

The US recognises Libya's Transitional National Council

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The Obama administration's decision to formally recognise the so-called Transitional National Council as Libya's "legitimate governing authority" is an unlawful act of political banditry, further exposing the imperialist character of the US-NATO war against Libya.

Announced by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton last Friday, it gives pseudo-legal cover for the US to steal billions in Libyan state assets and give them to the Benghazi-based TNC, which serves as NATO's proxy land force in the war. TNC officials have previously obtained funding by touring the US, Europe and the Arab Gulf states. Washington can now offer \$34 billion in Libyan funds frozen by Western banks.

The US recognition of the TNC is itself a violation of international law. Former US State Department legal advisor John Bellinger noted that the US recognition of the TNC "is especially unusual under international law because the TNC does not control all of Libyan territory, nor can it claim to represent all of the Libyan people ... International lawyers have viewed recognition by states of an insurgent group, when there is still a functioning government, as an illegal interference in a country's internal affairs."

There is a clear element of desperation in Washington's recognition of the TNC. The NATO war in Libya is now in its fifth month, yet it appears no closer to toppling the government of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi—due largely to the weakness and unpopularity of the TNC in the Libyan population.

US recognition of the TNC is the final refutation of Washington's initial claims that its goal in backing the

TNC was to protect Libyan civilians from harm at Gaddafi's hands. In fact, Washington aimed at regime change in Libya and dictating the policy of the Libyan government—at the cost of untold numbers of Libyan civilians' lives, as NATO repeatedly bombs Tripoli and other major Libyan cities.

The Western powers initially justified their intervention in Libya this March by cynically promoting the TNC as the leadership of a struggle for Libyan democracy against the Gaddafi regime. It was nothing of the sort. In fact, as press reports have made clear, the TNC is a disparate alliance of ex-Gaddafi regime officials, tribal chiefs, exiled businessmen and other operators including CIA assets and Al Qaeda operatives of the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG).

Such forces, hostile to the overwhelming majority of the Libyan population, could not play any role in creating a democratic regime in Libya. However, they could offer Washington and its European allies a chance of installing a client regime to further open up Libya's multi-trillion-dollar oil reserves to major oil firms, and to reassert their hegemony in a region shaken by the working class uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia.

With its formal recognition by Washington, the TNC stands even more exposed as a tool of imperialist intrigue. Hillary Clinton made clear last week that US had recognised the TNC because it had promised to do Washington's bidding. She said that the Benghazi leadership "has offered important assurances ... which reinforce our confidence that it is the appropriate interlocutor for us in dealing with Libya's present and addressing Libya's future."

Clinton claimed that the TNC had promised “democratic reform” and would use the seized funds in a “transparent manner.” This is absurd; even if the TNC’s reactionary operatives offered such assurances, no one could seriously believe them. The assurances Clinton sought no doubt involved commitments to give Western oil firms access to Libya’s reserves and open up its economy to major investors. As the TNC is utterly dependent on NATO military support against Gaddafi, it is likely that it also accepted demands that NATO military and intelligence assets be stationed in Libya after the war.

Remarkably little has been made in the US press of reports that about 500 TNC fighters are LIFG members. Many have experience fighting the US military in Iraq or Afghanistan. One LIFG commander now fighting Gaddafi under US-NATO auspices, Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi, told the Italian newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore* that he had fought in Afghanistan after 2001 before being captured in Pakistan in 2002 and deported to Libya, where he was imprisoned until 2008.

He said he had recruited “around 25” men from eastern Libya to fight in Iraq, some of whom “today are on the front lines in Ajdabiya.” He said his forces were not terrorists, adding that “members of Al Qaeda are also good Muslims and are fighting against the invader.”

This is a devastating exposure of the fraud of the so-called “war on terror.” Terrorists are declared “evil” and targeted for assassination in some cases—but in others, they function as useful tools of imperialist policy. Washington bases its policy not on some unwavering opposition to Al Qaeda, but on the changing calculation of its imperialist interests.

The US decision to openly move for regime change in Libya will have deep consequences internationally. After the formal re-establishment of US-Libya relations finalised by the Bush administration in 2003, Gaddafi was feted in Washington and internationally. Before the outbreak of revolutionary struggles in the Arab world this winter, he was an ally of the major Western powers. Virtually overnight, however, Libya went to

being the target of NATO-led regime change, with Gaddafi and his family facing repeated assassination attempts.

This extraordinary shift is a warning to governments and political movements around the world, which will have lasting consequences. Regimes such as Iran and North Korea, even if they were able to re-establish ties with the US as Libya did, must assume that in the long term, Washington’s declarations that it has peaceful intentions are not worth the paper they are printed on. More broadly, any political figure or tendency can be praised by the White House one day, and the target of assault and assassination by US forces the next.

Above all, the US-NATO war on Libya has exposed the various “left” and liberal political tendencies which backed the TNC and the NATO intervention in Libya on “humanitarian” grounds. They uncritically accepted claims that the TNC was an insurgent democratic movement that had to be protected by Western military forces at all costs. From France’s New Anti-Capitalist Party to the *Nation* magazine and US academic Juan Cole, these forces have proven to be nothing more than pseudo-left spokesmen for US imperialist policy. They now bear political responsibility for the violence inflicted on the people of Libya.

These positions were the polar opposite of the perspective advanced by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International. Based on an analysis of the class forces in the Libyan conflict, it warned that the US and its allies were preparing a colonial-style war against the North African working class—insisting that working class opposition to the Gaddafi regime would have to begin by adopting the most intransigent hostility to the imperialist forces controlling the TNC. This analysis has been vindicated.

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