

NATO's Libyan puppet regime bombs Misrata amid escalating civil war

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Civil war is engulfing Libya, after the NATO-backed puppet regime of Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni bombed Libya's third-largest city, Misrata, on Sunday, in an attempt to prevent Islamist militias from seizing an oil terminal. Air strikes are spreading, both by the al-Thinni regime and to a lesser extent by aircraft fielded by the Islamist militias.

The air strikes took place after Islamist *Fajr Libya* (Libya Dawn) militias, a coalition of antigovernment forces including the Misrata and Libya Shield militias and Amazigh (Berber) tribes, launched a renewed attack early Sunday to seize the key Al-Sidra and the nearby Ras Lanuf oil terminal. The air strikes targeted a flying school close to Misrata airport, the port and a steel factory in the city.

Misrata has been a key base for Libya Dawn since May. Sunday's attack followed an assault on December 13, which the self-proclaimed Islamist government dubbed "Operation Sunrise," with the start of the second phase of "Operation Sunrise" slated for Christmas Day.

On December 25, Islamist militias attacked Libya's largest oil terminal at Al-Sidra and the city of Sirte, where Islamist militiamen firing rocket-propelled grenades from speedboats killed 22 government soldiers.

As a result of the fighting, seven of the 19 oil tanks at Al-Sidra were ablaze on Sunday, according to an oil official. Casualties from the strikes have not yet been reported.

The air strikes came after the al-Thinni regime issued a 72-hour ultimatum that expired late on Saturday, warning of consequences unless Islamist militias ended the assault.

According to government spokesman Colonel Ahmed Mesmari, "the strikes took place after Fajr Libya

launched an air raid on Al-Sidra using a MiG-23 jet that took off from the aviation school in Misrata... That is why we targeted it and other positions of the militia."

In early December, the government carried out air strikes against an alleged warehouse holding foods, as well as a chemical factory west of the capital, Tripoli, killing 4 people and wounding 15.

The escalation of bloody fighting between the unpopular western-backed puppet regime and the Islamist militias is plunging the entire country into civil war. The al-Thinni regime itself has been expelled from all of Libya's major cities, fleeing to Tobruk in the far east of Libya, near the Egyptian border.

Brigadier General Saqr al-Garoushi, the commander of the al-Thinni government's air force, told Libyan media: "The armed forces chief of staff declared Misrata a military zone and it will be besieged from east and west alongside continuous escalating strikes."

The escalating civil war in Libya is an indictment of the NATO war in 2011 that overthrew the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and led to his murder, arming Islamist militias that were used as proxy forces against Gaddafi. This act of imperialist piracy, applauded as a revolution by pseudo-left parties like France's New Anti-capitalist Party and human rights charlatans like Bernard-Henry Lévy, turned Libya over to the imperialists and to Islamist militias for plunder.

NATO has fallen out with its former Islamist proxies, however, and Libya has joined the ranks of countries like Iraq and Afghanistan that have been utterly devastated by the imperialist powers.

The resulting civil war has plunged Libya into a major humanitarian crisis, with thousands from the population forced to flee the fighting. About 400,000 people have fled the fighting in the past six months alone.

Last month, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) said that “at least 106,000 people this month alone have fled their homes in Libya in search of a safe haven from warring parties.”

Schools have been turned into refugee shelters. Numerous refugees are forced to camp outside, with only plastic sheeting for cover.

UNHCR spokesman Adrian Edwards said, “It’s a worsening situation. Aid agencies are having difficulty reaching the people in need.”

The outbreak of violent conflict will lead to a major war across Libya. The UN mission in Libya, UNSMIL, issued a statement condemning the air strikes. The statement warned, “This cycle of violence...if continued, will lead the country to chaos and all-out war.” It called for taking “courageous steps” to end the fighting.

The war has also devastated the Libyan economy, particularly its critical oil industry. Mohamed Elharari, a spokesman for National Oil Corp, said, “the latest spate of fighting has led to a decline in output to 352,000 barrels a day.” According to Bloomberg News, “that makes Libya, which holds Africa’s largest oil reserves, the smallest producer of the 12-member Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. The country was producing about 1.6 million barrels a day before the 2011 rebellion that toppled Muammar Gaddafi.”

The imperialist powers are backing CIA-linked General Khalifa Hifter’s forces in the civil war, which is the direct product of their 2011 intervention, and threatening a renewed, direct intervention into Libya to defend their interests. In May, the United States dispatched 200 troops to a base in Sicily aimed at responding more quickly to crises in Libya.

In September, France’s Socialist Party government threatened military intervention, with President François Hollande urging the UN to “organize exceptional support for Libyan authorities to restore their state,” supposedly in order to fight terrorism.

On December 20, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi declared that Rome, the former colonial power in Italy, would not rule out the possibility of military intervention under an international framework, should diplomatic efforts fail.

In a press statement, Renzi said, “Italy is not far from ongoing tensions in Libya due to the two countries’

close geographical distance,” adding that his government “will do whatever is necessary for Italy’s security.”



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