

Libyan Prime Minister Abducted in Retaliation for US Raid on Tripoli

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Islamist militias in Tripoli abducted Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zeidan yesterday morning, in protest over the October 5 US raid to kidnap alleged Al Qaeda operative Abu Anas al-Liby. Zeidan's captors released him shortly before noon.

The kidnapping highlighted the impotence of the neo-colonial regime set up by Washington and its NATO allies after the 2011 war to overthrow Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Dependent on the competing right-wing Islamist militias that NATO armed against Gaddafi, it is overseeing the plundering of a country devastated by war, torn by tribal and separatist conflict, and hit by rising popular protest. There is broad anger at the blatant US violation of Libya's national sovereignty during the October 5 raid.

Zeidan was captured around 5 a.m. yesterday when 150 heavily-armed men surrounded and entered his residence at the heavily-guarded Corinthia Hotel. Though Zeidan is nominally the head of Libya's government, he is closely watched by US diplomats and the personnel of US oil corporations, which have also set up their operations in the hotel. Significantly, there was no report of fighting or resistance, though Zeidan's captors reportedly beat his two bodyguards.

The Operations Room of Libya's Revolutionaries—a militia aligned with the Interior Ministry and the Libya Shield Brigade of Libya's President of Congress Nuri Abu Sahmain—took credit for arresting Zeidan. It posted a statement on its Facebook page saying that it was acting on an arrest warrant obtained from “a prosecutor” and that it was acting entirely within the law.

The group confirmed that Zeidan's arrest was in retaliation for the October 5 US Special Forces raid in Tripoli. “His arrest comes after ... [US Secretary of State John] Kerry said the Libyan government was aware of the operation,” a member of the group told Reuters.

Amid mass popular distrust of Zeidan's claims that his government was unaware of the raid, members of the Libyan parliament had vowed to remove Zeidan from office if evidence emerged that his government had been aware of US plans.

Another group, the Brigade for the Fight against Crime, later also claimed to be holding Zeidan, telling the AP that he was being charged with corruption and harming state security.

Several Libyan ministers gathered together under army protection after Zeidan's abduction, fearing that they would be taken next. Deputy Prime Minister Sadiq Abdulkarim issued a statement condemning the kidnapping. He added that foreign diplomats and officials would be protected like Libyan citizens, and that his government was in talks both with Abu

Sahmain and with “local and international organizations.”

There were conflicting reports about Zeidan’s release. Government officials initially claimed he was freed in the course of negotiations, but Tripoli Supreme Security Committee (SSC) commander Hashim Bishr claimed fighters from the Fornaj area stormed a house where he was being held.

US Secretary of State John Kerry denounced Zeidan’s abduction. “Libyans did not risk their lives in the 2011 revolution to tolerate a return to thuggery,” Kerry claimed. “Today’s events only underscore the need to work with Prime Minister Zeidan and with all of Libya’s friends and allies to help bolster its capacity with greater speed and success.”

The steady disintegration of Zeidan’s puppet regime refutes Kerry’s attempt to depict the 2011 war for regime change in Libya as somehow progressive or revolutionary. The war was neither a revolution nor a struggle for democracy, but a bloody imperialist war in which the United States, Britain, and France allied with right-wing tribal leaders, criminals, and Islamist thugs, many of them tied to Al Qaeda, in order to topple the Gaddafi regime.

While these forces were hailed as “revolutionaries” by the US State Department and its pseudo-left allies, like the International Socialist Organization or France’s New Anti-Capitalist Party, they were in fact running a campaign to loot Libya and divide up its resources with US and European imperialism. A revolution in Libya and the region can develop only from a united struggle of the working class and oppressed masses of North Africa against them.

The abduction of Zeidan emerges directly from the contradictions of Washington’s reckless policy in Libya. Libya’s unstable post-Gaddafi regime balances precariously between the central government under Zeidan and the various tribal and Islamist militias, several of which are concerned that they may be attacked by US forces due to their connection to Al Qaeda. These forces are increasingly at each other’s throats, amid rising popular opposition and increasing regional tensions among the different militias and Islamist factions.

Over the last year, Libya has seen rising strikes in the critical oil sector and protests over the lack of jobs, public services, and of reconstruction of Libya’s devastated infrastructure.

The conflicts between Libya’s local militias and tribal elites have exploded, threatening to split the country apart. Last month, a group of tribal sheikhs in Libya’s southern Sahara declared that their province would break away from Tripoli. In the east, militias in the city of Benghazi have set up a local council and demanded autonomy.

Ibrahim al-Jathran, the former head of an oil security unit who has reportedly seized the eastern oil ports, complains: “The government and congress exploit Libya’s wealth and use it to serve their agendas.”

The corporate press, which initially hailed the Libyan war in 2011, is increasingly pessimistic about Libya’s future. Its oil production has reportedly fallen to one-tenth of its pre-war output of 1.5 million barrels per day.

In an editorial titled “The disaster that is today’s Libya,” London’s *Financial Times* wrote: “The prime minister has been too willing to buy off the warring militias with Western cash, rather than using these subsidies as a lever to place them under government control. Unless he gets a grip, the West can only look on in horror as Libya joins the dismal ranks of failed

states.”

Above all, there is rising opposition to US and NATO imperialism in Libya. The *New York Times* admitted that most Libyans “suspect Washington and the West of hegemonic ambitions. Although they may oppose Al Qaeda and denounce terrorism, Libyans across the political spectrum say they object to American military action on Libyan soil and the extradition of Libyan citizens for trial in American courts.”

Libyan citizens, including the leaders of numerous Al Qaeda-linked militias supported by Washington during the 2011 war, fear they may be the next targets of a US raid after al-Liby.

It is widely rumored that the October 5 raid was a trial run for a raid to abduct Ahmed Abu Khattala, a militia leader whom Washington holds responsible for the September 11, 2012 attack on US diplomatic and CIA facilities in Benghazi that killed US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans.

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