

Torture in Libya: The ugly reality of imperialist “liberation”

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Multiple reports of widespread torture in the detention centers run by the new imperialist-backed Libyan regime and NATO’s “rebels” give the lie to all those who justified last year’s war in the name of human rights and “liberation.”

It is just over 100 days since the lynch-mob murder of Libya’s former ruler Muammar Gaddafi, a grisly act that marked the culmination of the eight-month US-NATO war. At the time, President Barack Obama took to the White House Rose Garden to hail the assassination as the advent of “a new and democratic Libya.”

The evidence and testimony provided by aid groups and human rights organizations over the past week paint a very different picture. A criminal imperialist war that ended with a brutal murder has, unsurprisingly, yielded a regime of terror, torture and repression.

According to a report released by Amnesty International (AI), “torture is being carried out by officially recognized military and security entities as well as by a multitude of armed militias operating outside of any legal framework.”

The organization reported numerous cases of detainees having been tortured to death. It also reported meeting with others who bore “visible marks indicating torture in recent days and weeks.” AI continued: “Their injuries included open wounds on the head, limbs, back and other parts of the body.”

Prisoners are “suspended in contorted positions, beaten for hours with whips, cables, plastic hoses,

metal chains and bars and wooden sticks, and given electric shocks with live wires and Taser-like electro-shock weapons,” according to the Amnesty report. A spokesperson for the organization described the failure of the US- and NATO-backed National Transitional Council (NTC) to conduct any investigation, much less take any action against the torture, as “horrifying.”

Amnesty’s findings were corroborated by UN human rights chief Navi Pillay, who told the Security Council recently that torture is widespread. “There’s torture, extrajudicial executions, rape of both men and women,” she said.

Pillay expressed special concern for the fate of sub-Saharan African immigrants and black Libyans, who have been rounded up by militias as suspected Gaddafi supporters solely because of the color of their skin.

The medical aid group Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders—MSF) has pulled its volunteers out of detention centers in the Libyan city of Misrata because they were asked to treat torture victims solely for the purpose of making them fit to endure yet another interrogation session. “Our role is to provide medical care to war casualties and sick detainees, not to repeatedly treat the same patients between torture sessions,” said the group’s general director, Christopher Stokes. He added that MSF repeatedly raised the issue with Libyan authorities, but no action was taken.

The brutality and torture meted out by the “rebels” who were brought to power by NATO bombings and special forces “advisers” provoked an uprising last month in the town of Bani Walid, where citizens took

up arms to free prisoners and drive out the militia stationed there by the NTC.

All of these developments have been studiously ignored by the coterie of “left” organizations and liberal academics and journalists who played such a critical role in promoting and justifying the US-NATO war for regime-change in Libya.

Less than a year ago, they warned of a supposedly imminent massacre in Benghazi, decried the repression of the Gaddafi regime, and invoked the doctrine of “responsibility to protect” civilians as grounds for a military intervention by the imperialist powers in the former colonial country.

Academic scoundrels like Juan Cole of the University of Michigan, who traded on his inflated reputation as a critic of the Iraq war to sell the war in Libya, as well as pseudo-left groups ranging from the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France to the Left Party in Germany and the International Socialist Organization in the US all provided a critical service to imperialism, supporting the pro-imperialist “rebel” leaders and helping to dress up a naked intervention for oil and geo-strategic interests as a crusade to protect civilians and promote democracy and human rights.

That these pseudo-lefts and liberals can now turn a blind eye toward—and provide a cover for—torture in Libya has an unmistakable significance. This socio-political layer has moved decisively into the camp of imperialism.

Their politics reflect the interests of better-off sections of the middle class. Under conditions of unprecedented social polarization, which has been intensified by the global capitalist crisis, they are coalescing around their respective ruling elites and are prepared to defend whatever methods are required to defend their rule. Libya stands as a warning. If this layer and these organizations countenance repression and torture to uphold the interests of imperialism abroad, they will not shrink from backing similar methods in confronting the working class at home.

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