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The Secret War in Libya

The Truth of the Green Resistance

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The battles currently raging in the South of Libya are no mere tribal clashes. Instead, they represent a possible burgeoning alliance between black Libyan ethnic groups and pro-Gaddafi forces intent upon liberating their country of a neocolonial NATO-installed government.

On Saturday January 18th, a group of heavily armed fighters stormed an air force base outside the city of Sabha in southern Libya, expelling forces loyal to the “government” of Prime Minister Ali Zeidan, and occupying the base. At the same time, reports from inside the country began to trickle in that the green flag of the Great Socialist People’s Libyan Arab Jamahiriya was flying over a number of cities throughout the country. Despite the dearth of verifiable information – the government in Tripoli has provided only vague details and corroboration – one thing is certain: the war for Libya continues.

On the Ground

Libya's Prime Minister Ali Zeidan called an emergency session of the General National Congress to declare a state of alert for the country after news of the storming of the air base broke. The Prime Minister announced that he had ordered troops south to quell the rebellion, telling reporters that, "This confrontation is continuing but in a few hours it will be solved." A spokesman for the Defense Ministry later claimed that the central government had reclaimed control of the air base, stating that "A force was readied, then aircraft moved and took off and dealt with the targets...The situation in the south opened a chance for some criminals...loyal to the Gaddafi regime to exploit this and to attack the Tamahind air force base...We will protect the revolution and the Libyan people."

In addition to the assault on the airbase, there have been other attacks on individual members of the government in Tripoli. The highest profile incident was the recent assassination of the Deputy Industry Minister Hassan al-Droui in the city of Sirte. Although it is still unclear whether he was killed by Islamist forces or Green resistance fighters, the unmistakable fact is that the central government is under assault and is unable to exercise true authority or provide security in the country. Many have begun speculating that his killing, rather than being an isolated, targeted assassination, is part of a growing trend of resistance in which pro-Gaddafi Green fighters figure prominently.

The rise of the Green resistance forces in Sabha and elsewhere is merely one part of larger and more complex political and military calculus in the South where a number of tribes and various ethnic groups have risen against what they correctly perceive to be their political, economic, and social marginalization. Groups such as the Tawergha and Tobou ethnic minorities, both of which are black African groups, have endured vicious attacks at the hands of Arab militias with no support from the central government. Not only have these and other groups been the victims of ethnic cleansing, but they have been systematically shut out of participation in Libyan political and economic life.

The tensions came to a head earlier this month when a rebel chief from the Arab Awled Sleiman tribe was killed. Rather than an official investigation or legal process, the Awled tribesmen attacked their black Toubou neighbors, accusing them of involvement in the murder. The resulting clashes have since killed dozens, once again demonstrating that the dominant Arab groups still view their dark skinned neighbors as something other than countrymen. Undoubtedly, this has led to a reorganization of the alliances in the region, with the Toubou, Tuareg and other black minority groups that inhabit southern Libya, northern Chad and Niger

moving closer to the pro-Gaddafi forces. Whether or not these alliances are formal or not still remains unclear, however it is apparent that many groups in Libya have come to the realization that the government installed by NATO has not lived up to its promises, and that something must be done.

The Politics of Race in Libya

Despite the high-minded rhetoric from Western interventionists regarding “democracy” and “freedom” in Libya, the reality is far from it, especially for dark skinned Libyans who have seen their socioeconomic and political status diminished with the end of the Jamahiriya government of Muammar Gaddafi. While these peoples enjoyed a large measure of political equality and protection under the law in Gaddafi’s Libya, the post-Gaddafi era has seen their rights all but stripped from them. Rather than being integrated into a new democratic state, the black Libyan groups have been systematically excluded.

In fact, even Human Rights Watch – an organization which in no small measure helped to justify the NATO war by falsely claiming that Gaddafi forces used rape as a weapon and were preparing “imminent genocide” – has reported that, “A crime against humanity of mass forced displacement continues unabated, as militias mainly from Misrata prevented 40,000 people from the town of Tawergha from returning to their homes from where they had been expelled in 2011.” This fact, coupled with the horrific stories and images of lynchings, rapes, and other crimes against humanity, paints a very bleak picture of life in Libya for these groups.

In its 2011 report, Amnesty International documented a number of flagrant war crimes carried out by the so called “freedom fighters” of Libya who, despite being hailed in the Western media as “liberators”, used the opportunity of the war to carry out mass executions of black Libyans as well as rival clans and ethnic groups. This is of course in stark contrast to the treatment of black Libyans under the Jamahiriya government of Gaddafi which was praised up and down by the Human Rights Council of the United Nations in their 2011 report which noted that Gaddafi had gone to great lengths to ensure economic and social development, as well as specifically providing economic opportunities and political protections to black Libyans and migrant workers from neighboring African countries. With this in mind, is it any wonder that Al Jazeera quoted a pro-Gaddafi Tuareg fighter in September 2011 as saying, “fighting for Gaddafi is like a son fighting for his father...[We will be] ready to fight for him until the last drop of blood.”

As the Toubou and other black ethnic groups clash with Arab militias, their struggle should be understood in the context of a continued struggle for peace and equality. Moreover, the fact that

they must engage in this form of armed struggle again illustrates the point that many international observers made from the very beginning of the war: NATO's aggression was never about protecting civilians or human rights, but rather regime change for economic and geopolitical interests. That the majority of the population, including black ethnic minorities, is worse off today than they ever were under Gaddafi is a fact that is actively suppressed.

Black, Green, and the Struggle for Libya

It would be presumptuous to assume that the military victories made by the pro-Gaddafi Green resistance in recent days will be long-lasting, or that they represent an irreversible shift in the political and military landscape of the country. Though decidedly unstable, the neocolonial puppet government in Tripoli is supported economically and militarily by some of the most powerful interests in the world, making it difficult to simply overthrow it with minor victories. However, these developments do signal an interesting shift in the calculus on the ground. Undoubtedly there is a confluence between the black ethnic minorities and the Green fighters as both recognize their enemy as being the tribal militias who participated in the overthrow of Gaddafi as well as the central government in Tripoli. Whether a formal alliance emerges from this remains to be seen.

Were such an alliance to develop however, it would be a watershed moment in the continued war for Libya. As Green resistance fighters have shown in Sabha, they are able to organize themselves in the south of the country where they enjoy a large degree of popular support. One could imagine an alliance in the south that would be able to hold territory and possibly consolidate power throughout the southern part of Libya, creating a de facto independent state. Naturally, the cry from NATO and its apologists would be that this is anti-democratic and counter-revolution. This would be understandable as their goal of a unified Libya subservient to international finance capital and oil interests would become unattainable.

One should be careful not to make too many assumptions about the situation in Libya today, as reliable details are hard to come by. More to the point, Western media has attempted to completely suppress the fact that the Green resistance even exists, let alone is active and winning victories. All this simply further illustrates that the war for Libya rages on, whether the world wants to admit it or not.