

The rape of Libya

Bill Van Auken
26 August 2011

Five days after “rebels” entered Tripoli, under the cover of NATO bombing and led by foreign special forces, the abject criminality of imperialism’s takeover of Libya is becoming increasingly evident.

Fighting continues to rage throughout the Libyan capital, whose two million residents have been made hostages of the armed gangs and Western special forces troops that have seized control of the city’s streets.

The focus of NATO operations has become a frantic effort to hunt down and murder Muammar Gaddafi, who has ruled the country for 42 years. A \$2 million bounty has been placed on his head, and the British media now openly boast that SAS special forces troops are leading the search for him and his family. A vast array of US armed Predator drones, AWACS spy planes and other surveillance equipment has been concentrated on the North African country to facilitate the manhunt.

The pretense that the US and its European NATO allies were intervening in Libya to “protect civilians and civilian populated areas from threat of attack,” as stated in the United Nations Security Council resolution, has effectively been abandoned. Behind the fig leaf of this resolution the naked imperialist and colonial character of the war has emerged.

The Security Council’s stipulations that ground troops not be introduced into the country, that an arms embargo be kept in place and that mercenaries be prevented from entering Libya have all been flouted in this criminal operation to seize control of an oil-rich former colony and loot its resources. There is barely any attempt to hide the fact that special forces, intelligence agents and mercenary military contractors have organized, armed and led the “rebels”, who have not made a single advance without the prior annihilation of government security forces by NATO warplanes.

After being terrorized for five months by NATO bombs and missiles, the people of Tripoli are now facing sudden death and a looming humanitarian catastrophe as a result of the NATO campaign to “protect civilians”.

Kim Sengupta of the *Independent* reported Thursday from the Tripoli neighborhood of Abu Salim, which the “rebels” stormed under the cover of NATO air strikes. Known as a pro-Gaddafi area, its residents have been subjected to a reign of terror.

“There was no escape for the residents of Abu Salim, trapped as the fighting spread all around them,” Sengupta reported. “In the corner of a street, a man who was shot in the crossfire, the back of his blue shirt soaked in blood, was being carried away by three others. ‘I know that man, he is a shopkeeper,’ said Sama Abdessalam Bashti, who had just run across the road to reach his home. ‘The rebels are attacking our homes. This should not be

happening.

“‘The rebels are saying they are fighting government troops here, but all those getting hurt are ordinary people, the only buildings being damaged are those of local people. There has also been looting by the rebels, they have gone into houses to search for people and taken away things. Why are they doing this?’”

Asked why local residents were resisting the NATO-led force’s takeover of the city, Mohammed Selim Mohammed, a 38-year-old engineer, told the *Independent*, “Maybe they just do not like the rebels. Why are people from outside Tripoli coming and arresting our men?”

Meanwhile, other reports laid bare war crimes carried out by NATO and its local agents on the ground in Tripoli. Both the Associated Press and Reuters news agencies documented a massacre perpetrated against Gaddafi supporters in a square adjacent to the presidential compound that was stormed and looted on Tuesday.

“The bodies are scattered around a grassy square next to Moammar Gadhafi’s compound of Bab al-Aziziya. Prone on grassy lots as if napping, sprawled in tents. Some have had their wrists bound by plastic ties,” AP reported.

“The identities of the dead are unclear but they are in all likelihood activists that set up an impromptu tent city in solidarity with Gadhafi outside his compound in defiance of the NATO bombings.”

AP said that the grisly discovery raised “the disturbing specter of mass killings of noncombatants, detainees and the wounded.”

Among the bodies of the executed the report added were several that “had been shot in the head, with their hands tied behind their backs. A body in a doctor’s green hospital gown was found in the canal. The bodies were bloated.”

Reporting from the same killing field, Reuters counted 30 bodies “riddled with bullets”. It noted that “Five of the dead were at a field hospital nearby, with one in an ambulance strapped to a gurney with an intravenous drip still in his arm.” Two of the bodies, it said, “were charred beyond recognition.”

Amnesty International has raised urgent concerns about the killing, torture and brutalization of people being rounded up by the “rebels,” particularly African migrant workers who have been singled out for retribution because of the color of their skin.

In a report from a makeshift detention camp set up by the NATO-led forces in a Tripoli school, Amnesty stated:

“In an overcrowded cell, where some 125 people were held with barely enough room to sleep or move, a boy told Amnesty International how he had responded to calls by al-Gaddafi’s government for volunteers to fight the opposition.

“He said that he was driven to a military camp in Az-Zawiya, where he was handed a Kalashnikov rifle that he did not know how to use.

“He told Amnesty International: ‘When NATO bombed the camp around 14 August, those who survived fled. I threw my weapon on the ground, and asked for refuge in a home nearby. I told the owners what happened, and I think they called the revolutionaries [thuuwar], because they came shortly after.

“They shouted for me to surrender. I put my hands up in the air. They made me kneel on the ground and put my hands behind my head. Then one told me to get up. When I did, he shot me in the knee at close range. I fell on the ground, and they continued beating me with the back of their rifles all over my body and face.

“I had to get three stitches behind my left ear as a result. In detention, sometimes they still beat us and insult us, calling us killers.”

A pro-Gaddafi soldier told a similar story, recounting that he was captured August 19 while bringing supplies to his unit. “He said that he was beaten all over his body and face with the backs of rifles, punched and kicked. He bore visible marks consistent with his testimony.”

Amnesty said that “rebel” leaders estimated that one-third of the detainees were “foreign mercenaries,” meaning sub-Saharan Africans. “When Amnesty International spoke to several of the detainees, however, they said they were migrant workers. They said that they had been taken at gunpoint from their homes, workplaces and the street on account of their skin colour.” Several said that they feared for their lives and that guards had told them that they would be “eliminated or else sentenced to death.”

Among those detained were a family of five from Chad, including a minor, who were taken off of a truck while being driven to a farm to collect produce. A 24-year-old man from Niger who had worked in Libya for five years told Amnesty that armed men had seized him from his home, handcuffed and beaten him and thrown him into the trunk of a car. “I am not at all involved in this conflict,” he said. “All I wanted to do was to make a living. But because of my skin colour, I find myself here, in detention. Who knows what will happen to me now.”

The human rights group also cited a report from a Reuters reporting team which saw a “rebel” pickup truck carrying three black men in the back. One of them told Reuters he was Nigerian. “He sobbed as he said: ‘I do not know Gaddafi. I do not know Gaddafi. I am only working here.’”

News reports and statements from international aid agencies warn of a humanitarian catastrophe in the city as a result of the NATO siege. Reporting from a local hospital, the *Telegraph* said: “As battle raged in the Tripoli streets hundreds of casualties were brought in, rebel fighters, Gaddafi’s soldiers, and unlucky civilians, laying next to each other in bed and even on a floor awash with blood, screaming or moaning in agony. Many died before they could be treated.”

The paper interviewed Dr. Mahjoub Rishi, the hospital’s Professor of Surgery: “There were hundreds coming in within the first few hours. It was like a vision from hell. Missile injuries were the worst. The damage they do to the human body is shocking to see, even for someone like me who is used to dealing with

injuries.” Most of the casualties, he said, were civilians caught in the crossfire.

The *Telegraph* reported that Tripoli’s two other major hospitals were similarly overflowing with casualties and desperately understaffed, as were all of the city’s private hospitals.

The aid group Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF) warned that the city is facing a medical “catastrophe”.

The group told Reuters that “Medical supplies ran low during six months of civil war [i.e., NATO bombardment] but have almost completely dried up in the siege and battle of the past week. Fuel supplies have run out and the few remaining medical workers are struggling to get to work.” The lack of fuel means that hospitals that have kept their power by running generators can now no longer do so.

Health officials in Tripoli report that blood supplies have run out at the hospitals and that food and drinking water is unavailable over whole areas of Tripoli.

Meanwhile the governments of Algeria, Venezuela and South Korea have all reported that their embassies in Tripoli have been attacked and looted by “rebel” gunmen. While the governments of Algeria and Venezuela had opposed the NATO invasion and supported Gaddafi, South Korea, a close US ally, had taken no such positions.

The universal euphoria of the US and much of the European media, which is “embedded” with NATO and its “rebels,” cannot conceal the brutal reality that a war waged under the pretense of human rights and protecting civilians has unleashed immense death, human suffering and destruction.

Far from a “revolution” or struggle for “liberation,” what the world is witnessing is the rape of Libya by a syndicate of imperialist powers determined to lay hold of its oil wealth and turn its territory into a neo-colonial base of operations for further interventions throughout the Middle East and North Africa.



To contact the WWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact