

The real significance of Libya's elections

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The elections for a new General National Congress in Libya are an attempt to provide a “democratic” facade for an authoritarian and undemocratic government, subservient to the interests of the major Western powers, corporations and banks.

The NATO-installed National Transitional Council (NTC) ensured that candidacy was restricted to a relatively small layer approved by the Electoral Commission.

Indications are that Mahmoud Jibril's Alliance of National Forces has won the largest number of votes for the new 200-seat Congress on a turnout of just over 60 percent of the 80 percent of Libyans registered to vote. How this will be reflected in the actual number of seats will only become clear when the results are officially announced. Jibril will attempt to form a coalition to replace the NTC that was installed through a bloody imperialist NATO-led military offensive to depose the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. But success is by no means assured given the deep political divisions wracking the country.

A chorus of official hypocrisy has greeted the election, with particular satisfaction expressed over the victory of the supposed “liberal” Jibril. US President Barack Obama called it “another milestone in the country's transition to democracy.” The European Union hailed “Libya's first free elections” as the “dawn of a new era.”

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared, “Last year, thousands of Libyans sacrificed their lives or suffered lasting injury in order to win the right of the Libyan people to build a new state founded on human dignity and the rule of law,” as if this were now a reality.

A pliant media has enthused over the outcome and concealed its real import. “Democratic transitions are invariably long and messy,” wrote the *New York Times*. Nevertheless, “The election is a huge step away from

the Qaddafi nightmare.”

After stating without irony that overcoming “the grievances of that time” will take “enlightened political leaders committed to tolerance, rule of law, accountability and fair representation of all Libyans,” the *Times* asserted that Jibril's offer to form a grand coalition is “a potentially encouraging sign of inclusiveness.”

All such reportage and commentary, invariably wrapped up in references to the “Arab Spring,” is meant to conceal the fact that regime-change in Libya was the political/military response of the US and European powers to the revolutionary uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, both of which border Libya.

Far from seeking liberation and democracy, the NATO powers set out to install a regime more directly answerable to their demands. Their aim was to either bring under their control or to actively suppress all oppositional movements directed against the region's innumerable corrupt regimes and to safeguard access to Libya's oil reserves—the largest in Africa—and those of the rest of the Middle East and North Africa.

The Mediterranean would be turned into a NATO-controlled lake, after securing regime-change in Syria and Lebanon, while Libya would provide a beachhead for future interventions in Africa.

Jibril is the living embodiment of this policy. US-trained, he was a protégé of Saif al-Islam Gaddafi, the son of the Libyan leader. He recommended himself to the Western powers because of his role as the former head of the National Economic Development Board responsible for the privatisation of state-owned enterprises and his readiness to abandon his former allies. With unrestrained cynicism, Britain's *Guardian* even said of Jibril that he “has the advantage of experience.”

When the NTC formed an interim government in March 2011 at the beginning of the NATO war on

Libya, Jibril was appointed as its head. He was installed as prime minister in August after a war that killed at least 50,000 and wounded another 50,000. The NTC's constituent parts—ex-Gaddafi regime figures, Islamists, CIA assets and tribal leaders—will still make up a significant portion of any new regime.

Libya is being torn apart by ethnic conflicts, tribal clashes and fighting between militias that has seen hundreds if not thousands of people killed since the end of the NATO intervention. There is a distinct possibility that the country may even break apart.

Benghazi, the centre of Libya's oil production and the so-called cradle of the revolution, has demanded autonomy for Cyrenaica and greater control over oil wealth. The elections were marked by violence, with the interim government deploying 30,000 to 40,000 security forces. Benghazi witnessed a 48-hour oil production stoppage and numerous attacks on election officials in protest at the distribution of seats in the new Congress, which is seen as ceding too much power to Tripoli.

An array of pseudo-left parties, intellectuals and academics such as Professor Juan Cole fully endorsed the human rights pretexts of the major powers for intervening in Libya and thus gave support to a war of colonial conquest.

This was not a matter of political naiveté, but a decisive and conscious lining up behind imperialism. They backed NATO because of a shared aim of averting the development of a genuinely proletarian revolutionary movement in the Middle East—a possibility they portrayed with undisguised scorn as an impossible dream. In the face of irrefutable evidence that the Benghazi movement had been co-opted by US imperialism from an early stage, these petty bourgeois elements came out in favour of a pro-capitalist and bourgeois movement, the NTC, whose victory—on the back of a NATO blitzkrieg—would inevitably subordinate the region more fully to the dictates of the major powers and global corporations.

Cole surpassed himself in his post-election apologies, saying that news reporting was “colored by what is in my view a combination of extreme pessimism and sensationalism.” The “election went very, very well,” he insisted, because “Among this generation of Libyans, democracy is really, really popular.”

Today, these layers employ the same political

justifications in regard to the Syrian opposition to support an ongoing campaign for regime-change designed to isolate Iran, push Russia and China out of the region and establish the hegemony of Washington.

The crucial lesson that must be drawn from Libya is the impermissibility of ceding the task of democratic and social renewal to any faction of the region's bourgeoisie. To do so only disarms the working class and oppressed masses and allows the imperialists to dictate events through forces that invariably act as their local proxies.

It is the task of the working class itself to overthrow the region's corrupt regimes and replace them with socialist, anti-imperialist and genuinely democratic governments—ruled by the working class itself in a United Socialist States of the Middle East.

Workers in America, Europe and the rest of the world must see in Libya a bloody portent of the disastrous consequences of the imperialist powers' renewed drive to seize control of the world and its strategic resources and markets. A new antiwar movement is needed—rooted firmly in the working class and the young generation and freed from the political influence of the petty-bourgeois advocates of humanitarian war—to challenge and oppose the predatory designs of their ruling elites on the Middle East and Africa.

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