

Another NATO-backed interim government in Libya

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After a lengthy delay, the chairman of the National Transitional Council (NTC) in Libya, Mohammed Abdul-Jalil, announced the formation on Monday of a new “interim government.” Virtually all the current NTC ministers were reappointed, after Jalil admitted the council had been unable to come to any agreement over ministerial changes.

The NTC, a pro-imperialist proxy backed by the US and European powers, is deeply divided between tribal groupings, Islamists and defectors from the previous regime, all of whom are scrambling for power following the ousting of former Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi.

More than two weeks ago, the NTC vowed that “within days” it would form a “crisis government” to unify the disparate anti-Gaddafi groupings across the country. The last interim government had been dissolved in August following the still unexplained assassination of Abdul Fatah Younis, the former NTC military leader.

The sharp internal divisions are obvious. Last month, Jalil admitted that a “difference of views” had made agreement on the new ministers impossible. Mahmoud Jibril, the “prime minister” of the NTC, complained: “We are faced with the Libyan mentality that every tribe, every region, every city has a share in the new government.”

In a sign of continuing tensions between the rival factions, Jalil announced the new cabinet from the eastern city of Benghazi. The NTC has still not shifted its base to the capital, Tripoli, as it is not clear what, if any, authority the council has over the disparate tribal

groupings and Islamists who currently control the city.

The ministers of defence, economy, oil, finance and foreign and internal affairs have all retained their posts in the new government. Among the minor changes, Hamza Abu Fas will replace Sheik Salem al-Sheiki as minister for religion. Abdel Ramman Al-Keissah will lead a new ministry in charge of assisting the families of those killed during the civil war.

Speaking alongside Jalil, “prime minister” Jibril promised to step down following the capture of Sirte, where fierce fighting is continuing. Jibril, the former head of Gaddafi’s national economic board before he defected to the opposition, has come under sustained criticism from tribal leaders and Islamists, calling for him to resign.

Jibril claimed he had submitted his resignation, but had remained for the sake of national unity. “When I feel that I am unable to perform my duties fully,” he declared, “I will be honest and declare this to the NTC.” Jibril lashed out at unnamed figures, saying they had conducted a “personal smear campaign” against him.

Jibril, of course, will no more willingly step down than any other NTC figure. The common accusation against him was that he has been out of the country too frequently—even though he is also the NTC foreign minister. He is closely identified with the NATO powers, which have relied particularly on Jalil and him to keep the NTC in line.

Mohammed Benrasali, a NTC member for Misrata, was quoted by the *New York Times* on September 25 as

saying: “Misrata, we will never accept Mahmoud Jibril.” Benrasali said some people wanted to charge Jibril with “treason” for holding on to power, according to the *Times*.

NTC tribal leaders from Misrata assert they deserve a larger stake in the new government than Benghazi-based leaders, in return for their role in fighting Gaddafi’s forces in Misrata. Other tribes from the Nafusa Mountains to the East and near the eastern city of Zintan are making similar claims.

A NTC member from the eastern mountain region told the *New York Times*: “Like Misrata, we are the ones who paid the highest price... So there is no question who is going to take the prime minister, the defence minister, the interior minister, the foreign minister, the justice minister.”

On October 3, before the announcement of the latest interim government, the British-based *Guardian* noted that Salem Jouha, a commander from the city of Misrata, was expected to become the new defence minister, in a bid to placate Misrata-based tribal leaders. However, Jalil said the ministry of defence would remain in the hands of Jalal Dghaili, who is known to have the support of Islamist groupings.

Islamists based in the capital Tripoli have also called on Jibril to step down and are seeking a greater share in the government. The military leader of the Islamists in Tripoli is Abdul Haqim Belhaj, who, in the 1990s, helped form the Islamist Libyan International Fighting Group, which was affiliated to Al Qaeda. Belhaj now leads the Tripoli Military Council, which exerts control over the capital.

In an article in the *Guardian* on September 27, Belhaj threatened unnamed NTC figures who he claimed were blocking Islamists from gaining power. “Their political myopia renders them unable to see the huge risks of such exclusion, or the serious ... reaction of the parties that are excluded,” he warned.

Within Tripoli itself, various tribal groupings involving in seizing the capital from Gaddafi loyalists are now jostling for control of the city. According to

Reuters, Belhaj told reporters that “the sense of safety is turning into terror” in the capital. He called on “all who care about the security and stability of Tripoli” to “work with us to bring it back.”

On Sunday, a military commander in Tripoli named Abdullah Ahmed Naker announced the formation of the Tripoli Revolutionists’ Council, in a direct challenge to the Tripoli Military council led by Belhaj. According to Reuters, Naker asserted that his council already controlled 75 percent of the capital, and was composed of 73 different factions totalling 22,000 men. Referring to Belhaj, Naker demanded: “Who is he? Who appointed him?”

The power struggle taking place between the rival factions of the NTC flows directly from the pro-imperialist character of the Libyan opposition, which has assumed power not on the basis of popular support, but through the active cooperation of the US and European powers who have sought to prop up the NTC as a pliant puppet regime.

In announcing the government on Monday, Jalil promised that it would be dissolved and replaced by a further one after the fall of Sirte—paving the way for elections. The pledge is no more credible than previous ones. NATO’s client administration is no more capable of meeting the democratic aspirations of the Libyan people than the Gaddafi regime and is deliberately dragging out the holding of any, even stage-managed, elections.



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