

US, NATO plan Libyan “stabilization” as fighting continues

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Even as fighting continues in Libya, Washington and its NATO allies are preparing to “stabilize” the oil-rich North African country, including through the possible deployment of foreign troops.

Discussions on how to impose order in Libya and resume operations by Western energy corporations have taken place in a flurry of meetings over the past two days involving the US, Britain, France, Italy and the Benghazi-based National Transitional Council (NTC).

A NATO spokesperson in Brussels reported Wednesday that the Western alliance’s governing body had “provided the NATO military authorities with a set of political guidelines for a possible future NATO supporting role in Libya... in support of wider international efforts.”

The Associated Press quoted NATO officials as saying that the planning included an agreement that “NATO would not have any ‘sustained’ troop presence on the ground in Libya.”

This formulation strongly suggests that plans are being drawn up to send NATO troops into the country to restore order for a “limited” duration. Such a proviso does not rule out individual NATO members keeping their military deployed in Libya for a more protracted period.

British Ministry of Defense officials recently acknowledged that troops might have to be sent into the North African nation to “help keep order.” Testifying before Congress shortly after the initiation of the US-NATO war, US Navy Admiral James Stavridis, NATO’s top military commander, acknowledged that “the possibility of [the need for] a stabilization regime exists,” comparing a potential future NATO ground mission to the ones carried out in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Earlier this week, Reuters quoted an Obama administration official who said that plans included the US-backed Arab monarchies in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Jordan and Qatar organizing “a bridging force” of 1,000 to 2,000 troops for deployment in Libya once the regime of Col. Muammar Gaddafi was finally crushed.

Officials from the US and other NATO powers as well as these Arab regimes met in Qatar Wednesday to discuss “stabilization” plans as well as to negotiate with members of the self-appointed National Transitional Council about disbursement of some of the roughly \$110 billion frozen in foreign banks as part of the economic sanctions imposed against the Gaddafi regime.

While US financial institutions are holding some \$30 billion in

frozen Libyan assets, the State Department announced this week that it would propose releasing only between \$1 billion and \$1.5 billion to the NTC. Stuart Levey, a former undersecretary of the Treasury for terrorism and financial intelligence, told Bloomberg News that holding on to the bulk of the Libyan assets would provide “leverage to ensure the Obama administration gets the kind of government we’d like to see in Libya.”

Meanwhile, Mahmoud Jibril, the University of Pittsburgh-trained free market economist and former Gaddafi regime official who has been declared the prime minister of the NTC met with French President Nicolas Sarkozy on Wednesday and was set to travel to Rome on Thursday for consultations with Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi. Jibril has yet to set foot in Tripoli since leaving his government post under Gaddafi in 2010.

A meeting of the so-called Libya contact group is also scheduled in Turkey on Thursday to discuss “stabilization” planning.

One indication of what is being discussed at this meeting was provided by the release by a document entitled “Policy Options for Transition” by the Libya Working Group, which was formed by Chatham House, the London international security think tank. Top on its list were 1) “immediate reengagement with the police in Tripoli to help bring about the restoration of civilian order” and 2) “establish a process to collect weapons, as large sections of the civilian population will be left with arms.”

Similarly, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, during a trip to Benghazi, cautioned the Libyan “rebels” that they should not “disband settled institutions of the country such as the army and the police,” adding that the Benghazi-based NTC “have the same approach as us.”

What could be more revealing about the nature of what is being promoted in the corporate media as the Libyan “revolution” for “democracy” and “liberation?” With the supposed struggle against the “evil tyrant” Gaddafi not even over, the principal concern by the imperialist powers and their Libyan “rebels” is how to restore the monopoly of armed force of his police and army.

The reality, which has emerged more and more openly over the past week, is that the events in Libya are the not the result of a “revolution” or “people’s power,” but an operation planned and executed by US, British, French and Italian imperialism.

Seizing upon the popular upheavals in the broader region and hijacking the demonstrations that took place against the Gaddafi regime in Libya, these powers set out to conquer a country that boasts the largest oil reserves on the African continent in order to

install a puppet regime that would do the bidding of the Western energy conglomerates.

Amid the media euphoria that has accompanied the collapse of the Gaddafi regime, more has emerged about the real character of the operation to dislodge it. The British *Independent* Wednesday reported that the advance on Tripoli of NATO-backed forces based in the western Nafusa Mountains had been prepared by “an army of diplomats, spooks, military advisers and former members of the special forces.”

The newspaper reported as well that “groups of former special forces operatives, many with British accents, working for private security firms... have been seen regularly by reporters in the vanguard of the rebels’ haphazard journey from Benghazi toward Tripoli.” It might be added, “regularly seen by reporters,” but rigorously censored from the vast bulk of the coverage of the Libyan events.

The *Independent* added that contracts with these “dogs of war” were signed in Qatar and the UAE using “frozen” Libyan funds made available by the NATO powers.

The *Guardian*, meanwhile, reports it “has learned that a number of serving British special forces soldiers, as well as ex-SAS troopers, are advising rebel forces, although their presence is officially denied.” It added that “a number of SAS soldiers are now advising the rebels as they storm the capital, Tripoli.”

For its part, CNN, citing NATO sources, reported Wednesday that “Special forces from Britain, France, Jordan and Qatar on the ground in Libya have stepped up operations in Tripoli and other cities in recent days to help rebel forces as they conducted their final advance on the Gaddafi regime.”

The Associated Press revealed that even “some East European states” deployed “covert teams.” It reported, “Covert forces, private contractors and US intelligence assets were thrown into the fight in an undercover campaign operating separately from the NATO command structure.”

The *New York Times* reported that hundreds of rebels were sent to Qatar to be trained by NATO special forces troops and mercenaries, while the foreign troops armed and supplied the “rebel” forces in Libya.

As the *Times* report makes clear, the main function of these forces was to flush out loyalist troops who, if they attempted to block the “rebel” advance, were annihilated from the air by NATO warplanes and US hunter-killer Predator drones. As to how many bodies of these massacred troops litter Libya’s roads and countryside, the media once again keeps silent.

This then, is the real leadership of the Libyan “revolution.” In the front ranks is US imperialism, which just eight years ago conducted its illegal invasion of Iraq and continues to slaughter civilians in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

There is British imperialism, Washington’s major accomplice in these wars, which has brutally repressed the recent rebellion of British youth against conditions of poverty and social inequality.

The French government of Nicolas Sarkozy, which is spearheading racist attacks on Arab immigrant youth, is now the great liberator of Libya.

And there is the right-wing government of Silvio Berlusconi, previously among Gaddafi’s closest allies, which came to see

Gaddafi’s overthrow as the best means of securing Italian interests dating back to the colonial conquest of Libya consummated under Mussolini.

All of these governments are waging merciless wars against the social conditions and basic rights of working people in their own countries, even as they prosecute their supposed “struggle for freedom” in Libya. Both at home and abroad, they are pursuing the interests of finance capital. On display in Libya are the machinations of imperialism, aptly described by Lenin as “reaction all down the line.”

To find parallels to this filthy campaign, one has reach back to the 1930s and the Italian fascist conquest of Abyssinia or the “crusade for the national liberation” of Spain conducted by Francisco Franco, with the invaluable aid of the German Luftwaffe.

Yet, the imperialists have enjoyed the support of a whole layer of ex-lefts and liberals who have helped promote this war of aggression as a campaign for human rights and the protection of civilians.

Representative of this social-political layer is the University of Michigan Middle Eastern history professor Juan Cole, who gained a following for his limited opposition to the 2003 invasion of Iraq, only to become the most enthusiastic supporter of the 2011 conquest of Libya.

In his *Informed Comment* blog, he now describes himself as someone “who has actually heard briefings in Europe from foreign ministries and officers of NATO members” and who provides advice to Washington about “how to avoid Bush’s Iraq mistakes in Libya.” In other words, this intellectual scoundrel is offering tips to US imperialism about how it can successfully establish neocolonial control over an Arab country. He, like others, is fully integrating himself into the imperialist state, while working to provide it with a “left” cover.

Such efforts will not suffice. And the current triumphalism over the Libyan war together with the salivating of the major powers over expected oil profits will not resolve the crisis of US and world capitalism. Like the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan before it, the current imperialist adventure in Libya is paving the way for a debacle.



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