

Egyptian military junta deepens ties to NATO-backed Libyan opposition

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In recent weeks, the US-backed military junta in Egypt has increased its support for Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC), which is taking over power in Libya thanks to an intense NATO bombing campaign. The close collaboration between the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) and the NTC is part of a US-led counterrevolutionary offensive in the region, aiming to disorient the working class uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia and to intensify imperialist exploitation of the region.

The SCAF took power in Egypt on February 11 amid revolutionary struggles by the Egyptian working class. In the face of mass strikes and occupations of city squares, the Egyptian Army and its main backer, US imperialism, were forced to withdraw long-standing US stooge and dictator Hosni Mubarak. The SCAF—led by Field Marshal Mohammad Hussein Tantawi, Mubarak's minister of Defense for 20 years—replaced him.

Supported by all official political forces in Egypt—be it Islamist, liberal or pseudo-left—as a progressive product of the revolution, the counter-revolutionary junta and its Western backers launched a brutal offensive against the working class. It has issued a law banning sit-ins and strikes, attacked mass protests on Tahrir Square, cracked down on striking workers and put thousands of workers and youth before military trials.

As a further measure to contain the revolutionary movement, on March 19 NATO forces officially launched a war to topple the Libyan government and install the NTC, a body consisting of ex-Gaddafi ministers, CIA agents and Islamists. The Western powers sought to falsely pose as allies of the mass movement against dictatorships in the Arab world, while installing an even more subservient, pro-

imperialist regime than that of Colonel Muammar al-Gaddafi.

The SCAF junta supported the war against Libya from the beginning. On March 17 an article published by the *Wall Street Journal* reported: "Egypt's military has begun shipping arms over the border to Libyan rebels with Washington's knowledge." Officially the junta has been careful not to confirm its support for the NTC and the war in public, due to widespread hostility against foreign aggression among Egyptian workers and youth.

Now, the SCAF has publicly stated its support for the imperialist war in Libya. On August 22, Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohamed Amr officially recognized the NTC as the Libyan government at a joint news conference with NTC envoy Abdel Moneium al-Huweini, in Cairo.

Only a few days after the SCAF's recognition of the NTC, NTC leader Mahmoud Jibril arrived for talks with Tantawi. In an interview with the state-owned Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram*, Jibril spoke about the necessity of controlling "civil unrest" that could "lead to crisis" in Libya. He also proposed that Egyptian armed forces should contribute to an international mission deployed in Libya "to secure Tripoli and other areas."

Another article published by *Al-Ahram* cited NTC and Libya Crisis Management Committee (LCMC) member Abdel-Nasser Shamatta, who confirmed the Egyptian army's covert support for the imperialist attack on Libya: "The Egyptian army extended logistical support to the revolution in Libya, which cannot be ignored, and there was coordination since the beginning. There was also Egyptian aid that cannot be denied, especially medical caravans that came through the Salloum border crossing, and others. There was also

the media message and solidarity with the Libyan revolution declared by the new Egypt.”

Shematta added that there are plans for the Egyptian army to assist “in clearing landmines and creating a national Libyan army.”

Shematta made clear that the NTC and its SCAF allies completely accept the imperialist plunder of Libya: “priority for large projects will be given to companies in the West; the West has always been good to us, and we have to pay them back.”

Al-Ahram also reports that the SCAF wants to play a role in the reconstruction of Libya, writing that companies owned by the Egyptian military are also directly or indirectly involved in this process.

On September 4, Egyptian daily *Al-Shorouk* wrote that Egyptian Minister of Manpower Ahmed Borai has agreed to plans to send two million Egyptian workers to rebuild Libya, at the NTC’s request.

Magda Kandil, executive director for the Egyptian Center for Economic Studies, described the step as a “win-win” situation. She explained, “We have always said the situation in Libya was not helping Egypt’s already suffering economy, and we were concerned that lingering instability could continue taking its toll on Egypt’s economy.”

The division of labor between NATO, SCAF and the NTC in organizing the rape of Libya and the defense of Western imperialism is fully supported by all official political forces in Egypt, who also all supported the Libyan war from the beginning.

Essam El-Erian—the vice-president of the Freedom and Justice Party, the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)—said that he has no qualms at all about the NTC and feels that it was “propped up by the Libyan people to represent the revolution.”

Emad Gad, a liberal political analyst and founding member of the Egyptian Social Democratic Party, praised NATO, the NTC and the war against Gaddafi. He said: “If it wasn’t for NATO’s intervention, Gaddafi would not have fallen.” He dismissed any criticism about the imperialist intentions of NATO in Libya as “conspiracy theories.”

Amongst the most blatant supporters of the imperialist war against Libya are the Egyptian middle-class, pseudo-left groups such as the Revolutionary Socialists (RS) and the Egyptian Socialist Party (ESP). Karima El-Hefnawy of the ESP told *Al-Ahram* that she

understands the NTC’s motives and refused to call them “agents.”

Hossam al-Hamalawy, a leading member of the RS, said he must recognise the council’s legitimacy if Libyans decide to give it their support. In an attempt to hide the RS’s support for the imperialist intervention, he cynically stated that he hopes that the NTC “will have no future ties with NATO.”

In reality, the RS have promoted the NATO-backed NTC as “revolutionaries” since the beginning of the NATO-led war, collaborating closely with its supporters.

Thus, on May 14 the RS invited to its “Socialist Days” conference in Cairo Gilbert Achcar of the School of Oriental and African Studies and of the French New Anti-Capitalist Party-affiliated International Institute for Research and Education, an open defender of the war.

At the outbreak of the war in Libya, Achcar campaigned vigorously to support it. In an article posted on the NPA web site in March he wrote, “Here is a case where a population is truly in danger, and where there is no plausible alternative that could protect it... You can’t in the name of anti-imperialist principles oppose an action that will prevent the massacre of civilians.”

Such comments underscore the unprincipled and anti-Marxist outlook of the corrupt Egyptian political establishment, which is openly embracing and promoting the imperialist looting of Libya—while it continues to impose military rule on the Egyptian working class.



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