

US and NATO murder Muammar Gaddafi

By Bill Van Auken
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The savage killing Thursday of deposed Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi served to underscore the criminal character of the war that has been prosecuted by the US and NATO over the past eight months.

The assassination follows NATO's more than month-long siege of Sirte, the Libyan coastal city that was Gaddafi's hometown and a center of his support. The assault on this city of 100,000 left virtually every building smashed, with untold numbers of civilians dead, wounded and stricken by disease, as they were deprived of food, water, medical care and other basic necessities.

Gaddafi was apparently traveling in a convoy of vehicles attempting to break out of the siege after the last bastion of resistance had fallen to the NATO-backed "rebels". NATO warplanes attacked the convoy at 8:30 a.m. Thursday morning, leaving a number of vehicles in flames and preventing it from moving forward. Then the armed anti-Gaddafi militias moved in for the kill.

The death of Gaddafi appears to have been part of a larger massacre that has reportedly claimed the lives of a number of his top aides, loyalist fighters and his two sons, Mo'tassim and Saif al-Islam.

While details of the killings remain somewhat clouded, photographs and cell phone videos released by the NATO-backed "rebels" clearly show a wounded Gaddafi struggling with his captors and shouting as he is dragged onto the back of a vehicle. His stripped and lifeless body is then shown, drenched in blood. It seems clear that having first been wounded, perhaps in the NATO air strikes, the former Libyan ruler was captured alive and then summarily executed. One photograph shows him with a bullet hole in the head.

Gaddafi's body was then taken west to the city of Misrata, where it was reportedly dragged through the streets before being deposited in a mosque.

The fate of the body is politically significant in that it was seized by a Misrata militia faction that is operating under its own command and has no loyalty to the Benghazi-based National Transitional Council (NTC), which Washington and NATO have anointed as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Libyan people.

Thus this grisly event, which President Barack Obama hailed in the White House Rose Garden Thursday as the advent of "a new and democratic Libya," in reality only exposes the regional and tribal fault lines that are setting the stage for a protracted period of civil war.

Both the US and France claimed credit for their roles in the murder of Gaddafi. The Pentagon asserted on Thursday that a US

Predator drone had fired a Hellfire missile at the ousted Libyan leader's convoy, while France's defense minister said that French warplanes had bombed it.

The US and NATO had carried out repeated air strikes on Gaddafi's compounds in Tripoli and other homes where they suspected he was hiding since shortly after the brutal air war against Libya was launched last March. One of these strikes at the end of last April claimed the lives of his youngest son and three young grandchildren.

Washington had deployed surveillance planes along with large numbers of drones in an attempt to track down Gaddafi, while US, British and French intelligence agents, special operations troops and military "contractors" operating on the ground also participated in this manhunt.

Just two days before the murder of Gaddafi, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton staged an unannounced visit to Tripoli on a heavily armed military aircraft. While there, she issued a demand that Gaddafi be brought in "dead or alive".

As the Associated Press reported, Clinton declared "in unusually blunt terms that the United States would like to see former dictator Muammar Gaddafi dead.

"We hope he can be captured or killed soon so that you don't have to fear him any longer", Clinton told students and others at a town hall-style gathering in the capital city."

The AP went on to note: "Until now, the US has generally avoided saying that Gaddafi should be killed."

Yet in reality, Washington is pursuing an unconcealed policy of state murder. In this case, it has openly advocated and provided every resource to facilitate the killing of a head of state with whom the US government had established close political and commercial relations over the course of the last eight years.

The battered corpse of Gaddafi's son Mo'tassim, who was also captured alive and then executed, was put on display in Misrata. As recently as April 2009 he was warmly welcomed to the US State Department by Hillary Clinton.

In his Rose Garden speech Thursday, Obama boasted of his administration having "taken out" Al Qaeda leaders, sounding for all the world like a Mafia don, minus the charm. Among his most recent victims are two US citizens, Anwar Awlaki, the Arizona-born Yemeni-American Muslim cleric, last month and, two weeks later, his 16-year-old son Abdulrahman, who was born in Denver. Both had been placed on a "kill list" by a secret National Security Council subcommittee and murdered with Hellfire missiles. Abdulrahman was blown to bits along with his 17-year-old cousin and seven other friends as they ate dinner.

The killing of Gaddafi is the culmination of a criminal war that

killed untold numbers of Libyans and left most of the country in ruins. This operation was launched on the pretext of protecting civilian lives, based on the trumped up claim that Gaddafi was preparing to lay siege to the eastern city of Benghazi to massacre his opponents. It has ended with NATO orchestrating a siege of Sirte, where thousands have been killed and wounded in suppressing opposition to the “rebels”.

From the beginning, the entire operation has been directed at the re-colonization of North Africa and pursued on behalf of US, British, French, Italian and Dutch oil interests.

While over the past decade Gaddafi had curried favor with US, Britain, France and other Western powers, striking oil deals, arms agreements and other pacts, US imperialism and its counterparts in Europe continued to see his regime as an impediment to their aims in the region.

Among the principal concerns in Washington, London and Paris were the increasing Chinese and Russian economic interests in Libya and more generally Africa as a whole. China had developed \$6.6 billion in bilateral trade, mainly in oil, while some 30,000 Chinese workers were employed in a wide range of infrastructure projects. Russia, meanwhile, had developed extensive oil deals, billions of dollars in arms sales and a \$3 billion project to link Sirte and Benghazi by rail. There were also discussions on providing the Russian navy with a Mediterranean port near Benghazi.

Gaddafi had provoked the ire of the government of Nicolas Sarkozy in France with his hostility to its scheme for creating a Mediterranean Union, aimed at refurbishing French influence in the country’s former colonies and beyond.

Moreover, major US and Western European energy conglomerates increasingly chafed at what they saw as tough contract terms demanded by the Gaddafi government, as well as the threat that the Russian oil company Gazprom would be given a big stake in the exploitation of the country’s reserves.

Combined with these economic and geo-strategic motives were political factors. The turn by Gaddafi toward closer relations to the West had allowed Washington and Paris to cultivate elements within his regime who were prepared to collaborate in an imperialist takeover of the country. This includes figures like Mustafa Abdul Jalil, Gaddafi’s former Justice Minister and now chairman of the NATO-backed NTC and Mahmoud Jibril, the former economics official who is chief of the NTC cabinet.

With the popular upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt—on Libya’s western and eastern borders—the US and its NATO allies saw an opportunity to put into operation a plan that had been developed over some time for regime change in Libya. With agents on the ground, they moved to exploit and hijack anti-Gaddafi demonstrations and foment an armed conflict.

To prepare for a direct imperialist takeover, they followed a well-worn path, vilifying the country’s leader and promoting the idea that only outside intervention could save innocent civilians from a looming massacre.

The supposed imminent destruction of Benghazi was utilized to win support for imperialist war from a whole range of ex-lefts, liberals, academics and human rights advocates, who lent their moral and intellectual weight to an exercise in imperialist

aggression and murder.

Figures like University of Michigan Middle Eastern history professor Juan Cole, who had raised limited criticism of the Bush administration’s invasion of Iraq, became enthusiastic promoters of the “humanitarian” mission of the Pentagon and NATO in Libya. Representative of an upper middle class social layer that has become a new constituency for imperialism, they were utterly compromised, politically and morally. They were untroubled by the lawlessness of the entire enterprise and the mounting evidence of the murder and torture of immigrants and black Libyans by the so-called rebels.

Their attempt to portray the regime change in Libya as a popular revolution becomes more preposterous with each passing day. The unstable puppet regime that is taking shape in Benghazi and Tripoli has been installed through relentless and massive NATO bombing, murder and the wholesale violation of international law.

Libya stands as a warning to the world. Any regime that gets in the way of US interests, runs afoul of the major corporations or fails to do the bidding of the NATO powers can be overthrown by military force, with its leaders murdered.

Already, the US media, which has staged a hideous celebration of the bloodbath outside Sirte, is braying for NATO to repeat its Libyan intervention in Syria. For her part, Clinton warned Pakistani leaders on Thursday that insufficient support for the US-war in Afghanistan would mean that they would pay “a very big price.”

There can be no doubt that future operations are on the way, with bigger wars coming into focus, posing catastrophic consequences. The Obama administration has already put Iran on notice that all options remain “on the table” in relation to a fabricated plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador in Washington. And as the Libyan intervention was aimed in no small part at countering Chinese and Russian influence both in the region and globally, so China and Russia themselves are seen as future targets.

The bloody events in Libya, and the economic motives underlying them, are providing a fresh lesson in the real character of imperialism. The crisis gripping world capitalism is once again posing the threat of world war. The working class can confront this threat only by mobilizing its independent political strength and rearming itself with the program of world socialist revolution to put an end to the profit system, which is the source of militarism.

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