

The US-NATO Bombardment of Libya, Destroying a Nation

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The US-NATO military intervention against Libya, which began on 19 March 2011, served to discredit American power further and that of its military arm NATO. Between 31 March and 22 October 2011, NATO aircraft carried out 26,281 sorties over Libyan territory, with the principal intention of toppling the government of Muammar Gaddafi, who had been in power for 42 years.

During the 7 month period from March to October 2011, the often indiscriminate NATO air raids over Libya resulted in between 90,000 to 120,000 casualties, very high figures indeed. The attacks were carried out mainly by American, British, French and Italian planes. The bombings reduced much of Libya’s cities to rubble and displaced over 2 million people, in a country whose population was just 6.2 million.

The Italian Foreign Affairs Minister, **Franco Frattini**, acknowledged in June 2011 that NATO was “endangering its credibility” by killing civilians. Taking a stronger stance the American congressman, Dennis Kucinich, demanded on the floor of the House of Representatives that NATO’s top brass should be made accountable for civilian casualties in Libya, and brought before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Kucinich stated, “NATO’s top commanders may have acted under color of international law, but they are not exempt from international law”. He called for an end to the use by NATO forces of drones, which were also harming civilians. Moreover, Kucinich insisted that if Colonel Gaddafi was to be taken to court, then NATO leaders should likewise be prosecuted for civilian loss of life.

NATO raids over Libya consisted too of missile strikes fired from submarines and warships. There were 17 NATO vessels patrolling the Mediterranean Sea, preventing weapons deliveries from reaching pro-Gaddafi elements. The NATO bombings

starting in March 2011 destroyed hospitals, food warehouses and stores along with communications centres, television studios, vehicles, etc.

NATO launched at least 7,700 bombs and missiles against Libya; and destroyed in the process were the machines of the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer System, a vital lifeline which had pumped 6.5 million cubic metres of fresh water per day to Libya's large cities; supplying 70% of Libya's populace with water in a country which comprises of 95% desert.

As intended, the military offensive in Libya provided new markets for America and the European powers, opening a possibility to end the industrial depression and reinvigorate capitalist reproduction. Libya holds the largest oil reserves in Africa, the 9th biggest in the world, and contains more of the "black gold" than either the US or China.

After Gaddafi was killed in brutal fashion by NATO-backed militants on 20 October 2011, Western energy corporations and construction companies turned to Libya in the search for opportunities; as they had done in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) during the aftermath of those invasions. Several WikiLeaks cables revealed that, since 2009, the US Embassy in Tripoli was planning to prevent rival state-owned firms, like Russia's Gazprom, from gaining access to Libya's natural resources.

The New York Times admitted on 22 August 2011, two months before Gaddafi's death, that "the scramble to secure access to Libya's oil wealth is already on", and Gaddafi "proved to be a problematic partner for the international oil companies, frequently raising fees and taxes and making other demands. A new government with close ties to NATO may be an easier partner for Western nations to deal with".

Gaddafi was unpredictable and, whatever his faults, he was no puppet. On 9 March 2011 the Cuban leader Fidel Castro, who knew Gaddafi personally, wrote of his Libyan counterpart, "Born into the heart of a Bedouin community, nomadic desert shepherds in the region of Tripoli, Gaddafi was profoundly anti-colonialist. It is known that a paternal grandfather died fighting against the Italian invaders, when Libya was invaded by the latter in 1911... Even Gaddafi's adversaries confirm that he stood out for his intelligence as a student; he was expelled from high school for his anti-monarchical activities... He initiated his political life with unquestionably revolutionary acts".

A week before Gaddafi was murdered, a delegation of 80 French companies landed in Libya to meet with officials from the so-called National Transitional Council, the short-lived regime in Tripoli which had replaced Gaddafi. Britain's Defence Secretary, Philip Hammond, urged British companies to visit Libya too.

In September 2011 Stephen Green, the British Minister for Trade and Investment, travelled to Tripoli at the head of a group of businessmen. Among them were representatives of British Petroleum (BP) and Shell. In July 2012, BP declared it would resume exploiting concessions it was given. The British had investments in Libya which amounted to £1.5 billion, mainly in the oil industry.

Much of Libya's civilian infrastructure was destroyed in the air raids, but the oil

installations were mostly undamaged. The two oil refineries in the north-western city of Zawiya, a port city which connects Tripoli to Tunisia, were left untouched. By the spring of 2012, the oil refineries continued operation at full capacity.

A report compiled by the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) outlined that NATO and the anti-Gaddafi forces “committed serious violations” of human rights “including war crimes and breaches of international rights law”.

The militias supported by the Western powers (“freedom fighters”) consisted primarily of Qatari special forces, Libyan and Al Qaeda extremists and sectarians who capitalised on the war, in order to settle their own scores. Abdel-Hakim al-Hasidi, an anti-Gaddafi Libyan commander, said in late March 2011 that Al Qaeda militants were operating under his command and he described them as “good Muslims”.

A special adviser to Human Rights Watch, Fred Abrahams, observed how “The rebel conduct was disturbing”. One inhabitant of Sirte in northern Libya, Susan Farjan, told a Daily Telegraph journalist in early October 2011 “we lived in democracy under Gaddafi, he was not a dictator. I lived in freedom, Libyan women had full human rights”.

Libya had the best living standards in Africa under Gaddafi. Libya boasted the highest life expectancy on the African continent, and the lowest infant mortality rate. Less than 5% of the population was undernourished near the end of Gaddafi’s reign; but following the Western military assault, living conditions in Libya decreased significantly as revealed by the annual UN Human Development Index (HDI) ranking.

Gaddafi had managed to maintain the structure of the Libyan nation, since his assumption to power in 1969. Following Gaddafi’s fall, the Brazilian author Moniz Bandeira wrote that Libya as a state “had disappeared. Real power was represented by 60 sectarian and tribal militias, armed and in conflict with each other. Each one claimed a region, a city, an area, and would not accept any interference. They refused to submit to the National Transitional Council. Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, president of the National Transitional Council, had no legitimacy or authority. He was ineffective”.

On 24 February 2011 a British frigate ‘HMS Cumberland’ sailed into Benghazi in northern Libya, and British Special Air Service (SAS) commandos disembarked from the ship. London further dispatched MI6 agents to Libya, and there were US Navy SEALs and French special forces operating in Libya, usually through disguises in Arab dress.

The NATO intelligence services and elite forces collaborated with the anti-Gaddafi militants, including terrorists and jihadists; granting them large-scale assistance with the planning of military operations, targeting of bombings, and gathering of intelligence on Gaddafi forces sometimes with the use of drones.

Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) supplied aircraft to NATO. With the attack 5 months old, on 20 August 2011 a NATO warship dropped anchor on the Libyan coastline. The vessel was laden down with heavy weaponry and it contained elite

personnel from America's Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), the French Land Special Forces Brigade (BFST), and Britain's SAS. Also on board this NATO ship were former jihadists. With the help of the Franco-American-British units, they drew up a strategy for a rapid advance on Tripoli. The Libyan capital fell just 8 days later, on 28 August 2011.

It is important to stress that the extremist militant organisation, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), was among the chief instigators of the movement to overthrow Gaddafi. The LIFG commander was the 48-year-old Abu Yahya al-Libi, a Libyan citizen and leading member of Al Qaeda, the international terrorist group. Al-Libi, on 12 March 2011, urged Libyans to oust Gaddafi and to establish in Libya Islamic rule, in effect to expand Al Qaeda's control. Already earlier in 2011 the Al Qaeda number 2, Egyptian-born Ayman al-Zawahiri, sent experienced terrorists to Libya in order to establish a centre of operations against Gaddafi's government.

In Benghazi, there were around 350 men with extremist backgrounds present there in 2009, those previously pardoned and released by Gaddafi. By the time the unrest was breaking out in Libya at the start of 2011, the number of men in Benghazi with a history of terrorism had risen to 850.

Psychological warfare operations (psy-OP) were used extensively by the Western powers in Libya. The purpose of psychological warfare, as stated by the US Army Civil Affairs and Psychological Operations Command (USACAPOC), and Britain's MI6, is to sow confusion within the enemy's sphere, leading to disagreements and demoralisation.

Part of the strategy to wage war on Libya was to use the Western mass media, in order to construct a false image that Gaddafi was planning to massacre civilians protesting against his regime in Benghazi. This would serve as a pretext for the US-NATO bombing campaign to begin. Any unrest in Libya should have strictly been a domestic issue, as Gaddafi was not threatening international peace and security.

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