

Canada contributed a disproportionate amount to Libya air strikes: sources

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Global Research, August 26, 2011

National Post 26 August 2011

Region: [Canada](#)

Theme: [Military and WMD, US NATO War Agenda](#)

Global Research Editor's Note

Reports from Tripoli confirm an exceedingly large number of civilian casualties. There have been bombing raids on Libya since the onset of the NATO led war. In the last week, however, the raids on Tripoli, targeting primarily civilians, creating an atmosphere of generalised panic, were used to support the Transitional Council Rebels.

Over 20,000 sorties since March 31, in excess of 8000 strike sorties.

Examine the characteristics of the allied fighter jets and bombers,

How many missiles and bombs per plane. Multiply that by the number of strike sorties. How many people are killed each time a bomb is dropped or missile is launched on Libya.

Canadian jet fighters have taken on about 8-10 percent of the total strike sorties (of the order of 8000) with over 733 bombing strikes.

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, August 26, 2011

Canadian fighter jets were in the air again this week, striking at the Gaddafi regime's tanks and artillery, part of this country's surprisingly substantial contribution to the five-month-long NATO bombing campaign in Libya.

As one of three nations carrying out the bulk of the sometimes-controversial air war, Canada with its aging CF-18 fighters has made a contribution clearly disproportionate to the compact size of its air force, say alliance and academic sources.

While Britain and France have about three times as many fighter-bombers in the operation as this country and are usually credited with most of the fighting, Canada has been close behind in its role, said a NATO official, speaking on condition of anonymity.

It has also provided three planes for air-to-air refuelling and two reconnaissance aircraft, all of the crews based in the Italian island of Sicily. Canada is among a handful of NATO members that took on the bulk of the mission after the U.S. withdrew its 50 or so fighter jets early in the campaign.

"The burden of the strike sorties fell on the shoulders of predominately the Canadians, the British and the French," said the NATO official. "I must say that, Canada in particular, being the smaller of the three air forces, once again punched well above its weight."

NATO was keeping up its campaign on Thursday — bombing Sirte, Col. Gaddafi's birthplace. Meanwhile, fighting continued to rage over pockets of Tripoli and rebel leaders, who are believed to be in control of much of the capital, said the war would be over only when the now fugitive Libyan leader was found, "dead or alive."

Support for the operation among Canadians has been mixed, amid accusations of mission creep and controversy about civilian casualties; it seems clear, however, that for better or worse this country has well exceeded the peripheral role that many observers expected it to play.

The six CF-18s — backed up by one spare — have logged 733 bombing sorties above the North African nation, while the Canadian refuelling and reconnaissance aircraft have added hundreds more flights.

"The folks that are flying are flying hard and they're flying a high tempo of operations," said Brigadier-General Derek Joyce, commander of Task Force Libeccio, as the Italy-based Canadian team is called. "I'm very, very proud of what they've accomplished."

It is difficult to get a precise picture of who is contributing what to the campaign, said Prof. Michael Clarke, director of the Royal United Services Institute, a British defence think-tank.

However, "the Canadians are reported to be doing a lot of [sorties]," he said in an emailed response to questions. "Only Canada, France and the U.K., among the allies, have kept up a constant high tempo of ground attacks. The other five who have done some attacking have been more variable. Also, Canada has the right aircraft for the role and has more appropriate weapons systems to deploy than some other allies."

The mission began as Col. Gaddafi threatened to exact bloody revenge on opponents, with United Nations resolution 1973 authorizing member countries to take measures to protect civilians. Critics complain that the campaign has morphed into an attempt to overthrow the Gaddafi regime, as targets have grown to include the ruler's family compounds in Tripoli, and several of his family members were reportedly killed by NATO bombs.

The Canadian CF-18s conduct two types of missions — planned "air interdiction" attacks on static military infrastructure, including buildings used for command and control, plus "surveillance, co-ordination and reconnaissance" sorties where pilots hunt for government tanks and other mobile weaponry to bomb, said Brig.-Gen. Joyce from his Naples headquarters. There was an initial sense of "euphoria" among the Canadians this week when rebels started streaming into Tripoli, but the pilots have continued their strikes, as it became clear the regime was still alive, firing artillery and rockets into Tripoli and other cities, the commander said.

NATO and Canadian officials insist that they have gone out of their way to try to avoid civilian casualties, creating a bombing war of "unprecedented precision." Among those who screen targets before the Canadian pilots push the fire button is a National Defence lawyer, said Brig.- Gen. Joyce.

Civilian casualties have repeatedly sparked concern, with Italy at one point calling for a pause in bombing. Human Rights Watch investigators spent a week in Libya this month, visiting bombing sites with government minders, said the group's Fred Abrahams.

Some sites clearly had been doctored, as evidenced by spotless baby bottles strewn around

a crater where every other object was covered in dust, he said, but at other places, civilians definitely did die. They included one recent attack at Majer, where the regime said 85 were killed. Human Rights Watch and journalists found evidence of 19 or 20 bodies, he said.

“The evidence suggests [NATO] did exercise great care, but questions still exist about some of the choices,” said Mr. Abrahams. “The onus is on them to explain those cases.”

Steven Staples of the left-leaning Rideau Institute, usually a stiff critic of Canada’s foreign military adventures, said Thursday he was concerned about civilian casualties. He stopped short, though, of condemning Canada’s involvement in the Libya operation, saying it had a particular obligation to support the opposition, given that Canadian firms had been heavily involved with the Gaddafi regime.

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