materialized yet. And I really mean nothing”.

In response, the June 20 meeting of the EU foreign ministers agreed to examine the possibility of making frozen Libyan funds available to Benghazi, “in compliance with the provisions of the relevant” United Nations Security Council Resolutions. There are no resolutions that can, in fact, be employed to legitimise funding one side in a civil war. Hence the EU statement added the caveat that “measures in this respect will respect the rule of law”.

The US government, for its part, issued a press release announcing that it had “delivered a second shipment of non-lethal aid to Benghazi”.

Funding the war is a bone of contention between the US and Europe, but fighting it is a source of far greater acrimony. It is, moreover, placing great strains on Washington’s closest ally, Britain.

Yesterday, Royal Air Force head Sir Simon Bryant warned that mounting the NATO air war against Libya was endangering the RAF’s ability to deal with future emergencies. Bryant said morale among airmen was “fragile”, and fighting spirit was being threatened by being overworked in simultaneous operations in Libya and Afghanistan. Last week, the First Sea Lord, Sir Mark Stanhope, made a similar warning that continuing operations in Libya beyond September would mean taking ships away from other tasks.

Treasury Chief Secretary Danny Alexander yesterday said that the UK operation in Libya may cost “hundreds of millions” of pounds, rather than the tens of millions initially claimed.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**