

# New York Times covers up US responsibility for ISIS surge in Libya

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In a lengthy article entitled “ISIS’ Grip on Libyan City Gives It a Fallback Option,” the *New York Times* last weekend provided a chilling account of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria’s rule over the city of Sirte (also known as Surt) on Libya’s Mediterranean coast.

Thousands of foreign fighters have flooded into the area, with the Islamist militia having established control over 150 miles of the Mediterranean coastline and moving to seize “strategic crossroads, vital oil terminals and oil fields south of the city.”

“The group carried out four crucifixions in August,” the *Times* reports. It adds, “Last month the group held its first two public beheadings, killing two men accused of sorcery...”

The article further explains that ISIS has been “receiving weapons and other support from the accumulated oil wealth that should belong to the Libyan state,” thanks to backing from within “the tangle of factions that have taken over whatever remains of the Libyan government.”

The growth of ISIS in Libya first came to broad public attention last February with the hideous videotaped mass beheading of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christian migrant workers.

While long on detail about ISIS methods of rule within Sirte, the article provides strikingly little in terms of explanation of how the Iraqi and Syrian-based militia managed to conquer an entire region over 1,300 miles to the west of its base of operations.

The *Times* states that ISIS was able to take advantage of fighting between rival factions within Libya and fill a political “vacuum.”

The article declares: “In Libya, where a NATO bombing campaign helped overthrow Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi four years ago, there is no functional government. Warring factions are far more focused on fighting one another than on taking on the Islamic State,

and Libya’s neighbors are all too weak or unstable to lead or even host a military intervention.”

This tortured paragraph serves to expose the entire *Times* article as a deliberate cover-up of the roots of the present hellish conditions prevailing not only in Sirte, but throughout Libya. The first sentence is carefully constructed so as to obscure the causal relationship between the US-NATO war that overthrew the Gaddafi government and the ISIS surge into Libya.

The US and its NATO allies waged a war of aggression against Libya in 2011 on the false pretext of preventing a supposedly imminent “massacre” of antigovernment protesters in the eastern city of Benghazi. Even US officials were compelled to acknowledge after the fact that there was no such imminent danger.

Pitched to the public as a war to save human lives and bring “democracy” to the Libyan people, its real aims was regime change, i.e., the toppling of Gaddafi and the installation of a more pliant Western puppet in a country possessing the largest oil reserves on the African continent.

Its net effect was the killing of between 30,000 and 50,000 Libyans, the wholesale destruction of the country’s social and physical infrastructure and the unleashing of Islamist militias upon the population, which has lived under a state of perpetual civil war since the US-NATO intervention began.

Sirte itself, it should be noted, was Gaddafi’s birthplace and a government stronghold. Consequently, it was subjected to intense bombing and then devastation by US-backed ground forces that reduced the entire city to rubble.

Missing from the *Times* report is any explanation of how it was Islamists of the ISIS stripe that became the force to fill the “vacuum” created by the US-NATO war.

This was hardly a coincidence. The armed elements that Washington and its allies relied upon as their proxy

ground forces were drawn precisely from the elements that went on to found ISIS.

In the absence of any popular revolution from below, US imperialism made use of the Islamist groups, arming and funding them to fight the Gaddafi government. Many of those who played the most prominent role in the fighting were organized in militias that had their origins in the Al Qaeda-affiliated Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), whose leaders had previously been hunted down by the CIA in the so-called global war on terrorism.

Among the most prominent of their leaders was Abdelhakim Belhadj, reportedly the LIFG's founder, who began his career as an Islamist fighter alongside Osama bin Laden during the Soviet-Afghan war of the 1980s, then returned to Libya to lead an abortive armed uprising against Gaddafi. He subsequently escaped from a Libyan jail and returned to Afghanistan to help run Al Qaeda training camps in the run-up to the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City and Washington.

Belhadj was captured by the CIA in Malaysia in 2003 and "rendered" to a secret CIA prison in Thailand. Washington then turned him over to Libya in 2004, where he remained in prison until 2010, when Gaddafi released a group of former LIFG militants who formally renounced armed struggle.

A year later, Belhadj was picked up by the US and its allies to lead Islamist militias in an offensive backed by massive US-NATO airstrikes. He emerged as head of the Tripoli Military Council after Tripoli fell to NATO-backed forces in August 2011, and was hailed by US officials as a hero.

After the overthrow of Gaddafi, Belhadj became involved in a CIA-orchestrated operation that funneled both Libyan fighters and weapons drawn from the Libyan government's stockpiles to Islamist militias such as ISIS and the Al Nusra Front that have served as the main fighting force in the Western-backed war for regime change in Syria. The rise of ISIS in Sirte and the arrival of large numbers of foreign fighters demonstrate that, whatever the US intended, this transmission belt operated in both directions.

Last March, it was widely reported that Belhadj had aligned himself with ISIS.

The catastrophe in Libya as well as ISIS itself both bear the stamp, "Made in the USA."

The *Times*' reticence in explaining this background to the ISIS takeover of Sirte is a continuation of the newspaper's own filthy role in promoting and justifying the Libyan war.

As the US political establishment's "newspaper of record," the *Times* waged a campaign for US war on Libya based on the pretext of "humanitarian intervention." It was joined in this reactionary and dishonest effort by a host of pseudo-lefts, ranging from cynical academics like Juan Cole at the University of Michigan to political groups like the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France and the International Socialist Organization in the US, whose politics reflect the interests of privileged, pro-imperialist sections of the upper-middle class.

After the war succeeded in toppling Gaddafi in October 2011, ending in his savage torture and murder, the *Times*' chief foreign affairs columnist Roger Cohen wrote a triumphalist piece entitled "Score one for Interventionism," while fellow columnist Nicholas Kristof penned a wretched column entitled "Thank you America!" asserting that Americans were now seen as "heroes in the Arab world."

On its front news page, the *Times* published an article in August 2011, after the fall of Tripoli to the US-backed Islamist militias, entitled "US Tactics in Libya May Be a Model for Other Efforts," speculating on when the same methods could be employed in Syria.

The Libyan war, it stated, had given the White House "a chance to claim a victory for an Obama doctrine in the Middle East." The fruits of this "victory" are now on display in Sirte.

If the editorial board of the *New York Times* is anxious to conceal the real roots of the Libyan crisis, it is because it also wants to bury its own record of journalistic complicity in war crimes in Libya—not to mention its even more incriminating collusion in promoting the war based on lies in Iraq.

The *Times* editors are not troubled by their past journalistic crimes. They merely want to prevent any lessons from being drawn so that their newspaper can continue serving as a key propaganda arm of the US government, retailing and embellishing upon lies from the White House, Pentagon and CIA to justify the even more devastating wars that are to come.



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