

In final acts of bloodletting, Obama orders bombings in Libya, Syria

Bill Van Auken
21 January 2017

In the final acts of bloodletting before relinquishing the White House to Donald Trump, outgoing US President Barack Obama ordered deadly bombing raids in the two countries where his administration initiated new and devastating wars, Syria and Libya.

In what was likely the last major military action to be carried out under Obama, a US B-52 bomber, along with an undisclosed number of unmanned attack drones, carried out airstrikes in Syria late Thursday against what the Pentagon claimed was an Al Qaeda training camp in Idlib province to the west of Aleppo and near the border with Turkey.

A US military official told the media that at least 100 people were killed in the attack. The official made the point of distinguishing those killed as “core Al Qaeda” as opposed to the Islamist militia formerly named the Al Nusra Front, which has functioned as Al Qaeda’s Syrian affiliate. Al Nusra has served as the leading fighting force in the US-orchestrated war for regime change against the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad and operates in close alliance with similar Islamist militias that Washington has described as “moderate rebels,” supplying them with arms and funding.

This major US air raid was carried out under conditions in which Washington’s regime change strategy has been left in tatters after six years of war have claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of Syrians and turned millions into refugees. The Russian-backed Syrian army’s routing of Al Nusra-led militias in eastern Aleppo deprived these forces of their last urban stronghold. In the wake of this strategic reversal for the US-backed “rebels,” Russia and Turkey, with the collaboration of Iran, brokered a nationwide ceasefire and the convening of talks set to begin next week in Kazakhstan aimed at achieving a political settlement in Syria. Washington has been excluded from these negotiations, with the Trump administration receiving an invitation only at the last

minute from Moscow to send representatives to the political talks.

The day before the airstrikes in Syria, the US military launched an extraordinary long-distance bombing run against Libya, sending two rarely used and nuclear-capable B-2 stealth bombers, which dropped around 100 500-pound precision-guided bombs on what the Pentagon described as two ISIS (Islamic State) camps southwest of the Libyan port city of Sirte. The B-2 bombings were followed up with Hellfire missile attacks from a Reaper drone.

Obama had to personally sign off on the bombing run because previous authorization for US airstrikes had been limited to the immediate area around Sirte. Last month, the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) declared that campaign to have been “concluded” after a series of nearly 500 airstrikes that had begun last August. The bombing campaign was aimed at propping up a so-called “unity government,” backed by the US and the United Nations, which today exerts control over little more than parts of the capital of Tripoli and Sirte.

Outgoing US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter announced the airstrikes to the Pentagon press corps, claiming that they had killed at least 80 people. Without presenting any substantiation, Carter claimed that those killed were “external plotters, who were actively planning operations against our allies in Europe” and insisted that none of the victims were civilians.

Pentagon reporters pressed as to why the B-2 bombers were sent from an air base in Missouri, half way around the world, when previous strikes had been carried out by more conventional warplanes based in Europe.

Defense Department spokesman Peter Cook hinted at the reason, declaring in his opening remarks that “The use of the B-2 demonstrates the capability of the United States to deliver decisive precision force to the Air Force’s Global Strike Command over a great distance.”

This prompted the obvious question from one reporter as to whether the deployment of the stealth bombers was meant “to send a message to countries like Russia, China.” The spokesman brushed this suggestion aside, claiming that the B-2s had been requested by “commanders” and that the raid was designed solely to kill “terrorists.”

The last time that B-2s were deployed in combat was in 2011, as part of the massive US-NATO bombing campaign initiated in the war for regime change that ended with the toppling and lynch-mob murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi. Then, Washington and its allies relied upon a collection of Islamist militias as proxy ground troops, the same forces that it now claims to be fighting in Libya, which has been plunged into unending civil war and has become the epicenter of the deadly refugee crisis that has claimed thousands of lives in the Mediterranean.

The renewed US military action in Libya came amid indications that Russia is pursuing its own interests in the war-ravaged country, with which, before the ouster of Gaddafi, it had billions of dollars in arms sales, infrastructure deals and other trade agreements.

Last week, the Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov was brought off Libya’s eastern coast, welcoming aboard General Khalifa Haftar, commander of the so-called Libyan National Army. Haftar is the strongman of the factions in the east of Libya, which back a rival regime to that of the crisis-ridden “Government of National Accord” that has been anointed by the US and the UN in Tripoli. Haftar’s troops have succeeded in wresting the city of Benghazi from Al Qaeda-linked militias and seizing control of key oil terminals, while controlling most of eastern Libya.

His visit to the Russian aircraft carrier follows two trips to Moscow in search of aid and arms. While aboard, he held a video conference with Sergei Shoigu, the Russian defense minister.

For Washington, Haftar’s turn to Moscow is particularly galling, given that the former Gaddafi general had previously defected to the US and served for many years as an “asset” of the CIA, moving into a house near the agency’s headquarters in northern Virginia.

While turning to Russia, Haftar has also forged close ties to the Egyptian dictatorship of Gen. Abdul Fattah al-Sisi as well as to the monarchical regime in the United Arab Emirates.

The extraordinary B-2 raid on the desert outside of Sirte was no doubt intended to send a signal to Moscow that

US imperialism is prepared to renew the war in Libya in order to assert American hegemony over the devastated oil-rich north African country.

Meanwhile, in another final act relating to the war crimes of the Obama administration, the Director of National Intelligence James Clapper issued a report that absurdly claimed the total number of civilians murdered in US drone strikes during the eight years of the Obama presidency amounted to no more than 117.

Independent investigative groups, including the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, have provided conservative estimates that place the real number of victims at 10 times this official count by the US intelligence agencies.

The official number does not include what are likely thousands of more victims killed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria, which the CIA classifies as “active” combat zones.

The sham “assessments” of civilian casualties were instituted as part of an executive order reaffirming that the US president has the unquestionable right to order the state murder of anyone in any part of the world by means of drone missile attack. At the time, the Obama White House described the order as an attempt to “develop a sustainable legal and policy architecture to guide our counterterrorism activities going forward.” In other words, the infamous practice of “terror Tuesdays,” in which Obama personally selected “kill lists” of victims for assassination, was being turned into an institutionalized arm of the capitalist state.

This loathsome political legacy of arrogating to the presidency the “right” to order the assassination of foreign nationals and US citizens alike is now being passed on to the incoming administration of Donald Trump.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact