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US imperialism and the catastrophe in Libya

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This weekend, the Islamic State (ISIS) released a video of the horrific beheadings of 21 Coptic Christian workers seized in the town of Sirte in eastern Libya. This barbaric act was the latest in a series of such killings, including the beheading or immolation of hostages from the US, Britain, Japan and Jordan.

The latest ISIS atrocity has triggered predictable expressions of shock and anger by news anchors and editorialists in the United States, along with further massacres. Within hours of the release of the video, Egypt, led by US-backed dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, launched a wave of air strikes killing 64 people, including seven civilians.

Washington and its political allies are politically and morally responsible for these atrocities. The Islamist beheadings in Libya are the product of a monumental crime: the 2011 NATO war in Libya to oust the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi.

Prior to the intervention of NATO, there were no sectarian murders of Christians in Libya and Islamist militias tied to Al Qaeda were small groups with no broader influence. These forces were armed and promoted when, in 2011, the Obama administration and its allies in Europe, led by French President Nicolas Sarkozy, took the decision to topple Gaddafi.

The imperialist powers funneled massive amounts of money and weaponry to Islamist militias and Al Qaeda operatives, providing them with air support through a mass bombing campaign that killed tens of thousands of Libyans.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote at the time: “Far from a ‘revolution’ or struggle for ‘liberation,’ what the world is witnessing is the rape of Libya by a syndicate of imperialist powers determined to lay hold of its oil wealth and turn its territory into a neo-colonial base of operations for further interventions throughout the Middle East and North Africa.”

The disastrous consequences of the rape of Libya are now all too clear to see.

The war culminated in the carpet bombing of Sirte and the torture and murder of Gaddafi, after which then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gloated, “We came, we saw, he died.” Since then, Libya has collapsed into an ever-bloodier civil war between various Islamist factions and rival militias vying for state power. The country has also served as a training ground for CIA-backed Islamist forces preparing to fight the Syrian regime of President Bashar al-Assad.

Less than four years after the war, the American media report on ISIS atrocities in Libya as if US imperialism had nothing to do with them. No one reading the editorial produced Sunday by the *New York Times* (“What Libya’s Unraveling Means”) would have any inkling of Washington’s role in producing this catastrophe, or the US media’s role in supporting the operation. One of the key figures in the war, the late US Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens, who was killed in an Islamist raid in Benghazi after the war, was himself a friend of many *Times* journalists.

The *Times* worries that “this oil-rich nation [is veering] towards complete chaos,” and that “the growth and radicalization of Islamist groups raise the possibility that large parts of Libya could become a satellite of the Islamic State.” It manages to describe the conflict that led to Gaddafi’s ouster simply as a “civil war,” without even mentioning NATO’s six-month bombing of Libya.

ISIS is now strongest precisely where Washington has intervened most aggressively. Another article published in the *Times* over the weekend warns, “The Islamic State is expanding beyond its base in Syria and Iraq to establish military affiliates in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt and Libya.” The *Times* does not mention that the US has invaded or financed Islamist proxy wars in four of the six countries mentioned: Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya.

The world is now witnessing the consequences of the recklessness, brutality, greed and limitless stupidity of Washington and its NATO allies.

Responsibility for the disaster in Libya lies squarely with former French President Nicolas Sarkozy, the initial champion of a NATO war in Libya; President Obama, whose administration provided the bulk of the firepower that shattered Libya’s armed forces and its major cities; and the NATO allied powers that joined in this murderous adventure.

What is unfolding across the Middle East today is an indictment of imperialism, its ruling elites, its political servants and its lying media.

