

NATO's terror bombing of Libya

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The relentless bombardment of Tripoli over the past 48 hours represents a new stage in one of the most naked acts of imperialist aggression since the wars of conquest launched by Hitler and Mussolini in the 1930s.

Warplanes struck the Libyan capital 62 times between Tuesday and early Wednesday morning. The daylight air strikes underscored that Libya, its air force and air defense system devastated by earlier attacks, remains virtually defenseless in the face of the US-NATO blitzkrieg.

At least 31 people were killed and dozens wounded. The bombings have demolished civilian government buildings, while damaging homes, hospitals and schools. Their intended collateral effect is to terrorize Tripoli's population of 1.7 million.

The sharp escalation in the bombing campaign comes just days after the deployment of British and French attack helicopters, widely seen as the prelude to a direct ground invasion.

Meeting in Brussels on Wednesday, a summit of NATO foreign ministers agreed to continue the 10-week-old bombing campaign "as long as necessary," while US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and the NATO secretary general, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, pushed for other NATO member states, including Germany, Poland, Turkey and Spain, to join in the bombing of the oppressed African nation.

In an earlier period, such air attacks were described as "terror bombings." They were carried out by Hitler's Luftwaffe against defenseless populations—in Guernica during the Spanish Civil War in 1937, in Warsaw in 1939, in Rotterdam in 1940 and in Belgrade in 1941—with the aim of annihilating the targeted country's armed forces, destroying its state and breaking the morale of all those opposed to foreign occupation.

In North Africa, similar campaigns of aggression and terror were waged by Mussolini's fascist regime against Ethiopia and—then, as now—Libya.

There is little to distinguish these earlier acts of aggression—for which leaders of the Third Reich were

prosecuted at Nuremberg—from the present US-NATO war. In both their aims and methods, they are largely similar.

The US-NATO war is being conducted under the pretense of enforcing a United Nations resolution authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect the country's civilian population. The leaders of the US and the major European powers all acknowledge that this resolution is a joke.

The real aim of this war, like those waged in the 1930s, is imperialist conquest. The US, Britain, France and Italy are all openly pursuing "regime-change" in Libya, seeking to topple the existing government of Muammar Gaddafi and impose a new client state that will work as the puppet of the major powers and the Western energy conglomerates.

They have seized upon the popular upheavals sweeping the Middle East and North Africa to subjugate this sparsely populated country, which is strategically located between the two Arab nations where the most far-reaching uprisings have taken place—Egypt and Tunisia. Their purpose is not, as Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have cynically claimed, to safeguard the "Arab spring," but rather to put themselves in a military position to strangle it.

Acting under the pretense of enforcing a UN resolution and protecting civilian life, the US and its allies have caused immense suffering among Libyan civilians. They have likewise jettisoned the essential contents of the UN's founding charter, which outlawed wars of aggression and upheld the principle of national sovereignty, barring intervention in the domestic affairs of member states.

They have carried out acts of aggression with the patent aim of assassinating Libya's head of state and destroying its armed forces and state infrastructure. In the process, they have bombed central Tripoli and parts of other cities to smithereens and have killed innocent men, women and children—not to mention untold numbers of soldiers, many of them conscripts as young as 17.

The NATO bombing has also turned thousands of Libyans and migrant workers into refugees, fleeing for their lives. Many hundreds have died in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean. There is growing fear that the war will trigger a humanitarian disaster, depriving the civilian population of food, water and medical care.

Those responsible for these acts--Barack Obama, David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy and others--are guilty of war crimes.

At their meeting in Brussels, the NATO foreign ministers were told that preparations must be made for a "post-Gaddafi Libya." It can be predicted with certainty that, if achieved, this objective will take the form of a second military campaign—a reign of terror against the Libyan population, designed to crush any resistance to foreign domination.

What has Libya done to the countries—including Denmark, Norway and Sweden—that are now raining bombs down upon its cities and population? The answer is nothing. They are joining in the imperialist onslaught as the price of admission to the "post-Gaddafi" carve-up of the country's assets, both its oil reserves and the tens of billions of dollars that have been "frozen" in Western banks.

In carrying out this criminal imperialist adventure, the US and NATO have been able to exploit the near total absence of an antiwar movement in either America or Europe.

In the four decades since the Vietnam War, organized antiwar sentiment has played a political role on both continents. On the eve of the unprovoked US invasion of Iraq in 2003, millions took to the streets across the globe in an unprecedented international demonstration against war and imperialism.

Yet now, with US imperialism waging three wars of aggression simultaneously, and with the major powers in Europe joining in, the continuing opposition to war felt by broad masses of the population finds no significant public expression.

This political phenomenon is to be explained in large measure by the evolution of an entire middle-class ex-left layer which comprised the leadership of the antiwar protests of a previous period. While taking different political forms—in the US, an ever-deepening integration into the Democratic Party, and in Europe, the trajectory of the Greens and other so-called "left" political formations—this evolution has common social and political roots: the increased wealth of this layer and its accommodation to imperialism under the thoroughly

hypocritical slogan of "human rights."

Prominent among this layer is a coterie of formerly "leftist" academics—personified by the University of Michigan Middle East historian Juan Cole—who virtually salivate over every new NATO bombardment, proclaiming each attack a blow for a "Free Libya." In the shameless pro-war propaganda of some of these professorial scoundrels, there is an unmistakable echo of the positions taken by a similar middle-class layer in Germany during the rise of Nazism.

A new antiwar movement, based on the working class and a socialist perspective, must emerge in response to the assault on Libya, the continuing crimes in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq, and new acts of militarism yet to come.

These wars are being carried out by a ruling financial elite in an attempt to offset the catastrophic consequences of the economic crisis gripping global, and above all US, capitalism. Militarism abroad is combined with a relentless war against the living standards and basic social rights of working people in every country. While the ex-left erstwhile leadership of the middle-class protest movement is moving to the right, this crisis is pushing workers to the left.

The struggle against war—for an end to the imperialist aggression against Libya, the withdrawal of all US and other foreign troops from the Middle East and Afghanistan, and a halt to the threat of new and even bloodier imperialist conflagrations—can be waged only as part of the fight to mobilize the working class politically against the profit system, the source of militarism.

To succeed, this movement must be based upon a new perspective and strategy of socialist internationalism, to unite the working class in every country in a common struggle to put an end to capitalism and begin the socialist reorganization of the world economy to meet social needs, rather than private profit.

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