

# New York Times demands escalation of killing in Libya

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Having endorsed the Obama administration's war in Libya on the pretext of "protecting civilians," the editors of the *New York Times* are now demanding a sharp escalation in the killing through the reintroduction of the US military's flying gunships.

"Wars are messy business," the laptop generals of Eighth Avenue inform their readers in an editorial published in the newspaper's Friday edition. They note that "the international effort to keep Col. Muammar Gaddafi's forces from slaughtering Libyan rebels and civilians is proving no exception."

This opening sentence is a typical journalistic sleight of hand aimed at defending the increasingly tattered humanitarian cover for the imperialist war being waged in Libya. The intervention by the so-called "international community" is being carried out under the mandate of a United Nations Security Council resolution authorizing "all necessary measures" to protect civilians in Libya—not to intervene in a civil war to promote the victory of the "rebels" over forces loyal to the Gaddafi government.

The concern at the *Times* and within America's political establishment as a whole is not the lives of Libyan civilians, but the flagging fortunes of the so-called rebels. Washington had hoped that with air cover from NATO war planes, the armed force led by ex-Gaddafi officials and CIA "assets" could be used to bring down Gaddafi and install a regime even more subordinate to the interests of US imperialism and the big energy conglomerates.

But the US-backed insurgents have proven inadequate in size, ability and determination to drive back the government troops. They have engaged in panicked retreats over the past week.

The *Times* claims that the reason for this debacle is that the pro-Gaddafi forces have "thwarted NATO

airstrikes" by "regrouping" in populated areas, making an effective air war impossible without the threat of heavy civilian casualties. "There is a much better option," the *Times* insists. It is the renewed deployment over Libya of the Pentagon's AC-130 and A-10 flying gunships.

"These American planes can fly low enough and slow enough to let them see and target Colonel Gaddafi's weapons without unduly endangering nearby populations," the *Times* assures its readers. The AC-130, it adds, "is ideally suited for carefully sorting out targets in populated areas."

The AC-130 is a fearsome weapon. A converted World War II-era turboprop Hercules transport plane, it is armed with a 105mm Howitzer cannon capable of firing ten 105mm high-explosive shells a minute and three 25mm Gatling cannons that rain 7,500 rounds a minute on their target.

Describing the aircraft as the "Angel of Death," one recent profile of the gunship noted that on contact the 105mm shells "destroy buildings and spread shrapnel over a 'kill' area of up to 1,500 yards," or more than three-quarters of a mile.

Used from the Vietnam War to the current intervention in Libya, this weapon's impact is horrific. Human beings caught in its path are vaporized or torn in half.

The idea that the AC-130 is equipped for "sorting out targets in populated areas" is absurd. Its computerized systems lock onto targets and assure their decimation. They do not distinguish between combatant and civilian.

The *Times'* attempt to present the gunship as the ideal tool for "humanitarian" warfare notwithstanding,

the AC-130 has been at the center of some of the worst war crimes carried out by US imperialism in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

In August 2008, an AC-130 was used in an attack on the village of Azizabad in Afghanistan's Herat province. The ostensible target of the attack was a leader of the Afghan armed resistance, but its victims were 90 civilians—60 children, 15 women and 15 men, according to a United Nations investigation.

Similarly, US AC-130 gunships carried out air strikes in October 2001 against the farming village of Chowkar-Karez, 25 miles north of Kandahar, killing at least 93 civilians.

In Iraq, the AC-130s were employed to devastating effect in the US military's sieges of the city of Fallujah in April and November of 2004, which left thousands of Iraqi civilians dead and 60 percent of the city's buildings in ruins.

This history raises a troubling question about the *Times* editorial. What do the newspaper's editors mean when they say that the AC-130 can be used in Libya "without unduly endangering nearby populations?"

Presumably, they found that the US military was not "unduly" slaughtering civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq, given the justification and support offered by the "newspaper of record" for both of these wars of aggression. Like the rest of the corporate media, the *Times* has done its best to minimize reporting on the civilian death toll and bolster the stream of lies from the Pentagon.

The *Times* casually comments that "wars are messy business"—and does its best to conceal the mess from the American people. But the use of the murderous war planes in populated areas as advocated by the newspaper would be a war crime in which its editors would figure as accomplices.

The demand from the *Times* for the use of AC-130s and A-10 gunships in Libya—the *Washington Post* published a similar editorial, entitled "Does Withdrawing US planes from Libya Serve Our Interests?" just two days earlier—expresses growing concerns within American ruling circles that the war for control of Libya and its oil wealth is going badly.

They are concluding that the rebels are useless for achieving Washington's war aims and that more direct military force is needed. It will become increasingly difficult for the *Times* and the other media

propagandists for US imperialism to maintain the humanitarian mask for the aggression against Libya as the Pentagon and its European counterparts ratchet up the slaughter.



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