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US, European powers prepare new air and ground operations against Libya

By Thomas Gaist

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The US and NATO are preparing to carry out new military operations on Libyan territory, a *Guardian* report made clear on Sunday.

The Western powers are pressuring the newly formed Libyan “unity government” coalition, assembled last week under the nominal leadership of the Maltese government, to approve strikes against ISIS targets in the country, according to the British newspaper.

The first task of the “unity government” should be to issue “a direct call for help from the West,” the European Union’s Libyan ambassador said. UK Prime Minister David Cameron called on the new coalition to serve as “one unified, representative government in Libya in the fight against Daesh [ISIS].” The Gulf regimes will also send forces in support of the imperialist-backed “unity government,” British Foreign Minister Philip Hammond said.

US State Department spokesman John Kirby vowed that Washington would support the new governmental coalition with “full backing and technical, economic, security and counterterrorism assistance.” In his end-of-the year press conference Friday, President Barack Obama hinted at the plans for a new US-NATO military intervention in Libya, saying the country now faced “a very bad situation” as a result of the failure of the NATO coalition to “rebuild government there quickly” after the 2011 war.

The so-called “unity government” does not include either of the two regimes that currently claim sovereignty over Libya. Nor does it include numerous other factions that are heavily involved in fighting on the ground, where at least six major tribal-based militias are struggling for control of portions of the strategic Mediterranean coastline. These include the Libyan National Army, Ansar al-Sharia, the anti-Islamist Cyrenaica militia, Islamic State, the Shura Revolutionary Council, and the Libya Dawn coalition of so-called “moderate Islamist” and Berber militias.

Far from securing any real unity or stability, the new government has been cobbled together to fabricate a legal fig leaf for another military onslaught against Libya by the imperialist powers, which seek to exploit the political chaos produced by the 2011 war to carry out another round of neocolonial predations against Africa and the Middle East. Libya has the largest oil reserves in Africa.

Last week, Western media reported a mounting threat from the growth of a Libyan branch of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), claiming on Sunday that ISIS militias were on the verge of seizing the key town Ajdabiya. Media reports asserted that such a victory would give the militias control over a substantial portion of Libya’s oil wealth.

The sinister nature of the war preparations are underscored by the complete silence of the US media on these developments. A looming escalation in Libya, opening up a new front in a spreading war that already encompasses Iraq, Syria and Yemen, is to be launched behind the backs of the American people without any public discussion or debate.

A US Special Forces mission in Libya ended in a debacle last week, with the commandos making a hasty withdrawal after meeting with unexpected hostility from local forces, according to the *Guardian*.

The US troops, deployed to “foster relationships,” were reportedly withdrawn soon after deployment when it became clear that Libyan forces in control of the area were hostile to the US presence. Before departing, the US soldiers, dressed in civilian clothes and carrying rifles equipped with silencers and high-tech optics, stopped for a group picture outside a Libyan airport.

On Sunday, NBC News informed readers that US commandos have been operating secretly in Libya for “some time now,” moving “in and out” of the country, according to comments by unnamed US officials.

It was already well established that US Special Forces conducted extensive operations inside Libya prior to 2011, as the US and NATO sought to mobilize Islamist militias for wars against the Libyan and Syrian governments. The NBC story, one of a handful of reports produced last week before the story was buried by the American press, underscores the fact that US forces have continued to wage secret operations in Libya since the official end to the war.

The evidence of US covert operations in Libya comes amid the preparations of the imperialist powers for open air and ground operations to be carried out in the name of fighting Islamist jihadist forces. These are the same militia American and European intelligence agencies and their

regional allies such as Saudi Arabia financed and armed in the war that saw the overthrow and murder of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, and were then deployed against President Bashar al-Assad in Syria.

The most aggressive proposals for new operations in Libya have been advanced by London, which has worked with Italy to contrive a strategy that would send sizable ground forces to occupy portions of Rome's former colony. Britain is preparing to deploy 1,000-plus troops as part of plans to train new Western-backed militias and link up with pro-Western political elements, according to *Al Alam* .

Earlier this month, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls made clear that France would launch its own renewed operations against Libya, declaring “[W]e have an enemy, Daesh, that we must fight and crush, in Syria, in Iraq and tomorrow without doubt in Libya.”

Last week, in a report to the United Nations, the British government claimed that ISIS viewed Libya as “the best opportunity to expand its so-called caliphate,” and that the Islamist group had established new safe zones and staging areas in North Africa in response to escalated operations by the Western powers in Syria and Iraq.

The French military is already carrying out reconnaissance missions in preparation for the new campaign, including scouting operation over the city of Sirte, which was reduced to rubble by the 2011 bombing campaign. With the media blaring reports that hundreds of ISIS fighters have massed in Sirte, the city appears to be coming into the crosshairs of the Western powers once again.

The “war against ISIS” has become the all-purpose pretext for a new imperialist carve-up of the Middle East and North Africa.