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Libya

Imperialist Victory Is No Gain For Libyan People

- Debate - Problems of the Arab and Middle East regions -

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This article by Jeff Mackler for the Political Committee of Socialist Action appears in the September 2011 edition of Socialist Action newspaper.

Tragically, Libya's short-lived February 2011 Arab Spring was rapidly transformed into a six-month imperialist-led onslaught that wrought death and destruction on the Libyan people.

The UN no-fly zone Resolution 1973, approved 10-0 by the UN Security Council on March 17, was immediately followed by more than 20,000, and still ongoing, sorties by U.S./NATO warplanes against the forces of the Libyan dictator, Col. Muammar Gadhafi. These were complemented by drone strikes and artillery bombardments from NATO's armada, centered on a French aircraft carrier anchored off Libya's coast.

The UN no-fly zone resolution, never more than a license for the wholesale destruction of Libya's military apparatus and much of Tripoli's infrastructure including its water and fuel supplies, electricity, schools, hospitals, and residential neighborhoods was a Euro-American declaration of war. Humanitarian wars conducted by the world's superpowers will never benefit the oppressed masses in Libya or anywhere else.

In the assault on Tripoli in the last days of the war, Gadhafi's estimated 65,000 troops were pulverized by an intensive air and sea bombing campaign that NATO commanders estimate to have degraded that is, killed, wounded, or scattered some 50 percent of his forces. The remainder is thought to have retreated to Libyan cities and towns that continue to support the Gadhafi regime. These are today being bombed with impunity.

Estimates of the number of Gadhafi soldiers killed outright on just one day by this late-August intensive bombardment exceeded 1300. Well before the last week of August, when Gadhafi's forces were compelled to flee Tripoli, the defection of top commanders of the Libyan army to the imperialist-backed TNC signaled at least the partial disintegration of the army.

The TNC today "governs" most of Libya, but it is definitely not to be excluded that yet another long-lasting imperialist-abetted war and occupation is in the making. The Tripoli Brigade and associated TNC forces, aided by the ongoing and still massive NATO bombing campaigns, are currently engaged in street-to-street mop-up battles in Gadhafi strongholds in Tripoli as well as in regions of the country still loyal to the deposed dictator.

Historians have documented some 700-plus U.S. interventions and wars, covert and overt, over the past century or so all to advance the interests and power of the ruling elite, who require the constant expansion of their spheres of influence, today in the name of the War on Terror, to sustain their competitive advantage over their rivals. The interests of the oppressed peoples of the world have never been a factor in imperialist calculations.

Both the Bush and Obama administrations were more than happy to deal with the Gadhafi dictatorship as long as the formerly left-sounding populist dictator, more recently turned U.S. ally, was willing to open the country's economy to foreign capital. And Gadhafi readily acceded to IMF-dictated austerity programs, to giving a lion's share of and reducing the costs of Libya's oil to Western corporations, privatization of key industries, border guard assistance in thwarting the immigration of Black Africans into Italy and France, and joining in the War

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on Terror and the associated rejection of the Palestine liberation struggle. Gaddafi's harsh repression of dissent was never of any consequence to the Western corporations and governments who have now conquered the nation.

TNC officials have promised that they will honor all contracts that the Gadhafi regime made with Western capitalists. But the Libyan catastrophe will undoubtedly result in a new race by European and North American corporate rivals to turn a larger profit out of the nation's oil wealth. The British Independent commented on Aug. 24, "After five months of fighting in the world's 12th-largest oil producer, industry figures are acutely aware that billions could be made in the coming years from rebuilding Libya. Immediate focus will fall on the country's oil fields that are currently producing a 10th of the 1.6 million barrels a day that were exported pre-revolution."

As with the devastation in Iraq and Afghanistan, the conquerors can be expected to seek payment for their services and rebuild what they have destroyed via the impounded hundreds of billions of dollars of Libyan funds that have been frozen by imperialism's more-than-cooperative banking and financial institutions. As the Aug. 28 New York Times so delicately noted, "With so much uncertainty over the governance of Libya, none of the money will be given to the rebels, but instead will go directly to pay for services [provided by imperialism] and fuel costs."

The U.S./NATO war began when the Gadhafi dictatorship ordered its troops to open fire on a group of protesting human rights activists. As with the anti-government mobilizations in Tunisia and Egypt, this was followed by massive protests that were violently repressed by Gadhafi's police and military, which did not shrink from using its still intact ground and air power to quell the deep resentment that permeated Libyan society. Gadhafi's decision to make amends with Silvio Berlusconi's Italy and Nicolas Sarkozy's France, in the context of world capitalism's economic crisis, could only be at the expense of the Libyan masses.

In the early days of these mass protests, there were unmistakable but only modest indications of the independent character of at least a portion of the anti-Gadhafi leadership, as when anti-government protesters unfurled massive banners from rooftops, declaring, "No Foreign Intervention: The Libyan People Can Manage It Alone." Even then, it was not always clear whether opposition to foreign intervention referred to troops on the ground only, since major elements of the opposition had announced early on, and even demanded, support by U.S./NATO forces and a no-fly zone.

When a team of British secret operatives was captured by early anti-Gadhafi forces, they were summarily deported, an indication that at least a portion of the early fighters rejected any association with imperialist troops and other would-be liberators.

The United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC) referred to the mass character of the early mobilizations against Gadhafi when it issued its "Statement on U.S. Non-Intervention in Libya and Other Countries," declaring: "UNAC calls for an immediate halt to U.S. intervention in regions and countries where mass mobilizations are challenging oppressive regimes."

The statement continued, "We have seen the horrific consequences of U.S./UN-imposed economic sanctions against Iraq, as well as the consequences of U.S./UN operation of 'no-fly zones' over northern and southern Iraq, prior to the U.S. Shock and Awe attacks and invasion.

"We therefore oppose any form of U.S. military or economic intervention in Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, Tunisia and other countries where movements are rising in opposition to dictatorships and military rule." UNAC continues to oppose all U.S. intervention in Libya, North Africa, and the Middle East more generally.

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Unfortunately, the mass and independent character of the anti-Gadhafi mobilizations proved to be ephemeral. They had been politically limited and poorly organized, and therefore incapable of overcoming what rapidly devolved into a self-appointed government-like formation consisting of assorted factions from the Gadhafi regime, including leading political figures and top military commanders. These were supplemented by a swath of returning capitalists with connections to imperialist forces and representatives of assorted anti-Gadhafi tribal and fundamentalist groups. Virtually all these "Euro-leaders" demanded and expected U.S./NATO intervention to remove Gadhafi.

The conquest of Libya and the division of the spoils was moved to the top of the warmakers' agenda. Libya, with some 3-4 percent of the earth's known high quality, "sweet crude" oil reserves and an important European supplier was slated for permanent imperialist oversight, if not occupation. The European and American interveners brooked no voices to warn against or denounce the savage history of foreign intervention in the Arab world. They much preferred and selected the present mix of pro-capitalist Libyan oppositionists, who proudly sported and mass-produced the flag of King Idris al-Senussi, deposed by Gadhafi in 1969, and whose reign consisted in a permanent accommodation to world imperialism.

As we write, plans are in the works to establish an imperialist "stabilization" force to disarm the masses of Libyans who still retain the automatic rifles and other weapons captured from Gadhafi forces or liberally distributed by British, French, U.S., and other NATO forces parked at Misrata and other coastal ports. But disarming the population might prove more difficult than the imperialists originally thought. An Aug. 31 New York Times article entitled "Tripoli divided as rebels jockey over leadership" makes it clear that plans to stabilize Tripoli, not to mention several other cities, are uncertain.

The Times article states: "There are growing hints of rivalry among the various brigades over who deserves credit for liberating the city and the influence it might bring. And attempts to name a military leader to unify the bands of fighters have instead exposed divisions within the rebel leadership, along regional lines but also between secularists and Islamists.

"They were all signs, one influential member of the council said, that point to a continuing 'power vacuum' in the civilian leadership of the Libyan capital. But the jockeying for power also illustrates the challenge a new provisional government will face in trying to unify Libya's fractious political landscape. The imperialist overlords are far from certain that their initial TNC choices are reliable in this task. As in Iraq and Afghanistan, Libya has long been divided along fractious tribal and religious lines as well as warring bourgeois factions.

A 70-page plan obtained and published by the London Times embarrassed the imperial invaders when it described their preparations for the long-term pacification of Libya. The Times wrote: "The plans are highly reliant on the defection of parts of the Gaddafi security apparatus to the rebels after his overthrow. This is likely to prove not only risky, but controversial, with many rebel fighters determined to sweep away all vestiges of the regime.

"The document includes proposals for a 10,000-15,000 strong 'Tripoli task force,' resourced and supported by the United Arab Emirates (UAE), to take over the Libyan capital, secure key sites and arrest high-level Gaddafi supporters! (See the reference below to the UAE's Blackwater mercenary death squads.)

"The blueprint contains plans for about 5000 police officers now serving in units not ideologically committed to the Gaddafi regime to be transferred immediately to the interim government's forces to prevent a security vacuum. The documents claim that the rebel groups in Tripoli and surrounding areas have 8660 supporters, including 3255 in the Gaddafi army."

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As expected, the TNC and imperialist spokespersons everywhere promise "Eurosoedemocratic" elections within eight months "the same kind of elections that brought to power the various corrupt puppet regimes in Iraq and Afghanistan. Any notion of excluding Gadhafi supporters entirely, as the Bush administration "Eurosoemistakenly" did in its Iraq "Eurosoede-Baathification" program (removal of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party supporters from all key posts in the government and army), is said to be absent in the projected Libya scenario.

It is more than ironic that today's more "Eurosoeenlightened" occupiers seek to first physically destroy Gadhafi's resisting bureaucrats, generals, and soldiers and then reconstitute a new government with at least a portion of the old. Compliant Gadhafi supporters are expected to share power in a coalition government to supposedly avoid the kind of schisms that continue to plague Iraq and Afghanistan. Undoubtedly, today's "Eurosoenation builders" have no intention of including representatives of the mass of Libya's working class, other than as window dressing.

But imperialism's prevaricating diplomats nevertheless seek to paste a democratic facade on these delicate matters. Said French foreign minister Alain Jupp , "Eurosoelt" up to the Libyans and the Libyans alone to build a new Libya, which will be a democratic Libya. (!) Mention of Libya four times in a single sentence certainly sends a message. Had Jupp  said instead, "Eurosoelt" up to the imperialists and the imperialists alone to build a neo-colonial Libya, which will be an autocratic Libya. he would have been closer to the truth.

What rapidly emerged six months ago, in February 2011, was a patched together TNC, replete with a core of defecting Gadhafi military and diplomatic officials and an array of Western capitalist-connected, Libyan lawyers and "Eurosoehuman rights" advocates largely operating to advance the interests of the major NATO-affiliated invaders. From the earliest announcement of this government-in-waiting, now recognized by some 57 nations and counting, not a single TNC voice has been heard to indicate anything other than full support to and collaboration with the imperialist-orchestrated invasion, not to mention pledged support for peaceful negotiations between potentially competing forces as to who will get what in the post-Gadhafi Libya.

Some of the TNC's components are already registering disagreements, as with the recent demonstration of 500 Misrata residents who mobilized and formally petitioned to protest the inclusion of top Gadhafi officials in the new "Eurosoegovernment." The TNC's top leaders, however, have been thoroughly briefed by imperialism's presently silent advisers to the effect that the new "Eurosoegovernment" must begin with the "Eurosoeinclusion" of a broad range of forces to avoid future degeneration as was the case with Iraq.

The TNC's central leaders include:

• Mahmoud Jibril, present head of the new "Eurosoegovernment" and, until his early-on defection, head of Libya's National Economic Development Board. Jibril has spent most of his time in Europe, rounding up support for his imperialist-created regime. He studied at the University of Pittsburgh and served as an asset manager to the wife of the Emir of Qatar.

• Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, chair of the TNC and Minister of Justice under Gadhafi until he resigned to protest the attacks on students and other protesters.

• Gen. Abdul Fattah Younis, the TNC's top military commander, Libya's interior minister, a French intelligence asset and a personal friend of Gadhafi before defecting. Younis was likely killed by the TNC's Muslim Brotherhood faction, also included in the new "Eurosoegovernment."

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• Ali-al-Essawi, former Gadhafi cabinet official and ambassador, thought to be involved in Gen. Younis' murder.

• Khalifa Hifter, senior commander of TNC troops, who had been living in exile in the U.S. Hifter appointed himself the TNC's military commander, replacing his rival, Younis.

• Abdel Hafidh Ghogi, a Benghazi-based human rights attorney.

• Fathi Terbil, youth representative on the TNC and a human rights attorney, whose arrest by Gadhafi security forces is said to have sparked the rebellion.

Most of these leaders are hardened Gadhafi bureaucrats, military strongmen who defected from the Gadhafi government, or Libyans in exile who have collaborated with U.S. officials. A few youthful human rights activists may have been added to the mix to lend it a liberal cast.

Of the TNC's 31 members only 13 were formally announced, supposedly due to security reasons. With the TNC's relocation to Tripoli in late August, the number has been expanded to 40 and is expected to rise to 80. This self-appointed body of essentially Libya's elite has no connection with any mass political organization of Libya's working masses; to the extent that these groups exist at all, they are largely in embryonic form.

Whatever self-organization was evidenced in the earliest days of the mass protest was essentially spontaneous and created to organize the distribution of food and the coordination of vital services as Gadhafi's forces bombarded Benghazi. We have yet to see any indication that these organizational forms gave rise to or were based on independent political forces aiming at developing a program to advance the interests of the masses. Nor is there evidence that they took on the task of consolidating an alternative to the leading bourgeois and pro-imperialist forces, which fully understood the need to rush to the leadership of the mass movement.

Given the political void among the anti-Gadhafi forces, the TNC was quickly recognized as the nation's legal government by France and Italy with the United States, briefly considering the feasibility of a greater military and political role, following suit soon afterwards. The Europeans' and Americans' public pretensions of protecting civilians from Gadhafi's forces rapidly gave way to their real objectives—regime change—pure and simple. The order of the day was Gadhafi's removal. Inter-imperialist negotiations as to the role and weight of Libya's future overseers were temporarily set aside.

The U.S./NATO intervention and massive bombing were qualitatively intensified while TNC forces were prepared to take Tripoli. Some 30 percent of all sorties were scheduled for the last five days. The rebels were further aided by massive supplies provided by the imperialist-backed military governments in Egypt and Tunisia. The Qatari government served as the overt organizer and trainer of the Tripoli Brigade, which led the assault, undoubtedly with the assistance of the Qatar-based Blackwater mercenary death-squad forces, financed by the U.S. and based in Qatar.

The Aug. 19 Washington Post reported: "For months, we have been gathering information in Tripoli and shipping weapons, money and men to the capital," said Abu Oweis, the founder and deputy commander of the Qatari-trained Tripoli brigade. "We are completely ready to take over," he added. "All people there will be very happy."

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The brigade's temporary headquarters, a school building near the city of Zintan on the vast plateau of the Nafusa Mountains, was stocked with ammunition during a visit on Thursday. Commanders worked on laptops and used satellite phones as recruits assembled their weapons.

Oweis said his troops would arrest "over a hundred" high-profile Gaddafi loyalists designated as criminals and potential troublemakers by the rebels' Transitional National Council, which for now is based in the city of Benghazi in eastern Libya.

The rebel leaders succeeded in quickly gaining diplomatic recognition from countries around the world, including the United States. International support, in which Qatar and the United Arab Emirates play a key role, has given the rebels access to frozen assets that once belonged to Gaddafi, as well as weapons deliveries from abroad.

Cargo planes from the United Arab Emirates could be seen in Benghazi's airport Monday, and rebels have turned a slab of highway in the western mountains into a provisional airstrip where they regularly receive cash and automatic weapons from representatives of the Transitional National Council.

The Washington Post report neglected to mention that Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, with virtually no armies of their own, rely on U.S.-financed Blackwater mercenary death-squad armies to defend their regimes against domestic unrest. Mercenaries of the Blackwater type constitute nearly half of the U.S. fighting forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, the largest U.S. deployment of privatized military forces in history. Whatever pretensions the Obama administration offers to indicate the withdrawal of some troops from Iraq and Afghanistan are more than compensated for by the massive mercenary forces it maintains in these countries.

The May 15 New York Times, in a front-page article entitled "Secret Desert Force Set up By Blackwater Founder," asserted, "The force is intended to conduct special operations missions inside and outside the country, defend oil pipelines and skyscrapers from terrorist attacks and put down internal revolts, the documents show. Such troops could be deployed if the Emirates faced unrest in their crowded labor camps or were challenged by pro-democracy protests like those sweeping the Arab world this year" (emphasis added).

An Aug. 25 Washington Post article by Spencer Ackerman entitled "Tiny Qatar Flexes Big Muscles in Libya" similarly noted: "If the Persian Gulf nation has any defense profile at all, it's mostly for hosting the giant al-Udeid air base, a major transit point for U.S. troops and material heading to Iraq and Afghanistan. But despite having very few men under arms, Qatar not only helped keep Moammar Gadhafi's planes grounded, it helped turn the ragtag Libyan rebels into a real fighting force and even, according to one well-placed source, played a key role in getting them into Tripoli."

The Aug. 23 New York Times told the same story: "The rebels received steady supplies of weapons, fuel, medicine and food from British, French and Qatari troops as well as an escalated bombing campaign by American jets and Predator drones." The Times added, "Hundreds of rebels took part in secret military training in Qatar." None of these corporate media reports dared to explicitly state that Blackwater forces "that is, U.S.-financed mercenary death squads, as are routinely deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq" "were engaged in combat missions in Libya. A growing body of evidence reveals that they were.

The imperialist-led conquest of Libya was reported in the kept media in the tradition of all imperialist wars. Gadhafi's forces were demonized even though he was George Bush's praised leader little more than a year ago. But much of the media hyperbole aimed at justifying the U.S. war proved to say more about the TNC than it did about Gadhafi.

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The Aug. 14 New York Times article entitled "Waves of Disinformation and Confusion Swamp the Truth in Libya" is revealing not so much in its ridiculing of Gadhafi's statements that he would fight to the last soldier but rather because a few skeptical reporters provided a rare glimpse into TNC politics. The rebels have offered their own far-fetched claims, like mass rapes by loyalist troops issued tablets of Viagra. Although the rebels have not offered credible proof, their claim is nonetheless the basis of an investigation by the International Criminal Court.

Furthermore, says The Times: "And there is the mantra, with racist overtones, that the Qaddafi government is using African mercenaries, which rebels repeat as fact over and over. There have been no confirmed cases of that; supposedly there are many African prisoners of war held in Benghazi, but conveniently journalists are not allowed to see them. There are, however, African guest workers, poorly paid migrant labor, many of whom, unarmed, have been labeled mercenaries." The Times has referred to this anti-Black African racism promoted by TNC spokespersons on several occasions, as if to caution the rebel leaders that it counters the democratic image they have been encouraged to promote.

What lessons can be drawn from the impending imperialist victory in Libya? First and foremost, as the mass mobilizations in Egypt and Tunisia and now Libya have more than amply demonstrated, there are no shortcuts not to mention imperialist interventions in defeating dictators. The construction of mass revolutionary socialist parties, deeply rooted in the organizations and struggles of the masses for equality and freedom, is the first prerequisite to victory. There will be no sustained victories against capitalist regimes, liberal or dictatorial, unless these are complemented by coordinated struggles on a regional, if not international, basis.

Second, imperialist interventions in all of their manifestations must be vehemently opposed. The right of self-determination of all oppressed nations, even those led by heinous dictators, must be supported as against imperialist interventions. Imperialism's defeat in any confrontation with oppressed nations weakens its capacity for future interventions and opens the door wider for others to follow suit. While revolutionary socialists have every right and obligation to criticize and oppose dictatorships everywhere, these criticisms are subordinate to the defeat of imperialist intervention and war. Revolutionaries are not neutral in such confrontations. We are always for the defeat of the imperialist intervener and would-be colonizer.

A critical element in the program of the United National Antiwar Coalition is opposition to any and all U.S. intervention. UNAC is united in organizing massive mobilizations to demand "Bring All U.S./NATO Troops, Mercenaries and War Contractors Home Now!" Its constituent organizations have a variety of views, which are sometimes conflicting, on the regimes of many countries, from Iran to Libya, as well as Iraq and Afghanistan. These differences are properly addressed by the various constituent organizations' publications and activities. But the basis of unity in action, of the united-front-type formations that are critical to the organization of the masses to stay the hand of the imperialist warmakers, is defense of the right of self-determination of all oppressed nations even those headed by hated dictators.

We live in deeply troubled and contradictory times in which the worldwide capitalist offensive remains largely unchallenged on a scale necessary to change the present relationship of forces. But history repeatedly demonstrates that the working-class majority will once again rise to challenge its oppressors and once again boldly pose the question of which power shall rule theirs, in the interest of the tiny parasitic few or ours, in the interest of all humanity.

Today, the imperialist-led war in Libya continues, with massive NATO bombing supporting the TNC troops' efforts to conquer pro-Gadhafi cities. But we are compelled to recognize the tragic truth that a severe defeat has been inflicted on the Libyan people. To our sisters and brothers in Libya, we can merely assert that the crisis-ridden imperialist beast can only provide new opportunities to build fighting mass movements and the essential mass

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revolutionary socialist parties capable of uniting all the oppressed in a common struggle against imperialism and all its agents. The Libyan masses will rise again!

In contrast to the massive mobilizations during the Arab Spring in North Africa that forced the ouster of hated dictators in Egypt and Tunisia, the Libyan people are saddled with an even greater evil—direct neo-colonial intervention into their country's affairs.

This is not to say that the victories won by the Egyptian and Tunisian masses are secure. Imperialism's satraps continue to rule in these nations in the form of the still-powerful military regimes. The work of revolutionaries in Egypt and Tunisia is far from completed. Indeed, it has just begun. Whatever space has been opened by the massive mobilizations can and will be quickly closed if the still-existing capitalist state power remains in place. The coming revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia, and in all other nations, can only be secured with the abolition of the capitalist system, whose inherent logic is oppression, war, and destruction.

Today the imperialist boot is on the ground in Libya and deeply implanted. The Libyan masses have not been liberated. Thousands have been killed. Imperialism's sights are now focused on doing the same in Syria and eventually in Iran. The liberation struggle in these countries also rests in the development of mass revolutionary socialist parties there, not with imperialism's humanitarian interventions and not with any reliance on the present entrenched and brutal local capitalist exploiters.

Here in the United States, we must restate our revolutionary obligation to the world's people to oppose our own imperialist government and all its wars, and to warn once again that American imperialism is incapable of serving anyone's interests other than the elite ruling-class few. The Obama administration is a glaring example of this fundamental truth. It has exceeded the Bush administration in virtually every measure with regard to the attacks on workers at home and abroad. Any illusion that it is capable of doing otherwise will prove fatal to the coming mass struggles that will challenge the capitalist system as never before.

- ▶ Bring the Troops Home Now: Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan!
- ▶ Stop the U.S./NATO War on Libya! Imperialist Troops, Warships, Aircraft, Mercenaries Out Now!
- ▶ Self-determination for All Oppressed Peoples!
- ▶ Build the Revolutionary Socialist Party of the Working Class in Libya and Everywhere Else!