

US senators call for Gaddafi's assassination

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Senior leaders of the US Congress used appearances on CNN's "State of the Union" program yesterday to brazenly call for the assassination of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and a major escalation of air strikes to achieve the war's real aim—the installation of a compliant puppet regime.

Five weeks of bombing have failed to bring about Gaddafi's downfall, primarily due to continued support for the government in the capital Tripoli and the military and political weakness of the anti-Gaddafi forces based in the eastern city of Benghazi. Opposition fighters have made no significant gains in the east of the country and pro-government troops have maintained a siege of the opposition-held western city of Misrata, despite almost daily NATO bombardments.

The clear signs of a military stalemate, and a ruthless insistence that it be broken, dominate the discussion within the US establishment. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham told CNN: "Right now there's just not enough momentum by the rebels... So my recommendation to NATO and the administration is to cut the head of the snake off. Go to Tripoli, start bombing Gaddafi's inner circle, their compounds, their military headquarters."

Graham repeated the widespread demand in the US establishment for the Obama administration to deploy AC-130 gunships for operations against the pro-Gaddafi Libyan forces. AC-130s are armed with a rapid-fire, five-barrel 25mm Gatling gun, a 40mm cannon, and a 105mm howitzer. They are designed to blanket an area with explosions and bullets and devastate vehicles and personnel—and any civilians who happen to be caught up in the fire. They have been used with murderous effect in Afghanistan and Iraq, including documented massacres of civilians.

Graham dismissed CNN host Candy Crowley's observation that attacks on targets in heavily-populated areas of Tripoli were not covered by the UN resolution

that provides a legal fig leaf for the war. "The goal is to get rid of Gaddafi," he said. "The people around Gaddafi need to wake up every day wondering 'will this be my last?' The military commanders supporting Gaddafi should be pounded. So I would not let the UN mandate stop what is the right thing to do."

Republican Senator and former presidential candidate John McCain, who visited Benghazi last Friday to meet with members of the opposition Transitional National Council, called for the immediate US recognition of the rebel body so that money and armaments could be sent. McCain declared that the former Gaddafi ministers, CIA-linked figures and Islamists who are known to be in the council "represent the legitimate aspirations of the Libyan people."

As well as demanding stepped-up efforts to train and arm the anti-Gaddafi forces to wage their civil war, McCain insisted that US air power such as AC-130s and Apache gunships be deployed in "a heavier way."

In response to Graham's call for assassination, McCain expressed general agreement with targeting the Libyan leader, but declared US strategy had to be based on "winning the battle on the ground" not on "a chance of taking him out with a lucky air strike."

Independent Senator Joseph Lieberman—the one-time vice presidential candidate of the Democratic Party—joined the campaign for escalation and echoed Graham's call to assassinate Gaddafi. NATO, he declared, "has got to start thinking about whether they want to more directly target Gaddafi and his family." Lieberman cynically declared that the UN resolution justified a policy of assassination on the grounds it would "protect the civilian population."

The blatant advocacy of war crimes to remove Gaddafi from power stems inexorably from the criminal motives of the war itself. From the beginning, it was driven by the neo-colonial ambitions of France, Britain and the US to gain domination over Libya's

lucrative oil resources at the expense of rivals such as China and Russia. Five weeks after the bombing began and with no end in sight, the mounting frustration in Washington is fuelling calls to drown all resistance in blood.

One motivation is the impact on world oil prices of the virtual shutdown of Libya's oil exports. Fighting and bombing around major oil and gas facilities have also caused damage to infrastructure. Fields held by the Benghazi rebels are predicted to be out of production for the next four weeks, forcing them to rely on donations of fuel from Qatar.

The Obama administration and its NATO allies have already moved to significantly escalate the assault on Libya. Britain, France and Italy have begun dispatching "trainers" to Benghazi to assist the opposition forces—a first step toward the eventual deployment of ground forces.

On Saturday, the first attack on Libyan government troops was carried out by an unmanned US Predator drone, which President Obama ordered deployed last week. A vehicle-mounted rocket launcher in Misrata was reportedly destroyed by a Hellfire missile. At least two Predators will be kept flying over Libya 24 hours a day.

On Sunday, British Foreign Secretary William Hague refused to rule out a NATO decision to deploy the Predators to attempt to assassinate Gaddafi. Hague declared: "Who and what is a legitimate target depends on how they behave."

Efforts to kill Gaddafi or his family members appear to be already taking place. Among a number of sites bombed in Tripoli over the weekend was a bunker complex near the Libyan leader's compound. Three people were reportedly killed. CNN reported that a major ammunition dump was bombed and that "air strikes went on for the better part of the night."

Last week, NATO commander General Charles Bouchard warned civilians to keep away from alleged military targets. The attacks are deliberately targeting civilian infrastructure however. The Libyan news agency reported on the weekend that NATO aircraft bombed water supply and sewage systems in the Gaddafi-held towns of al-Khums and Sirte. During the 1999 NATO air war against Yugoslavia, power plants, roads, rail lines and water systems were bombed to terrorise the civilian population.

Reports from Misrata, where heavy fighting has been taking place, indicate that large numbers of Libyan soldiers were killed on the weekend by NATO attacks. An opposition fighter boasted that 30 tanks had been destroyed, along with a convoy of four-wheel drives. A journalist for the British *Guardian* reported seeing at least six burnt-out tank in a district of the city where government troops retreated on Saturday.

While opposition commanders are insisting the city is under their control, their positions were heavily shelled on Sunday from the city outskirts, killing and wounding a number of people. Desperate to break the current military stalemate, NATO aircraft are continuing to attack government forces in the area.



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