The “liberation” of Libya

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Libya’s NATO-backed National Transitional Council (NTC) is set to announce the supposed completion of the country’s “liberation” this weekend following the lynching of former ruler Muammar Gaddafi.

What is being celebrated with the speech to be delivered by NTC Chairman Mustafa Abdel Jalil, Gaddafi’s former justice minister, is not the liberation of the Libyan people, but rather the victory of the major imperialist powers in a war aimed at turning the clock back to the days of colonialism.

It has been achieved by means of a NATO bombing campaign that has reduced much of the country’s infrastructure to rubble and left thousands of Libyan men, women and children dead and wounded. Its final chapter, the barbaric siege of the coastal city of Sirte and the murder of Gaddafi, his son and other former members of his regime, only underscores the criminality of the entire venture.

These crimes provide the ultimate exposure of the pretense that the war in Libya was waged for “humanitarian” aims, to protect Libyan civilians from the Gaddafi regime. In Sirte, NATO provided air cover for a “rebel” army carrying out precisely the kind of bloody assault on a civilian population center that the US-NATO intervention was purportedly designed to prevent.

From its outset, the war has been one for regime-change, prosecuted by the United States and the Western European powers in pursuit of definite geo-strategic and economic interests. Their war aims included inflicting a sharp reversal on China and Russia, which had both concluded significant oil, infrastructure and arms deals with the Gaddafi regime, challenging Western hegemony in a key energy-producing country on the Mediterranean.

The NATO powers saw in the overthrow of Gaddafi the prospect of establishing far tighter control over Libya’s oil and gas reserves by major Western energy conglomerates such as BP, ConocoPhillips, Total and ENI. They also saw the installation in Tripoli of a wholly subservient client regime as a means of asserting military power in a region that has been convulsed by popular upheavals, both in Tunisia to the west and Egypt to the east.

The regime taking shape in Tripoli and Benghazi will be one dominated by gangsters, Western intelligence “assets” and bribed former Libyan officials, all offering their services in the re-colonization of the country. Only the most morally and politically corrupt elements of the so-called “left” in Europe and America can equate this filthy enterprise with “liberation” and “democracy.”

Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* responded Friday to the murder of Gaddafi with editorials urging Washington to take an aggressive role in asserting US dominance in Libya. The killing, the *Post* wrote, “must be seen as the beginning and not the end of Libya’s transformation.” Noting that Libya’s oil wealth can “pay for a US training mission for security forces,” the editorial argued that the US should “take the lead.” It added that Libya’s “stabilization under a democratic government could help tip the broader wave of change in the Arab Middle East toward those favoring freedom.” Here the word “freedom” is used in the traditional manner of US foreign policy to signify being under American domination.

The *New York Times* counseled that “More than money—thanks to oil, Libya is wealthy—Libya will need sustained technical advice and full-time engagement.” No doubt, such “advice” will encompass the rewriting of the terms of Libya’s oil contracts.

Both editorials include worried passages about the existence of dozens of “rebel” militias and the dispersal of Libya’s arms stockpiles, including surface-to-air missiles, implicitly supplying the pretext for continued US-NATO military intervention.

The brutal death of Muammar Gaddafi was a state murder that was openly demanded by Washington. Barely 48 hours before NATO warplanes and a US Predator drone attacked the convoy in which Gaddafi was fleeing Sirte, leaving him to the mercy of the “rebels,” Secretary of State Hillary Clinton flew into Tripoli and called for the ousted Libyan head of state to be “captured or killed”

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as quickly as possible.

Inspired by Nasserism, Gaddafi led a young officers' coup in September 1969. By the time of his death, he had long since abandoned any suggestion of revolutionary nationalism. In those early days, nationalist regimes like the one in Libya had come to power in a number of countries proclaiming a national and social agenda that was bound up with the mass anti-colonial movement.

In Libya, this included the overthrow of the corrupt monarchy of King Idris, which was completely subservient to US and British imperialism, the closure of Wheelus Air Base, the largest US military facility on the African continent, the striking of harder bargains with the foreign oil companies and the push for OPEC to use oil as a weapon, including by instituting embargoes.

It was this policy that led Henry Kissinger, then the US national security advisor, to push in 1969 for approval of covert action to kill or overthrow Gaddafi.

Like all of the radical nationalist rulers, Gaddafi sought to gain greater room for maneuver on the international arena by balancing between imperialism and the Soviet Stalinist bureaucracy, while utilizing a combination of repression and reforms to suppress social struggles within the country. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 left Libya and similar regimes scrambling to reach an accommodation with the imperialist powers.

In 2003, in the wake of the US invasion of Iraq, Libya sought a normalization of relations with the West, renouncing any ambitions toward nuclear weapons and condemning terrorism, while collaborating with the CIA in the global crusade against Al Qaeda. Once he had taken this course, Gaddafi was courted by Washington and every major power in Western Europe for oil deals, arms contracts and other lucrative agreements.

Nevertheless, the imperialist powers never forgave Gaddafi for his early radicalism and never trusted him. Thus the same political figures who had fawned over him not so long ago gloated over his grisly murder.

Told of Gaddafi's death on Thursday, Hillary Clinton—who in 2009 had welcomed the Libyan ruler's murdered son Moatessem to the State Department—laughed and declared, "We came, we saw, he died."

This sums up the gangsterism of the American government, headed by a president who has gone before the television cameras three times in the last six months to claim credit for a state murder, in one case that of a US citizen, the New Mexico-born Muslim cleric Anwar al-Awlaki.

In his speech Thursday, Obama claimed that the murder of Gaddafi had proven that "we are seeing the strength of American leadership in the world."

This is nonsense. Assassination as a continuous instrument of foreign policy is a symptom not of US strength but of historic decline. It reflects the desperate and irrational belief within the ruling elite that acts of naked violence can somehow compensate for the profound crisis and decay of American capitalism.

The debacles produced by the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan have only laid the foundations for new and even bloodier wars. With Obama having used the assault on Libya to enunciate a preventive war doctrine that allows for US aggression anywhere that perceived American "values and interests" are at stake, such wars will not be long in coming.

The war in Libya, culminating in the murder of Gaddafi, has served to acquaint working people all over the world once again with the real character of imperialism, described by Lenin as "reaction all down the line." Predatory wars abroad in the interest of finance capital are one component of a counterrevolutionary policy directed ultimately against the working class. They are inevitably combined with a ruthless assault on both the social and democratic rights of the working class at home.

The fight against war and the struggle against the destruction of jobs, living standards and basic rights are inseparable. They can be won only through the political mobilization and international unity of the working class in the struggle for socialism.

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