

Former Tripoli Brigade leader Mahdi al-Harati outed as US asset

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An article in Ireland's *Sunday World* has drawn attention to relations between Mahdi al-Harati, former leader of the Tripoli Brigade of the National Transition Council which played a central role in the NATO assault on Libya, and an unnamed US intelligence agency.

According to an unattributed article November 6, €200,000 in cash was stolen from al-Harati's Dublin house a month previously.

The *Sunday World* reported that a criminal gang working the area found two envelopes stuffed with €500 notes during a raid on the al-Harati's family home, October 6. Jewellery was also stolen.

The article, apparently relying on police sources, stated that al-Harati, who has been a Dublin resident employed as an Arabic teacher for 20 years, claimed, when contacted by police, that the stolen cash was "given to him by an American intelligence agency."

The article continued, "Astonished officers made contact with Mahdi al-Harati who told them that he had travelled to France, the United States and Qatar the previous month and that representatives of an American intelligence agency had given him a significant amount of money to help in the efforts to defeat Gaddafi. He said he left two envelopes with his wife in case he was killed and took the rest of the cash with him when he went back to Libya."

Al-Harati's Tripoli Brigade was one of a number of military units put together in conjunction with the NTC to participate in the pro-imperialist overthrow of the regime of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. The brigade was formed in April 2011, following a trip by Al-Harati to Benghazi in the wake of the eruption of mass protests against Gaddafi in February 2011. From the first, the brigade appears to have been developed, and paid for, as a well-trained assault force, designed to

operate alongside NATO for an attack on Tripoli.

Coordinated by al-Harati and his Irish-born brother-in-law, Husan al-Najar, a building contractor from Dublin, the Tripoli brigade rapidly recruited a core of English-speaking Libyan exiles from Ireland, Canada, the UK and the US. These made their way to Nalut University in Libya, from where they recruited local opponents of the Gaddafi government. By August 2011, the brigade had over 1,000 fighters trained by Qatari special forces, equipped with light modern weaponry, uniforms, body armour, communication equipment. The brigade boasted an eight-man sniper unit.

Throughout the assault on Libya, Qatar has functioned as a US proxy, channelling vast sums of cash and military resources into removing Gaddafi and fashioning a regime more suited to imperialist interests.

The brigade was involved in the August assault on Zawiyah outside Tripoli and was one of the first units to enter and hold areas of Tripoli, which it attacked from three directions. It was reported as leading the shock assault on Gaddafi's Bal al Azizia fortress. After the fall of Tripoli, the brigade was given particular responsibility for guarding strategic locations and infrastructure in the city while hunting down remaining Gaddafi supporters.

Al-Harati became the deputy leader of the NTC's military council, under former Libyan Islamic Fighting Group leader Abdelhakim Belhaj. He gave press interviews in September on the NTC's perception of the military situation around one of Gaddafi's last outposts, Bani Walid.

He also informed *Al Jazeera* of his view that the various militias and brigades were being "integrated into the Libyan army" and members of the former regime's police force were being "summoned" to rejoin the new government's police.

Al-Harati seems to have lost out during feuds between Belhaj's Qatar-backed supporters and rival regional and religious militias that led to the resignation of Mahmoud Jibril as NTC leader and Libyan prime minister in October. Feuding, reflecting both squabbles for influence and oil money and generalised distrust of the new regime, saw heavily armed militias from Zintan, Tripoli and Nalut exchange gunfire in Tripoli and the Nafusa mountains.

On October 5, CNN reported a tense press conference where al-Harati threatened, "Whoever doesn't recognize the legitimacy of the (military) council doesn't recognize the legitimacy of the national council."

Immediately after the press conference, an NTC spokesman told CNN that members of the Zintan-based Kekaa militia tried to arrest Belhaj and al-Harati.

Al-Harati resigned his position shortly after, around the time when cash was seized from his Dublin house—the timing of which may or may not be a coincidence. The *Sunday World* claimed Irish travellers carried out the robbery.

Jibril has subsequently been replaced by Abdurrahim al-Keib, a Tripoli-born former engineer and oil industry professor, someone deemed more acceptable to both the imperialist powers and, due to his lack of a political power base, to the contending militia factions.

A significant feature of al-Harati's activities are his relations with so-called "anti-war" groups in Ireland—an indication of the extent to which the ex-lefts internationally are dripping with Libyan blood.

Prior to his Libyan adventure, al-Harati was quite well known in such circles in Dublin. He was on board the Challenger 1 vessel in its 2010 voyage to Gaza as part of the Free Gaza Flotilla, which was brutally assaulted by Israeli forces. Al-Harati reportedly suffered a diabetic attack during the Israeli raids, in which nine people were killed, and was hospitalised. He returned to Dublin a hero.

The Irish Anti-War Movement (IAWM) unequivocally called for the NTC to be armed and internationally recognised.

On March 28 the IAWM, whose steering committee includes Richard Boyd Barrett of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), stated that the "best use that Egypt could make of the \$1.3bn of military aid that it gets from the US would be to arm the Libyan rebels".

The same statement called on the newly installed Fine Gael/Labour government to recognise the NTC, something they did in August.

Throughout the summer, when al-Harati and his brigade were undergoing combat training in Nalut and being lauded in the mainstream Irish press, the IAWM maintained complete silence on the Tripoli Brigade's activities. Nor have they made any comment on the *Sunday World* report.

Instead, IAWM statements and articles have maintained that despite unfortunate episodes, the NTC has in fact "liberated" Libya. An October 26 posting on their website from the SWP's Eamonn McCann sought to excuse the public lynching of Gaddafi on the basis that "the maiming and killing wasn't done in cold blood."

Nor do the IAWM's pro-imperialist activities stop at Libya. The IAWM's web site currently hosts a petition calling for the German and Turkish governments to use their leverage with the government of Russia to force it to drop support for the Assad regime in Syria.

This position, notwithstanding the repressive character of Assad's government, serves only to assist in US, UK, French and Turkish efforts to emulate their Libyan military model in Syria, at the expense of triggering a new and even more disastrous regional bloodbath.



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