

Imperialist powers seek exit from Libyan war

James Cogan
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The governments of Britain and the United States have joined France, the other principal instigator of the imperialist war on Libya, in seeking an exit strategy from their failed attempt to overthrow the country's long-standing dictator Muammar Gaddafi and install the Benghazi-based Transitional National Council (TNC) as a puppet government. After five months of raining death and destruction on the people of Libya and making numerous attempts to assassinate the Libyan leader, the major powers are now offering a settlement to Gaddafi and his regime.

On Monday, British Foreign Secretary William Hague signalled his government's acceptance of a deal. He stepped back from previous declarations that the war would not end until Gaddafi had been removed from power and had left Libya. Gaddafi's fate, Hague stated, was instead "a question for Libyans to determine." White House spokesman Jay Carney endorsed the British position several hours later, telling journalists that whether Gaddafi remained in the country was "up to the Libyan people to decide."

The French government of President Nicolas Sarkozy had already indicated its willingness to make a deal with Gaddafi. On July 10, French Defence Minister Gerard Longuet declared that it was pressuring the "rebels" of the TNC to enter into peace talks with Gaddafi loyalists and accept that the dictator himself could "be in another room in his palace with another title."

The cynical gestures toward the "democratic" will of the Libyan people are a smokescreen. The acceptance that Gaddafi can remain in the country is above all a clear signal to his regime's inner circle and powerbrokers that the imperialist powers are prepared to cut a deal that allows them to retain their privileges,

positions and wealth.

The statements coincided with diplomatic activity by United Nations envoy Abdul Elah al-Khatib and representatives of Gaddafi's government to draw up plans for a "power-sharing government." The Russian government has allegedly proposed a five-man interim regime, consisting of two Gaddafi loyalists, two members of the TNC and a fifth person appointed on the basis of mutual agreement.

This shift in imperialist diplomacy is a devastating confirmation of the predatory, neo-colonial agenda that lay behind the launching of the war in the first place.

The French, British and American governments viewed the mass popular uprisings that forced the removal of pro-imperialist dictators in Tunisia and Egypt as a threat to their interests in North Africa and the Middle East. They were determined to ensure that Gaddafi's Libya, with which they had each established close political and economic relations, was brought firmly under their control.

As cables published by WikiLeaks demonstrate, the United States was concerned by Gaddafi's efforts to secure better terms for the exploitation of the country's lucrative oil and gas resources and his overtures toward Chinese and Russian corporate interests. Any government that came into existence through a popular overthrow of his regime would be even more likely to demand a greater share of the country's natural wealth.

The alternative seized upon by the imperialist powers was to fashion a new regime from elements in Benghazi in eastern Libya, who had grievances against the Tripoli-based government of Gaddafi. Such a regime could serve not only to deliver the country's

resources into the hands of US and Western European interests, but, through agreements to base imperialist troops, as a bulwark against the further spread of unrest in the region.

Within weeks of protests for greater democracy breaking out in Benghazi, small numbers of people who later formed the TNC launched an armed insurrection against the regime. The figures behind the so-called rebellion were an amalgam of former Gaddafi ministers, CIA operatives and pro-Al Qaeda Islamic fundamentalists. Operations by the Libyan armed forces to suppress their small-scale uprising were exaggerated by the major powers into genocidal blood-letting against civilians that could be prevented only by foreign military intervention.

Everything that has transpired since has demonstrated that the pro-imperialist insurrection did not represent a broad popular movement and does not have mass support across Libya. Tripoli and its surrounding area are firmly under Gaddafi's control. Contrary to expectations, the Libyan military has largely remained loyal to the government. There has been no mass enlistment in the armed units of the TNC. The ill-trained "rebel" military has repeatedly failed to hold onto territory that Libyan forces had been forced to abandon due to NATO air strikes.

The war has never been about protecting civilians. From the time the United Nations legitimised the war with Resolution 1973, the US, Britain and France, operating under the umbrella of the NATO alliance, made no secret that their real agenda is regime-change.

Sheer criminality has characterised the efforts of the major powers to achieve this end. Gaddafi has been the target of numerous assassination attempts, one of which murdered his son and three of his grandchildren. Hundreds, if not thousands, of Libyan soldiers have been slaughtered by air attacks aimed at decimating Gaddafi's army. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been supplied, and special forces, mercenaries and intelligence operatives from NATO countries flown in, to assist the "rebels" in assembling military units. France has illegally air-dropped weapons to tribal groups in the west of the country.

According to the Libyan government, the bombing of essential infrastructure in Tripoli and other areas held by pro-Gaddafi forces has killed at least 1,108 civilians and wounded over 4,500. Evidence is mounting that NATO has stepped-up deliberate attacks on civilian targets in order to terrorise the population into turning against the regime. This week, a flu inoculation clinic and a food storage depot were bombed in the town of Zlitan to the east of Tripoli. Journalists from CNN were shown the ruins of a mosque and a school. A local official told CNN: "It [NATO] is waging wide-scale war on the people. They are destroying everything."

The criminal war on Libya has now entered a sordid stage. An end is being sought to a five-month operation that has become a debacle and embarrassment for the US and its allies. This month, the major powers have all recognised the TNC as Libya's "legitimate government," enabling them to essentially steal an estimated \$130 billion in Libyan assets held in Western banks and financial institutions. The intent is clear. To get back the wealth, the Libyan elite around Gaddafi will have to enter into negotiations with the TNC and form a government on the terms dictated by the US, Britain and France. Whatever combination of elements from Gaddafi's regime and the TNC eventuates, it will have nothing to do with democracy.

The US-NATO war on Libya is a damning exposure of the various pseudo-left and liberal tendencies and individuals, including France's New Anti-Capitalist Party, the *Nation* magazine and US academic Juan Cole, who endorsed the intervention with claims it was justified on "humanitarian" grounds. They have legitimised the deaths of thousands and the devastation of an oppressed country so that the imperialist powers can refashion its government—directly against the interests of the masses in Libya and more broadly in the region.

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