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More airstrikes in new US war in Libya

By Peter Symonds
3 August 2016

US airstrikes on the Libyan coast city of Sirte, which began on Monday, continued yesterday as part of what American officials have made clear will be an ongoing military campaign. While nominally directed against Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) militias, the fresh eruption of American militarism is more broadly aimed at ensuring US dominance in the region.

Pentagon spokesman Jeff Davis told the media that the US had hit five locations in Sirte on Monday and two yesterday, targeting tanks, vehicles, a rocket launcher and ISIS positions in the city. According to Associated Press, Marine Corps strike aircraft based on the USS Wasp, an amphibious assault ship in the Mediterranean, participated in the raids.

The UN-backed puppet regime in Tripoli, the Government of National Accord (GNA), gave Washington the fig leaf of its formal approval to conduct the airstrikes. GNA units drawn from various militia groups are currently engaged in an offensive to drive ISIS fighters out of Sirte.

Davis declared that the US military was simply assisting the GNA to retake Sirte, saying that “the duration of the operation will be measured based upon the length of time it takes for them to do that objective.” He claimed that the US airstrikes would likely last “weeks not months.” Davis indicated, however, that the commitment to the GNA “absolutely will endure”, even though “for right now” the target was Sirte.

Unnamed US officials told Reuters that Monday's raids marked the start of a sustained air campaign rather than another isolated strike. The previous US airstrikes took place in February on an ISIS training camp in the western city of Sabratha.

Washington has been preparing a new military intervention in the oil-rich North African nation for months. General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters in late May that a "long term mission" involving thousands of US troops was imminent. The delay has been in securing the GNA's seal of approval.

Speaking to the *Military Times*, US officials would not say whether there were US soldiers on the ground in Libya. However, they did acknowledge that small "contact teams" of special operations troops had gone into and out of the country in recent months to gather intelligence and forge alliances with local militias. British, French and Italian special forces have also been active in Libya.

While Washington is justifying its new military operations in the name of the "war on terror", the US-led military intervention in Libya in 2011 is directly responsible for creating ISIS and giving it a foothold in the country. The US and its allies relied heavily on militias linked to Al Qaeda to topple the Libyan government and murder its leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The same Islamist militias, along with large quantities of Libyan arms, were then shipped off to take part in the new US-sponsored regime-change operation in Syria. The ISIS forces that seized control of Sirte last year are the US proxies that returned from the bloody Syrian civil war.

The US claim to be acting in the name of a legitimate government is a sham. The unelected pro-Western GNA regime headed by Fayeze al-Sarraj was patched together out of competing factions as part of an agreement signed just last December with the approval of the UN Security Council. It was only installed in Tripoli in March.

A rival government based in the eastern city of Benghazi is headed by General Khalifa Haftar, a long-standing CIA asset who was prominent among the American proxy forces that ousted Gaddafi and is bitterly opposed to the GNA. Yesterday, Ahmed Mesmarri, a spokesman for Haftar's forces, denounced the US airstrikes, declaring that Washington "had no permission, even under the cover of fighting extremism."

A parliamentarian representing the eastern government Abubaker Baira told the *Wall Street Journal*: "Unfortunately all sides of the Libyan conflict happily open their doors to this so-called military or political support, even if covertly, in the hope it will empower them against their domestic enemies."

Like Tripoli, Benghazi is a cesspool of international intrigue. Even though formally recognising the GNA, France has provided support to the Haftar regime along with Egypt and some of the Gulf States. French involvement was graphically exposed last week when President Francois Hollande acknowledged that three French security agents had been killed when their helicopter was shot down near Benghazi earlier last month.

Yesterday, France attempted to mend relations with Tripoli by declaring its full support for the GNA and its efforts to unify the country.

The new US military intervention in Libya takes place amidst rising tensions in the Middle East and Eastern Europe with Russia as well as in the Asia Pacific with China. The airstrikes in Sirte, which are undoubtedly the opening shot of a far broader operation, are not only designed to consolidate Washington's grip over Libya and its oil fields but are meant as a warning to Moscow and Beijing.

The decision to launch a new war was taken behind the backs of the American population with no attempt to secure congressional approval. The Obama administration absurdly cited the 2001 Authorisation for Use of Military Force that approved military action against those who had planned and carried out the 9/11 terrorist attacks. ISIS not only did not exist in 2001 but is now the sworn enemy of Al Qaeda.

Obama issued no formal statement on the launching of another war, but made a few perfunctory remarks at a joint press conference yesterday with Singapore's prime minister. After justifying the 2011 intervention as necessary to prevent a bloodbath, he declared that the new military operations were "to begin what is going to be a long process to establish a functioning government and security system there."

In reality, as in Iraq and Syria, the latest front in US imperialism's never-ending "war on terror" will only spell new disasters for the Libyan people as Washington resorts to ever more desperate and reckless measures to secure its economic and strategic interests against its rivals.