

Libya: The criminal face of imperialism

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NATO's assault on Libya, a criminal imperialist war from its outset more than five months ago, has descended into an exercise in out-and-out murder as special forces operatives and intelligence agents hunt down Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

From the beginning, the central objectives of this war have been to seize control of Libya's oil reserves, the largest on the African continent, and carry out an imperialist show of force as a means of suppressing and diverting the mass popular movements that only months earlier had toppled the US- and NATO-backed regimes of Mubarak in Egypt and Ben Ali in Tunisia.

"Operation United Protector," as NATO dubbed its military onslaught, would have been more accurately described as "Operation Imperialist Gang Rape." The US, Britain, France and Italy, each pursuing its own interests in Libya and the broader region, managed to unite for the common purpose of "regime-change."

To achieve this aim, NATO warplanes carried out over 20,000 sorties, destroying schools, hospitals and homes and slaughtering untold numbers of Libyan soldiers, many of them young conscripts.

Flouting the terms of the United Nations resolution authorizing "all means necessary" to protect civilians, NATO powers, including the US, France and Britain, sent in special forces troops, military contractor mercenaries and intelligence agents to arm, organize and lead the so-called "rebels," whose primary function was to draw out Libyan government forces so they could be annihilated from the air.

The pretense that this was a war to protect civilians has been exposed as a moral obscenity, with the death toll in Tripoli alone climbing into the thousands and NATO bombs and missiles continuing to fall in heavily populated areas.

One has to go back to the 1930s when, as today, world capitalism was gripped by a desperate economic crisis to find fitting parallels. Then, mankind was

stunned by the savage aggression unleashed in the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Hitler's backing of the Sudeten Germans to achieve the carve-up of Czechoslovakia, and the dispatch of the German Condor Legion to bomb Spain on behalf of Franco's fascist insurgency.

At that time, these violent acts of aggression were seen as part of world capitalism's descent into barbarism. Today in Libya, similar acts are proclaimed to be a flowering of "humanitarianism" and "democracy."

During that period, US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt appealed to the democratic sensibilities of the American people—while no doubt positioning the US for the pursuit of its own imperialist aims—by demanding a "quarantine" of fascist aggression.

He declared in 1937, "Without a declaration of war and without warning or justification of any kind, civilians, including vast numbers of women and children, are being ruthlessly murdered with bombs from the air... Nations are fomenting and taking sides in civil warfare in nations that have never done them any harm. Nations claiming freedom for themselves deny it to others. Innocent peoples, innocent nations, are being cruelly sacrificed to a greed for power and supremacy which is devoid of all sense of justice and humane consideration."

Those words from three quarters of a century ago read like an indictment of the Obama administration and the governments of Cameron, Sarkozy and Berlusconi.

The Nuremberg trials after the Second World War established aggressive war as the "supreme international crime, differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole."

This conception was incorporated into the United Nations, which barred "the threat or use of force

against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state.”

Yet today within the political establishment there is virtually no criticism of the aggressive war carried out by the NATO allies. The scoundrels of the media have fully integrated themselves into the imperialist war machine, literally stepping over corpses and concealing the camera-shy Western dogs of war to better fashion their propaganda about “revolution” and “liberation” in Libya.

The driving force behind the Libyan war is imperialism, aptly described by Lenin as reaction all down the line. It is a war that has been pursued in the predatory interests of finance capital. It is designed to produce what is being referred to widely in the financial press as a “bonanza,” not only for the major energy conglomerates, but for the banks and corporations, while underpinning the vast fortunes accumulated by the ruling elite by means of financial speculation, the driving down of labor costs in America and Europe, and the exploitation of low-wage labor the world over.

International gangsterism goes hand-in-hand with economic and political criminality at home. Aggression abroad is inseparable from the merciless assault on the living standards and basic rights of broad masses of working people in Europe, America and virtually every major country. While workers are everywhere being told that there is no money to pay for jobs, education, health care, pensions or vital social services, billions are expended to bomb and invade Libya with no questions asked.

A striking feature of the Libya war is the way it has mobilized behind it a social-political layer of middle class ex-lefts, liberal academics and former protesters. This is a process that has been developing over the course of several decades, accelerated by the demoralization of a section of this layer whose “leftism” leaned heavily on the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy and began to dissipate with the bureaucracy’s self-liquidation. Others rallied to the imperialist intervention in the Balkans, attracted then, as now, to the phony claims that the world’s greatest aggressors were waging a war for “human rights.”

Today, one would have to be blind not to see the profound shift taking place within this layer. There are the academic scoundrels like Juan Cole, the University

of Michigan Middle Eastern history professor who uses his reputation as a critic of the Bush administration’s war against Iraq to sell the Obama administration’s war on Libya.

In Europe, groups like the French New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) have used the war to forge closer ties with their own governments and promote the interests of their own ruling elites. They represent an entire stratum of the privileged middle class, which is being recruited as a new constituency for imperialism. Their politics are in all essentials indistinguishable from those of Obama and the CIA.

The war in Libya has won no significant popular support in any of the aggressor countries. Working people instinctively suspect that this war, like those that have preceded it, is being waged for the benefit of the financial oligarchy and at the expense of the broad masses.

The struggle against war and imperialism can be taken forward only if it centered in the working class. The fight against war and the struggle against the destruction of jobs, living standards and basic social and democratic rights are today inseparable. Militarism abroad and social counterrevolution at home have common objective roots in the insoluble crisis of world capitalism. They can be defeated only through the political mobilization and international unity of the working class in the struggle for socialism.

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