

Kerry, McCain push Senate resolution to sanction war in Libya

Joseph Kishore, Barry Grey
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As the American military expands its campaign against civilian population centers, killing at least 19 people in a single incident on Monday, Senators John Kerry (Democrat of Massachusetts) and John McCain (Republican of Arizona) have introduced legislation that would retroactively authorize the Obama administration's war.

More than 90 days into the war, the administration is now in open violation of the War Powers Act, which requires congressional authorization for military action within 60 days, and, failing that, the withdrawal of US forces within the next 30 days. Obama has flouted even this minimal requirement for oversight of executive war-making.

Amidst suggestions from some members of House of Representatives, primarily Republicans, that they might move to cut off funding for the war, Kerry and McCain are spearheading a drive to obtain a vote by the Democratic-controlled Senate sanctioning the military aggression. A vote is expected some time this week or next. According to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, the Kerry-McCain resolution has broad support from Democrats as well as many Republicans.

The resolution provides a legal fig leaf for the bombing of Libya to continue for up to one year. Of particular significance is its language, which asserts the broadest possible basis for US military operations.

It expressly authorizes the use of the US armed forces "in support of United States national security policy interests" in Libya. The aim is to set a precedent for expanding the basis for US military interventions even beyond the preemptive war doctrine laid down by the administration of George W. Bush.

That doctrine repudiated the post-World War II framework of international law, which incorporated the principles affirmed in the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders, outlawing war as an instrument of policy and permitting it only when required for self-defense.

The Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928, which formed the basis for the Nuremberg trials, expressly prohibits war as "an instrument of national policy" (and therefore also "national security policy interests") except in matters of self-defense. This pact remains a binding treaty under international law, and therefore is incorporated in US law as well.

Under Bush, the US essentially asserted its right to attack any country deemed to be a current or future threat to US security.

The Kerry-McCain resolution, echoing the so-called "Obama doctrine" announced by the president in his March 28 speech justifying the US bombing of Libya, goes even further, making the pursuit of "national security policy interests"—a deliberately vague formulation—the pseudo-legal basis for military intervention. It essentially provides a blank check for the president to launch future wars.

In his speech on Libya, Obama proclaimed the right to launch military action against any country whenever US "interests and values" are at stake. He included the US interest in "maintaining the flow of commerce," i.e., control over Libya's oil reserves.

These are barely disguised justifications for carrying out neo-colonial aggression and the plundering of the resources of targeted countries—acts that are defined under

international law as war crimes.

Also significant are the identities of the chief sponsors of the Senate resolution—McCain, the 2008 Republican presidential candidate who was defeated by Obama, and Kerry, the 2004 Democratic presidential candidate.

Obama defeated McCain in large part due to mass popular opposition to war. He is now in open alliance with the senator on Libya. McCain, for whom there are few countries not worth bombing, has sharply criticized members of his own party for threatening to cut off funding.

Kerry proclaimed that any move to cut off funding would represent a “moment of infamy” for the House of Representatives.

The nomination of Kerry in 2004 was part of a calculated effort by the two big business parties to exclude any political expression of popular hostility to war. He was nominated after the Democratic Party establishment, with the help of the media, sidelined the candidacy of Howard Dean, who had gained in the polls by making an appeal to antiwar sentiment. The “antiwar” Democrats quickly turned around and supported Kerry, who ran as a defender of the war in Iraq.

In 2006, the Democrats won control of Congress in large part due to opposition to war. They promptly voted to fund the expansion of the Iraq war.

Obama’s election two years later has been followed by the continued occupation of Iraq, the expansion of the war in Afghanistan, the intensification of the bombardment of Pakistan, drone attacks in Yemen, and a new war against Libya.

The media plays its appointed role in this normalization of illegality and militarism. Typical is an opinion piece published Sunday in the *New York Times* by veteran reporter John F. Burns under the headline “Delusion’s Last Stand.”

Purportedly based on first-hand observations and discussions with citizens in the besieged capital Tripoli, the article offers a defense of the war against Libya in the form of an unflattering portrait of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and recitation of the alleged crimes and abuses of

his government, past and present.

Of Gaddafi’s methods of rule, Burns writes: “For decades, Libya has had its ubiquitous secret police, its archipelago of Abu Ghraib-like prisons, and a chilling narrative of ‘disappearances,’ extrajudicial murders and summary executions, often after torture. The victims number in the thousands.”

Leaving aside the fact that the United States had for most of the last decade maintained close ties with Gaddafi, it is not the nature of the Libyan regime that is at issue in this war. From the earliest days of colonial conquest, the sins of native rulers were used as the pretext for the subjugation of weaker and less developed countries.

The issue is the nature of the US regime. The vast erosion of democratic norms and relentless attacks on working class living standards domestically is accompanied on the world arena by its turn to neo-colonial wars and the installation of stooge regimes to gain military advantage and control of vital resources.

The notion that the oppressed peoples of the former colonies have a right to oppose foreign attack and intervention, and that colonialism in any form is reactionary, has been largely abandoned by an entire layer of middle-class liberals and former radicals whose protracted movement to the right has brought them into the camp of imperialism. These pseudo-left apologists for Obama, echoing the pro-Democratic *New York Times*, champion the rape of Libya under the foul and false banner of “humanitarian war.”



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