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## US launches airstrikes against Libya

By Bill Van Auken

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US warplanes struck Libya in the early morning hours Friday killing as many as 50 people at what the Pentagon alleges was a “training camp” of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the northwestern port town of Sabratha, near the Tunisian border.

The mayor of the town, Hussein al-Thwadi, told Reuters that the target was a building in Sabratha’s Qasr Talil district, which had been home to many foreigners. Many of the victims were Tunisians and at least two women were reported among the dead.

The Pentagon indicated that the bombing was aimed at assassinating one man, Nouredine Chouchane, a Tunisian national described as a “senior facilitator in Libya” and alleged to be a suspect in the March 2015 terrorist attack that killed 22 people at the Bardo Museum in Tunis.

US officials allowed that they were still “assessing” who had actually been killed in the strike and were unsure if Chouchane was among the dead.

This was the second known US airstrike in Libya in the space of just three months. Last November, US warplanes struck the Libyan town of Derna, near the Egyptian border, in a bid to kill ISIS operative Abu Nabil.

This latest air strike comes just days after President Barack Obama told a press conference called at the close of an ASEAN summit meeting in California that Washington was prepared to

intervene militarily in Libya. The US military, he said, would “take actions where we’ve got a clear operation and a clear target in mind.” He added that the US is “working with our other coalition partners to make sure that as we see opportunities to prevent ISIS from digging in, in Libya, we take them.”

In a further indication of the escalation of US military intervention in the north African country, the Pentagon acknowledge that US special operations troops have been deployed on the ground there in recent weeks and had played a role in preparing the airstrike.

Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook claimed that the bombing raid had been in compliance with international law and the Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) passed by Congress shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks.

This legal rationale is dubious to say the least. There is no UN authorization for foreign military intervention in Libya, and there is no legitimate government in Libya itself to request such action. As for the nearly 15-year-old AUMF, it has been used by the Obama administration like the Bush administration before it as a blank check to carry out military interventions anywhere on the planet, without having to seek congressional approval, nor, for that matter, even going through the motions of securing the support of the American people.

Washington’s military intervention in Libya in the name of the war against ISIS follows by nearly five years the launching by the Obama administration and its NATO allies of a war for regime change in Libya under the pretext of intervening to protect civilians against what was falsely claimed to be an imminent threat of massacre at the hands of troops loyal to the government led by Muammar Gaddafi.

The war, which killed some 30,000 Libyans, culminated in Gaddafi’s defeat and hideous torture-murder in October 2011 at the hands of Islamist fighters employed as proxy ground troops in the US-NATO war.

Since then, the country has been wracked by a civil war between rival militias that Washington and its allies had armed and backed in the regime change operation. The violence has driven some 2 million Libyans, one-third of the population, into exile in neighboring Egypt and Tunisia. Hundreds of thousands more are internally displaced within Libya, and the country’s basic social infrastructure and economy remain decimated.

The growth of ISIS in Libya—the Pentagon claims that the group has as many as 5,000 fighters there—was the byproduct of successive US imperialist interventions in the region. The same Islamist fighters that Washington used as proxies in the war to topple Gaddafi were funneled, along with massive quantities of arms taken from Libyan government stockpiles, into Syria to wage another regime change war coordinated by the CIA against the government of President Bashar al-Assad. Now, some of these same elements have returned to Libya.

It is not only the US that is embarked on another military intervention in Libya. WikiLeaks released a classified document this week disclosing a European Union (EU) plan for military intervention on the pretext of halting the flow of “refugee boats” across the Mediterranean.

Dated January 29, 2016, the document was drafted by Rear Admiral Enrico Credendino, commander of the EU's "Operation Sophia," employing naval vessels to halt "human smuggling" on the high seas. It calls for EU bodies and member states to press for the speedy formation of a "reliable" EU-friendly government that could provide a legal cover by inviting European military forces not only to patrol Libyan territorial waters, but also to operate on the country's territory.

At present, however, no such government exists. Instead, there are two rival parliaments, one in Tripoli and the other in Tobruk, with a so-called presidential council, hand-picked by UN officials, posing as a government of national unity and operating in exile in Tunisia and Morocco. Meanwhile, militias backing the rival governments continue to wage a vicious war for control of resources.

It is the intervention into this conflict by ISIS, and particularly its move to take control of key oil exporting ports, that has lent increasing urgency to the demands for US and EU military intervention.

Just as the war in 2011 was not about human rights, so the new war being prepared today is not about terrorism. In both cases, the objective is the semi-colonial subjugation of Libya and appropriation by competing energy conglomerates of its oil and gas reserves, the largest on the African continent.