

Evidence mounts of atrocities by Libyan “rebels”

Patrick Martin
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A series of reports from journalists on the ground in Tripoli have provided evidence of mass killings by the NATO-backed forces in the Libyan civil war. These reports, which appear in publications largely supportive of the US-NATO intervention to overthrow the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, further expose the fraudulent claim that the imperialist war against Libya is driven by humanitarian motives and the desire to protect civilian lives.

The *Washington Post* carried a prominent report Saturday, headlined, “Revenge Killings Mount in Libya, Extrajudicial Attacks by Rebels Cast Shadow Over New Freedom.” The headline refers to the contradiction between the claims by the National Transitional Council (NTC), the new NATO-backed regime in Libya, as well as the Obama administration that what is taking place is a new birth of freedom in Libya and the reality of politically directed and in some cases racially motivated slaughter.

Post reporter Simon Denyer asserts that Gaddafi’s troops “executed scores or even hundreds of political prisoners this week, even as victorious rebel fighters appear to have carried out their own abuses.” He cites the testimony of Diana Eltahawy, Libya researcher for Amnesty International, who “described a record of abuse, torture and the extrajudicial killing of captured pro-Gaddafi fighters that has followed the rebels from east to west as they have taken over the country.”

The reporter himself saw five Gaddafi soldiers wounded and dying in a field hospital now patrolled by the “rebels,” without receiving food, water or medical attention, and 15 bodies, mainly of black Africans presumed to be Gaddafi supporters, left to rot in the sun outside the Bab al-Aziziyah compound where much of Gaddafi’s family lived. According to Denyer, “not all of them looked like ordinary battlefield deaths. Two

dead men lay face down on the grass, their hands bound behind their backs with plastic cuffs.”

McClatchy News Service reported the same gruesome scene: “The dead apparently had been pro-Gaddafi fighters, but they had not gone down fighting. Some had been shot inside their tents, possibly asleep, without shoes on. One had been shot inside an ambulance and another had been shot inside a field hospital, still hooked to an intravenous drip. Others had gunshot wounds in the back of their heads, fueling speculation of executions by rebel fighters.”

Patrick Cockburn of the British *Independent* described the same scene Sunday, under the headline, “Rebels Wreak Revenge on Dictator’s Men.” He wrote: “The rotting bodies of 30 men, almost all black and many handcuffed, slaughtered as they lay on stretchers and even in an ambulance in central Tripoli, are an ominous foretaste of what might be Libya’s future. The incoming regime makes pious statements about taking no revenge on pro-Gaddafi forces, but this stops short of protecting those who can be labeled mercenaries. Any Libyan with a black skin accused of fighting for the old regime may have a poor chance of survival.”

Amnesty International has confirmed that many of the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from sub-Saharan Africa have been labeled “mercenaries” by the NTC forces, by virtue of their skin color, and subjected to imprisonment, torture and summary execution.

One account of rebel abuses comes from Alex Crawford of Sky News, a British broadcast network owned by Rupert Murdoch that has enthusiastically backed the “rebels.” The correspondent was embedded with the anti-Gaddafi forces and accompanied a unit that marched from Zawiya into Tripoli. “We report it as we see it,” she said. “We saw Gaddafi fighters who

were tied up and executed. It's war. This is what happens. Rebel retaliations here are really upsetting."

The British news agency Reuters reported the finding of several mass graves in Tripoli, claiming they were evidence of "widespread summary killings during the battle for the Libyan capital." While attributing the worst single killing, some 53 bodies found in a burned-out warehouse, to Gaddafi's forces, the Reuters report continued, "Reports of cold-blooded killings by both sides have surfaced in the last few days, darkening the atmosphere in a city where many residents had greeted Gaddafi's fall with joy."

The *Los Angeles Times* on Sunday wrote of "the visceral violence of rebel forces hammering away at residential neighborhoods known to be strongholds of Kaddafi supporters. Rebel fighters use artillery and antiaircraft guns in such districts, which include Abu Salim, Hadba and Salahadin. At one point this week, rebels were firing assault rifles into residential apartment blocks in Abu Salim, where they suspected a sniper was holed up."

In other words, the NATO-backed forces are engaged in precisely the same indiscriminate firing of heavy weapons in residential neighborhoods that provided the original pretext for the NATO intervention, when Gaddafi ordered similar action by his own forces. The *Times* account ended by quoting a Tripoli taxi driver who told the newspaper, "I have a fear that one day we'll be like Iraqis, wishing for the days of Muammar Gaddafi."

The *Independent*, in its leading article Sunday, warned the National Transitional Council that the savagery in the streets of Tripoli would backfire politically. It was difficult enough for supporters of the intervention—like the newspaper's own editorial page—when they could claim that Gaddafi was engaged in slaughtering civilians, but "it will become almost impossible if a shift in the balance of power unleashes mass executions."

The British newspaper also identified Abdelhakim Belhadj, the newly appointed commander of the Tripoli Military Council, as a former mujaheddin who "had fought in Afghanistan alongside the Taliban and was an Islamist terror suspect interrogated by the CIA." Belhadj was a founder of the Libya Islamic Fighting Group, which became the Libyan affiliate of Al Qaeda after the 9/11 attacks.

A chilling picture emerges of the new regime being consolidated in Tripoli. It is being consolidated in blood, with massacres of civilians in pro-Gaddafi neighborhoods as well as pogroms of African migrant workers, under the direction of an Al Qaeda ally who now takes his orders from NATO headquarters and the White House.

The crimes being committed by the NATO-backed NTC forces demonstrate the hypocrisy of the propaganda campaign spearheaded by the Obama administration and its accomplices in Britain and France to justify the military onslaught against oil-rich Libya in the name of "human rights" and preventing a bloodbath.

Some of the journalists on the spot in Tripoli have been unable to close their eyes to the bloody settling of accounts that is taking place. That is to their credit, and it demonstrates as well the cynical and reactionary position taken by those "left" commentators in the United States and Europe who continue to justify the imperialist war against Libya and cover up its predatory character.

The events unfolding in Libya are an object lesson to the international working class. Those who held out the prospect of a "progressive" intervention by the imperialist powers to defend democracy and human rights are now politically implicated in unspeakable crimes. The only genuine and consistent opposition to imperialism is that conducted on the basis of the historic principles of the revolutionary socialist movement, as advanced by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party.

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