

Mass killings, arbitrary detention under new Libyan regime

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US-based Human Rights Watch yesterday revealed it had evidence of a massacre of 53 people carried out by anti-Gaddafi fighters in the devastated Libyan city of Sirte. The bodies, some with their hands bound behind their backs before being shot about a week ago, were discovered in Hotel Mahari, in Sirte's District 2.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) noted: "The bloodstains on the grass directly below the bodies, bullet holes visible in the ground, and the spent cartridges of AK-47 and FN-1 rifles scattered around the site strongly suggest that some, if not all of the people, were shot and killed in the location where they were discovered."

Local people identified two of the murdered men as a former Gaddafi government official and a military officer, but reported that many others were Sirte residents who had attempted to flee as the NATO-backed "rebel" forces were laying waste to the city. The HRW statement continued: "Other victims were possibly released from Ibn Sina Hospital in Sirte, they said, after being treated for conflict-related injuries. The claim that some of the victims had been released from the hospital is consistent with the discovery of bandaged wounds on some of the bodies."

The hotel was under the control of anti-Gaddafi forces from Misrata when the 53 people were killed. Graffiti on the walls indicated that five militia groups had occupied the building.

The mass killing was committed in the final stage of the NATO-enforced siege of Sirte, which involved the unlawful firing of mortars, rockets, and other missiles into civilian areas. Not a single building in the city avoided being hit, and large areas were reduced to rubble. The operation culminated in the savage killing of Muammar Gaddafi and the massacre of his aides, guards and his son Mo'tassim.

HRW reported yesterday: "At the site where Muammar Gaddafi was captured, we found the remains of at least 95 people who had apparently died that day. The vast majority had apparently died in the fighting and NATO strikes prior to Gaddafi's capture, but between six and ten of the dead appear to have been executed at the site with gunshot wounds to the head and body."

Further details are emerging about the mistreatment and torture of Gaddafi before he was shot through the head by a "rebel" fighter. Video footage taken after his capture and before his execution, published on the *GlobalPost* website, appears to show Gaddafi being sodomised with an object by one of the militiamen. *GlobalPost*'s Tracey Shelton said: "There is some question as to whether the instrument was a knife from the end of a gun, which Libyans call a Bicketti, or a utility tool known as a Becker Knife and Tool, which is popularly known as a BKT."

The barbaric conclusion to the NATO military campaign in Libya underscores the fraud of the declared "liberation" of the country. The Transitional National Council (TNC) has been installed as the puppet administration of Washington and its European allies, through a neo-colonial war that was waged in violation of international law. Its purpose was to bolster the imperialist powers' geo-strategic standing throughout the region and to give them control over Libya's lucrative oil reserves.

TNC chairman Mustafa Abdel-Jalil yesterday announced a committee of inquiry to investigate the circumstances of Gaddafi's death—but this will be nothing but a whitewash. Jalil has maintained that Gaddafi was either killed in "crossfire," or, even more absurdly, that he was shot by his own staffers and loyalists.

Jalil and other TNC officials are yet to respond to reports detailing the arbitrary detention and torture of thousands of political prisoners, alleged Gaddafi supporters and fighters.

The *Washington Post* noted Sunday that under international law, combatants in civil war must be released after the fighting ends unless they have committed crimes such as attacking civilians. Under the TNC, however, the *Post* reported: “Nearly 7,000 prisoners of war are packed into dingy, makeshift jails around Libya, where they have languished for weeks without charges and have faced abuse and even torture, according to human rights groups and interviews with the detainees.”

The TNC is a self-appointed body, largely comprised of senior ex-Gaddafi regime officials, different Islamist forces and Western intelligence assets. Its installation as the new Libyan government has nothing to do with “democracy,” as claimed by US President Barack Obama, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and Britain’s David Cameron.

Part of the “liberation” speech on Sunday delivered by Jalil, Gaddafi’s former justice minister, was an appeal to the Islamist forces within the disparate coalition that worked with NATO against the previous government. Jalil declared Libya an “Islamic state.” Insisting that any “law that runs contrary to the Islamic principles of the Islamic Shariah was legally void,” he decreed there would no prohibition of polygamy and that usury would be banned.

Behind the official rhetoric about a “liberated” Libya, the major powers are proceeding with their carve-up of the oil-rich state. Little pretence is being made by the governments involved that the so-called reconstruction of Libya is anything more than an oil and cash grab.

Britain’s defence secretary, Philip Hammond, told the BBC: “I would expect British companies, even British sales directors, [to be] packing their suitcases and looking to get out to Libya and take part in the reconstruction of that country as soon as they can... Libya is a relatively wealthy country with oil reserves, and I expect there will be opportunities for British and other companies to get involved.”

Daniel Kawczynski—a parliamentarian with Britain’s ruling Conservative Party who serves as chairman of the All Party group for Libya—spelled out the mercenary calculations of the major powers in even

blunter terms. Demanding that the new Libyan administration foot the bill for Britain’s bombing raids during the NATO campaign, Kawczynski declared: “Libya is clearly not a country without means. We should not forget that in helping to free the people of Libya from oppression, we have also helped free an economy rich in natural resources that exported over \$34 billion worth of oil products in 2009 and had a GDP estimated at over \$85 billion.”

British, French and other European corporate executives have already travelled to Tripoli and Benghazi in delegations sponsored by their national governments’ trade and investment departments. The British government body, UK Trade & Investment, has estimated that oil and gas contracts—as well as projects involving reconstruction, civil engineering, education and telecommunications—will be worth \$320 billion in the next ten years.

The US is aggressively pursuing its corporate interests. The *InvestorPlace* website noted yesterday: “Libya will be a multibillion-dollar payday for US stocks if the political situation stabilizes itself. And stocks like Exxon, General Electric, and Caterpillar will be first in line to benefit from the rebuilding.” Other identified “potential winners” included Chevron, ConocoPhillips and Halliburton.

Obama is being urged to ensure that these and other corporations are not outmanoeuvred by their European rivals. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham last week expressed concern that allowing Britain and France to lead the NATO campaign meant that “when a day like this comes, we don’t have the infrastructure in place that we could have.” He continued: “Let’s get in on the ground. There is a lot of money to be made in the future in Libya. Lot of oil to be produced.”



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