

LIBYA UNDER PENTAGON-NATO RULE: Corruption, internecine conflict and the “fruits” of imperialist warfare

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Some 200 disgruntled rebels who fought with the Pentagon and NATO in the regime-change military mission against the Jamahiriya government in Libya during 2011, made an effort to assassinate the interim Prime Minister Abdurrahim al-Keib on May 8. The rebels were supposedly angry over the cancellation of monthly payments to the militiamen who served as ground troops in the campaign that overthrew the martyred leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi.

The compensation program for the rebels, which distributed \$US1.4 billion, has been riddled with fraud and consequently was suspended in April. There were reports that people were paid who were dead and that those who never joined the anti-Gaddafi efforts also received monies. In addition to these problems with public funds being turnover to rebel fighters, others were sent on trips abroad for medical treatment but were not injured.

The militia groups served as the ground forces in the imperialist war against Libya that resulted in an arms embargo against the Gaddafi government, a naval blockade, sanctions, foreign assets seizure and bombing missions involving 26,000 sorties and 10,000 airstrikes. Corruption has been endemic to the so-called National Transitional Council (NTC) since its inception during the war last year. After being placed in power in Tripoli in late August 2011 and throughout the country after the brutal murder of Gaddafi on October 20, billions of dollars have gone missing from the national treasury. With the exposure of the widespread corruption in Libya, the interim finance minister Hassan Ziglam announced on May 11 that he would soon resign. The reason for his departure is the “wastage of public funds.” (Reuters, May 11)

The interim prime minister al-Keib, who was the target of the assassination attempt, called those responsible for the shooting that left at least one person dead, “outlaws.” The various militia groups scattered throughout the capital of Tripoli and other parts of the country have never been brought into a national army. Ziglam, the outgoing finance minister, said of the incident on May 9, that “They came with weapons. How can you work in such an environment.” (Reuters, May 11)

Other allegations of corruption over the last several months have included irregularities with the Libyan Investment Authority where some \$US2.5 billion in oil revenues that were supposed to be transferred to the national treasury remains unaccounted for. Also the foreign assets that were frozen by the imperialist states in the early stages of the war on Libya remain a source of dispute in regard to the actual value of these funds. In the eastern

oil-producing region of the country, the Arabian Gulf Oil Company has been hampered by work stoppages by employees who are demanding accountability from the executives running the firm. Although oil production has reportedly increased to a million barrels a day, there are questions about the utilization of revenue and the compensation of workers.

Human Rights Violations Ignored by the Imperialists and Their Surrogates The rationale for the imperialist war on Libya during 2011 was that the Gaddafi government was violating the human rights of its citizens during an armed rebellion that was financed and coordinated by foreign interests. Despite the fact that no concrete evidence of mass killings and imprisonment were uncovered, this same narrative is being maintained as a justification for what transpired.

Yet under the current NTC regime reports indicate that at least 7,000 people are still being detained inside the country with many of them suffering torture and extrajudicial killings. Even the United Nations, which through Resolutions 1970 and 1973 provided a pseudo-legal basis for the bombing of Libya and the overthrow of its government, has spoken out against the unjust incarceration by the Libyan rebels. According to Ian Martin, who heads the UN mission to Libya, "Cases of mistreatment and torture of detainees continue. Addressing these practices should be a top government priority in pursuit of a new culture of human rights and the rule of law." (AFP, May 11)

In April there were claims that three people were tortured to death in a prison in the coastal central city of Misrata. This prison has been notorious for its mistreatment of detainees and there are allegations that another seven people have been murdered there as well. The detainees are accused of fighting with the Libyan military in defense of the country that was being attacked internally and from the air and sea during 2011. Another method of arresting people is by outlawing any "glorification" of the former leader and government of Col. Muammar Gaddafi. The NTC government has passed a law that orders the militias to round up for prosecution anyone in support of the former political system that ruled the country for 42 years. Consequently the upcoming elections will bar political interests that still remain supportive of the Jamahiriya. Threats against supporters of the former Gaddafi government also extend outside of Libya.

The previous oil minister and Prime Minister Dr. Shokri Ghanem, was found dead in Vienna in late April floating in the Danube River. Ghanem was being pressured to return to Libya by the NTC to provide evidence for the further persecution of former members of the government. In a Reuters interview in December 2011, the Boston University graduate told a reporter in regard to the NTC rebels, "One man they were interviewing, they threw him out of the window." (Reuters, May 13) Noman Benotman, an analyst and a long-time opponent of the Gaddafi government, said of the death of Ghanem that "It was a professionally executed crime. It is the global energy mafia. It's to do with corruption, secret deals. People wanted to make sure he is not around anymore to talk." (Reuters, May 13)

The son of Muammar Gaddafi, Seif al-Islam, is still being held in a secret prison in Zintan and is not being allowed to have legal representation of his choice. An International Criminal Court (ICC) representative visited him recently for an interview in which it was witnessed that two of his fingers were severed and a tooth was missing. ICC prosecutors are allowing the detention of Seif al-Islam inside Libya although the NTC government claims that it is not in control of the facility where he is being held. Under such conditions and with overall political chaos inside the country, it will be impossible for him to have any semblance of a

fair trial. Elections Will Inevitably Be a Sham There is no way that the elections scheduled for June 19 can be considered free and fair.

The former officials of the Gaddafi government and their supporters have been criminalized and many of them remain outside the country. The entire registration process has been marred by confusion and inconsistencies.

One Libyan who was quoted by the BBC said of the process that “We don’t understand elections. There are some who don’t know anything at all! There’s nothing on TV even about how elections work, how to vote, what to do.” (BBC, May 11) Meanwhile the secessionist elements in the eastern part of the country where the anti-Gaddafi rebellion began in February 2011, the so-called Barqa Council, has rejected the election process and is calling for a boycott. The leadership within the region, which is calling itself the Council of Cyrenaica, is pushing for autonomous status outside the authority of the NTC in Tripoli.

At the same time in the southern region of Libya reports of ongoing sectional conflict continues. Many have been killed in fighting over the last several months between what is described as the Toubou people and Arab tribesmen. On May 14 the French Press Agency (AFP) reported that “A candidate in the upcoming poll for a constituent assembly was murdered in Libya’s southern desert on Sunday shortly after submitting his registration. ‘Khaled Abu Saleh was murdered 30 kilometers (22 miles) from Ubari.” Mohammed Saleh, who is described by AFP as the deputy chairman of the High Security Commission, said that “An armed gang traveling in five cars followed him after he registered with the electoral commission. They surrounded and killed him.”

The Fruits of Imperialist War in Africa The situation in Libya represents the outcome of imperialist wars that have been waged by the U.S. and other Western countries over the last decade. Initiated on the basis of humanitarian concerns, these interventions always result in the worsening of conditions for the masses within the respective countries. In the U.S. itself, the economic crisis is causing the destruction of the cities and the rise in racist violence. The runaway military spending has not created any job growth for the tens of millions of unemployed workers. In Canada, which ostensibly led the NATO operations in Libya, a scandal is emerging over the cover-up of the cost of the war. Conservative government Defense Minister Peter MacKay took to the airwaves on May 13 in a damage control effort amid allegations of misrepresentation of funding in the war. Press reports say that the actual cost of the Libya bombing campaign for Canada was 700 percent higher than what has been stated publically. MacKay said “The interventions are expensive. In my view, this was money well spent.”

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