

The Fall of the Qaddafi Regime in Libya. The Hand of the U.S. and NATO

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The 42-year rule of Muammar Qaddafi over the north African country of Libya appears to have come to an end. Anti-Qaddafi fighters poured into the capitol city of Tripoli—Qaddafi’s main stronghold, over the weekend of August 20-21 and by Monday, August 22, had taken over most of the city. (At this writing, the whereabouts of Qaddafi and his sons apparently remain unknown.)

Qaddafi’s overthrow and the victory of the “rebel” forces is being presented by the U.S. rulers, their European imperialist allies—including Britain, France, and Italy—and their media mouthpieces as a big victory for the people, a triumph of “democracy” over tyranny, and a vindication of their “humanitarian” military intervention in Libya.

As the anti-Qaddafi forces took over Tripoli, President Barack Obama stated, “The people of Libya are showing that the universal pursuit of dignity and freedom is far stronger than the iron fist of a dictator... The future of Libya is now in the hands of the Libyan people.”

It is nothing of the sort. The unfolding events in Libya are primarily the result of a U.S.-NATO military, political, and economic assault on Qaddafi’s forces, stretching over months.

The day the Tripoli fell to the anti-Qaddafi forces, the *New York Times* reported:

“Through Saturday, NATO and its allies had flown 7,459 strike missions, or sorties, attacking thousands of targets, from individual rocket launchers to major military headquarters. The cumulative effect not only destroyed Libya’s military infrastructure but also greatly diminished the ability of Colonel Qaddafi’s commanders to control forces, leaving even committed fighting units unable to move, resupply or coordinate operations.” (“Sharper Surveillance and NATO Coordination Helped Rebels Race to Capital,” August 22)

This assault has had not been about liberating Libya or ensuring self-determination for the nation of Libya. Instead, it has been aimed at strengthening imperialism’s grip on Libya.

Background: The Qaddafi Regime, the Libyan Uprising, and the Role of Imperialism

Libya is a north African country of 6 million people. It is strategically located on the Mediterranean Sea, and it has large reserves of light, high-sought crude oil. It was first colonized by Italy in 1910. After World War 2, the U.S. became the main power dominating Libya, including its oil sector. The U.S. built one of its largest overseas military facilities in the world—Wheeler Air Base—in Libya. In 1969, Col. Muammar Qaddafi and a group of young military officers, organized a coup and seized power from the pro-U.S. monarch then

ruling Libya. Qaddafi's forces were inspired by Arab nationalism and sought to loosen the direct stranglehold imperialism had on Libya, including more control and a larger share of its oil wealth. But as Raymond Lotta put it in an interview with *Revolution*, "Qaddafi was for many years a real thorn in the side of imperialism, especially the U.S.... even though the Qaddafi regime never fundamentally broke with or fundamentally challenged imperialism." By the late 1990s, the Qaddafi regime was seeking closer ties with Western imperialism including the U.S., and in 2004 formally forged an alliance with the U.S., including aiding it in the so-called "war on terror."

Over these decades, the situation of the people of Libya grew worse, both economically and politically. The regime brutally suppressed its opponents, and peoples' hopes and aspirations were suffocated if not outright crushed.

An Uprising Quickly Taken Over By the West

When the dictatorship in Tunisia was overthrown by the masses in January, and then the Mubarak regime in Egypt was brought down in February, people across the Arab world—including in Libya—were inspired and emboldened. On February 15, an uprising broke out in Benghazi, Libya's second largest city (triggered by the arrest of a human rights activist). The Qaddafi regime attempted to violently suppress this revolt.

From the very beginning, this uprising included a variety of political forces—including former Qaddafi officials and other reactionaries tied to various imperialist powers. (The National Transitional Council, anointed the leadership of the anti-Qaddafi forces by most of the world's big powers, is dominated by pro-imperialist forces who called for U.S.-NATO intervention in Libya as soon as it was formed.)

(For an in-depth analysis, see: "[Revolution Interviews Raymond Lotta: The Events in Libya in Historical Perspective... Muammar Qaddafi in Class Perspective... The Question of Leadership in Communist Perspective](#)," *Revolution* #226, March 8, 2011)

Whatever role the imperialist powers did or didn't have in initiating this uprising, they very quickly intervened to shape and control it for their own interests. On February 26, the UN Security Council—a body controlled by the U.S. and other big powers—imposed sanctions on the Qaddafi family. On March 17, it voted to authorize a "no-fly" zone over Libya in order to defeat Qaddafi and support pro-imperialist forces. And on March 19, the first U.S.-NATO air assaults began.

Since then, U.S.-NATO military, economic, and political intervention has grown steadily. And increasingly "rebel" forces have been organized and directed by the U.S., France, and Britain (Britain, France and other U.S. allies deployed covert military forces inside Libya "to help train and arm the rebels..."). International sanctions were squeezing and weakening the Qaddafi Regime. And the anti-Qaddafi forces' final push to Tripoli was made possible by the cumulative impact of U.S. and NATO bombing, intelligence, and military coordination.

The August 22 *New York Times* report paints a picture of the extent of U.S.-NATO military intervention:

"As rebel forces in Libya converged on Tripoli on Sunday, American and NATO officials cited an intensification of American aerial surveillance in and around the capital city as a major factor in helping to tilt the balance after months of steady erosion of Col. Muammar

el-Qaddafi's military.

"The officials also said that coordination between NATO and the rebels, and among the loosely organized rebel groups themselves, had become more sophisticated and lethal in recent weeks, even though NATO's mandate has been merely to protect civilians, not to take sides in the conflict."

So now, it is clear that the U.S., Britain and France are mainly shaping events in Libya, and whatever the initial intent and aspirations of some of the Libyans who began the uprising may have been, at this point they've now been reduced to being objectively extensions and pawns of the U.S.-NATO imperialists.

"Humanitarian" Hypocrisy....and Murder

The U.S. and NATO claimed their intervention in Libya was for humanitarian reasons—simply to protect civilians, and not to determine the outcome of the conflict in Libya. Both claims have been shown before the world to be bald-faced lies.

Hundreds and hundreds of Libyan people have been killed by NATO bombs and missiles. One attack on August 9 killed, according to a Libyan government spokesperson, 33 children, 32 women and 20 men. ([Reuters, 8/9/11](#)) Tripoli, Libya's capital, where nearly one-third of its population is concentrated, was not spared as bombs rained down. In contravention of international law, the U.S. and NATO openly tried to assassinate Qaddafi, bombing his compound numerous times.

And as events have made crystal clear—and the imperialists have done little to try and even conceal—their intervention has from the start been aimed at shaping events, not protecting lives. In fact, the day after Tripoli fell, the *New York Times* carried an article headlined, "Scramble Begins for Access to Libya's Oil." (August 23, 2011)

None of this means that even if the imperialists have succeeded in overthrowing Qaddafi, they have everything all sewn up and that everything will go smoothly according their plans and designs (including because there are contradictions among these imperialists themselves). Time and events will tell how all this will play out, and *Revolution* will be covering these developments.

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