

US evacuates Libyan embassy

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The Obama administration closed the US embassy in Libya Saturday and evacuated the staff in a military convoy, in a further humiliation for American imperialism in a country which was devastated by the US-NATO war in 2011.

The State Department ordered the embassy shutdown after fighting between two rival militias forced the closure of the Tripoli International Airport, the main gateway for travel to and from the Libyan capital. The embassy is located on the road to the airport, close to the battle zone. The State Department also issued a travel warning advising United States citizens to leave Libya “immediately.”

The international airport had been under the control of a militia based in Zintan, a mountain town southwest of Tripoli, but the Zintanis were challenged by an Islamist militia based in Misrata, Libya’s third-largest city. Dozens have been killed since the fighting broke out July 13.

The United Nations withdrew its staff from Tripoli two weeks ago, and Turkey announced Friday it was pulling out. Great Britain, which is still keeping its embassy open, advised British nationals against traveling to Libya and said that British nationals still in the country “should leave now by commercial means.”

The evacuation became the occasion for the largest display of force by the US military in Libya since the 2011 bombing campaign. Nearly 100 US Marines were deployed to guard a long convoy of vehicles filled with embassy staff, equipment and sensitive documents for the road journey from Tripoli to the Tunisian border, a distance of more than 100 miles.

A bevy of US warplanes, including F-16 fighter jets, surveillance aircraft and MV-22 Osprey quick takeoff and landing planes were in action as well. A Pentagon spokesman said that the operation was conducted “without incident” and was completed in about five hours.

The entire affair was a political humiliation, one that some US media outlets compared to the panic-stricken final withdrawal of US personnel from the roof of the embassy in Saigon at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. While the US Marine Corps anthem celebrates the elite combat force’s prowess on “the shores of Tripoli,” it did not have in mind guarding US diplomats burning papers and smashing computer drives before unceremoniously fleeing the country.

The speed and scale of the evacuation were clearly influenced by the events of September 2012, when Islamists attacked the US consulate and a CIA annex in Benghazi, Libya’s second-largest city, killing the US ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

The Obama administration has faced nonstop criticism from its Republican opponents over its alleged security failure. The political mudslinging has largely served to cover up the real issue in Benghazi: that the CIA annex, the main US facility in the city, was the center of efforts to ship Islamist militants armed from Gaddafi regime stockpiles to join the anti-Assad “rebels” fighting in Syria.

In other words, the Benghazi disaster was a case of “blowback,” in which CIA-trained and equipped Islamist terrorists turned their guns on their imperialist patrons, perhaps because of a dispute over the terms of payment.

Earlier this year, a longtime CIA asset in the Libyan exile groups, former Gaddafi general Khalifa Hiftar, launched a rebellion against the Islamists in Benghazi. It was under cover of the fighting between Hiftar’s forces and the Ansar al-Islam group that US special ops troops swooped into Benghazi and seized Ahmed Abu Khattala, a minor figure in Ansar al-Islam who has been portrayed in the US media as the mastermind of the September 2012 attack that killed the four Americans.

The Hiftar rebellion has become bogged down in eastern Libya, but the ongoing fighting reportedly contributed to the crisis in Tripoli that provoked the US evacuation. The Zintan militia was allied with Hiftar, while the Misrata militia is Islamist and loosely linked to the Islamists in Benghazi.

The US-NATO war in 2011, a joint operation between Washington and its European imperialist allies, particularly Britain and France, killed tens of thousands and overthrew and murdered the longtime Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi, but it failed in its goal of establishing a stable regime of pro-Western stooges.

Instead, as in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, imperialist intervention has effectively destroyed the society of the conquered country, and in the case of Libya, split the country into hundreds of fragments, the domains of various militias that sprang up during the US-NATO bombing campaign or during the chaos that followed the killing of Gaddafi in October 2011.

The Libyan intervention has already destabilized neighboring Mali, leading to the deployment of French troops to push back an offensive by Islamist groups that had been reinforced and rearmed as a consequence of the breakup of the Gaddafi regime.

Last week a heavily armed group identified variously as Islamist militants or smugglers attacked a checkpoint on the Egyptian border with Libya, killing 22 soldiers.



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