

Fierce fighting continues in Tripoli

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Fierce fighting raged into the night in Tripoli Monday, even as leaders of the major Western powers proclaimed the end of the 42-year-old regime of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and maneuvered for position in the scramble for Libya's oil wealth.

After their surprisingly rapid advance into the Libyan capital, the armed groups backed by NATO have encountered stiff resistance from forces loyal to the Gaddafi regime. The crowds that initially greeted the so-called "rebels" melted away and streets remained largely deserted as the two sides exchanged automatic weapons fire as well as mortar and anti-aircraft rounds.

Heavy fighting continued around Gaddafi's fortified Bab al-Aziziya presidential compound, while smoke billowed over sections of the city. A spokesman for the NATO-backed Transitional National Council (TNC) based in Benghazi predicted that the fortified compound would not fall easily and fighting there would be "fierce." The huge Tripoli compound has been subjected to heavy bombardment by NATO warplanes.

While the TNC has claimed to control between 80 and 90 percent of the Libyan capital, reporters in the city have described the situation as "fluid," and few checkpoints have been set up to secure the streets.

BBC correspondent Orla Guerin reported that east of Tripoli "the battle is not over," and that the Benghazi-based militias had been blocked from entering the capital by loyalist forces holding the highway near the coastal town of Zlitan, about 80 miles east of the capital. While captured on Friday by the TNC forces, the town came under a counterattack from government troops on Monday.

Libyan government spokesman Moussa Ibrahim told journalists late Sunday that 1,300 Libyans had died in the capital over the previous 24 hours as a result of the fighting and NATO air strikes. Another 5,000 were reported injured.

While launched under the pretense of protecting civilians from the repression of the Gaddafi regime, the US-NATO war has since claimed far more victims than were threatened by Gaddafi's security forces and, in its final stages, has involved major war crimes, including the heavy bombardment and use of Apache attack helicopters in Tripoli, a city of 2 million.

The BBC quoted a Tripoli resident as reporting that the NATO-backed guerrillas were "breaking into people's houses, stealing everything." He predicted that the siege of the capital would be "a disaster for Libya and NATO."

While the speed of the NATO-backed force's entry into Tripoli was no doubt facilitated by the internal collapse of Gaddafi's corrupt and dictatorial regime, reports published Monday in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* made it clear that the advance of the "rebels" had been directed, both on the ground and in the air, by the Western powers intervening in the oil-rich North African country.

As the *Washington Post* reported, the success of the siege of Tripoli was the result of a strategy implemented by "British, French and Qatari special forces on the ground" as well as "an earlier decision by the Obama administration to share additional intelligence on the positions of Libyan government forces."

Citing NATO as well as US military and intelligence sources, the *Post*

said the operation was designed to "create a 'pincer,' driving forces loyal to Moammar Gaddafi back from all directions to protect Tripoli. In the process, government troops would provide clear targets for NATO air strikes and the roads would be clear for the rebel advance."

"The targeting shifted toward Tripoli over the last four or five days as the regime forces moved back...and the target set [in the capital] became larger," a senior NATO official told the *Post*. In other words, the function of the "rebels" was largely to push the Gaddafi forces into a position where they could be slaughtered from the air.

The report also makes it clear that the US played a crucial role in this process by providing NATO warplanes as well as French and British special operations units on the ground with detailed satellite imagery as well as intelligence intercepts from the National Security Agency, allowing for far more accurate and rapid targeting of Libyan government troops.

Asked about charges that, in violation of the United Nations resolution, NATO was acting essentially as the air force of the "rebels," the NATO official acknowledged that "the effect of what we were doing was not dissimilar."

The *New York Times* also quoted US and NATO officials who cited "an intensification of American aerial surveillance in and around the capital city" as the "major factor in helping to tilt the balance after months of steady erosion of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's military." The newspaper reported that "coordination between NATO and the rebels" had become "more sophisticated and lethal in recent weeks." It also credited the fact that "Britain, France and other nations deployed special forces on the ground inside Libya."

Meanwhile, the Pentagon released figures Monday showing that the US military had doubled its air strikes in Libya over the past 12 days. While between April 1 and August 10 US warplanes were carrying out on average 1.7 strikes a day, since August 10 they have risen to 3.1 air strikes, with close to half of them being carried out by pilotless Predator drones.

The cost to the US of the military intervention in the North African country is fast approaching \$1 billion, CNN reported Monday.

According to the most recent poll by the television news network, only 35 percent of the American public supported the war, with 60 percent opposing the US intervention in Libya.

Interrupting his vacation in Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts, President Barack Obama proclaimed that the events in Tripoli made it clear that "Gaddafi's rule is over" and called for an "inclusive transition that will lead to a democratic Libya."

The president vowed that Washington would be Libya's "friend and a partner." He continued, "We will join with allies and partners to continue the work of safeguarding the people of Libya." He said his administration was in discussion with NATO and the United Nations to "determine other steps that we can take."

The *Wall Street Journal* quoted US military commanders Monday as saying that, while they believe an international "peacekeeping" force will be needed in Libya, "The Obama administration has made clear to its allies that they shouldn't expect American troops to participate."

The *Journal* cited government officials who said the Pentagon “would have some political issues with Russia, China and Brazil.” The three latter countries abstained on the UN Security Council resolution authorizing the use of force and voiced opposition to the US-NATO intervention.

Among those calling for the US to put “boots on the ground” in the aftermath of Gaddafi’s ouster is Richard Haass, the former State Department official and current president of the Council on Foreign Relations, who was initially critical of the US intervention. In an opinion piece published by the *Financial Times* of London, Haass writes: “NATO’s airplanes helped bring about the rebel victory. The ‘humanitarian’ intervention introduced to save lives believed to be threatened was in fact a political intervention introduced to bring about regime change.”

“Now NATO has to deal with its own success. Some sort of international assistance, and most likely an international force, is likely to be needed for some time to restore and maintain order... Most importantly, US President Barack Obama may need to reconsider his assertion that there would not be any American boots on the ground; leadership is hard to assert absent participation.”

German Chancellor Angela Merkel also called for international action in Libya. “We must quickly create political structures which will enable a transition from the current situation into a peaceful, democratic and free society,” she said.

While Germany abstained on the United Nations Security Council vote authorizing the imposition of a “no-fly zone” in Libya and refused to provide warplanes for the air strikes, the country’s defense minister, Thomas de Maiziere, told the daily *Rheinische Post* that the Merkel government would consider sending troops for a “peacekeeping” operation after Gaddafi’s removal from power. “Should the Bundeswehr be asked to join in, we will review such a request constructively,” he said.

For his part, French President Nicolas Sarkozy invited the head of the National Transitional Council, Mustafa Abdel Jalil, to Paris for consultations, while Foreign Minister Alain Juppe announced that France would convene a meeting of the Libyan “contact group,” which also includes Britain, the US, Qatar and representatives of the UN and other international bodies.

In London, British Prime Minister David Cameron delivered a statement outside of No. 10 Downing Street proclaiming that Britain would do all it could to “support the will of the Libyan people, which is for an effective transition to a free, democratic and inclusive Libya.” The first priority, he added, was “to establish security in Tripoli.”

After praising the role of the British pilots who relentlessly bombed Libya over the past five months, Cameron added a note of false modesty: “This has not been our revolution, but we can be proud that we have played our part.”

On the contrary, the so-called “revolution” has in fact been a coup sponsored by the major imperialist powers working with the big energy conglomerates and executed by US, British and French military and intelligence. Using the upheavals in neighboring Egypt and Tunisia as cover, and a “humanitarian” mission as pretext, these powers launched a colonial-style war with the aim of toppling the Gaddafi regime and installing a more pliant client regime in Tripoli.

Behind all of the talk about aiding “democracy” and providing assistance, these powers and the major oil companies whose interests they promote are now scrambling to get as big a share as possible in a new carve-up of Libya’s oil reserves, the largest on the African continent.

A spokesman for the ACOCO oil firm created by the “rebels” with NATO’s backing announced on Monday that a post-Gaddafi regime would reorder contracts to the benefit of the Western powers and at the expense of their rivals.

“We don’t have a problem with Western countries like Italians, French and UK companies,” said the spokesman, Abdeljalil Mayouf. “But we

All three countries have billions of dollars in investments in Libya. Prior to the US-NATO war, there were 75 Chinese companies operating in Libya, employing 36,000 workers on some 50 projects. Russian companies, including the oil firms Gazprom Neft and Tatneft, had operated in the country, and Brazil’s state-owned energy conglomerate Petrobras and construction firm Odebrecht were also involved in major deals there.

“We have lost Libya completely,” Aram Shegunts, director general of the Russia-Libya Business Council, told Reuters.

“Our companies won’t be given the green light to work there,” he added. “If anyone thinks otherwise, they are wrong. Our companies will lose everything because NATO will prevent them from doing their business in Libya.”

Meanwhile, major European oil companies saw their stock prices rise precipitously on expectations that they would reap bonanzas from renegotiated deals with a NATO-installed regime in Libya. ENI, Italy’s government-created oil multinational, led the way with a 7 percent rise.

Italy’s foreign minister, Franco Frattini, reported that ENI representatives had already arrived in Libya to survey prospects for renewed exploitation of the country’s oil resources. Before the war, ENI had the largest operations of any foreign oil corporation in Libya. Frattini predicted that after a new regime was installed there would be “great opportunities” for Italian corporations.

Italy exercised brutal colonial rule over Libya from 1911 to 1943, killing off half the country’s population in its suppression of resistance.

The Houston-based Marathon Oil Corp. announced on Monday that it has also been in talks with the “rebels” about resuming exploitation of the Waha oil fields, located in Libya’s Sirte basin.

The British daily *Telegraph* reported Monday that “Both David Cameron and President Sarkozy are anxious to reap the rewards for the NATO air offensive by ensuring that British or French companies are in the vanguard of the international effort to help the new regime restore law and order and rebuild the economy.” Both governments, the newspaper said, are conducting a “dialogue” with the TNC on infrastructure projects and “lining up construction and other infrastructure companies to be ready with bids.”

In an article titled “The Scramble for Access to Libya’s Oil Wealth Begins,” the *New York Times* provided a frank justification for the US-NATO “humanitarian” war:

“Colonel Qaddafi proved to be a problematic partner for the international oil companies, frequently raising fees and taxes and making other demands. A new government with close ties to NATO may be an easier partner for Western nations to deal with. Some experts say that given a free hand, oil companies could find considerably more oil in Libya than they were able to locate under the restrictions placed by the Qaddafi government.”



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