

Ongoing atrocities by NATO-installed Libyan regime

By Will Morrow
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The Libyan Transitional National Council (TNC) regime installed by the US-NATO intervention in Libya last year is responsible for ongoing atrocities, particularly against black-skinned Libyans, detainees and alleged supporters of the previous Gaddafi government.

One of the most recent incidents occurred on February 6 at a former naval base in the Janzour district of the capital, Tripoli. The base is being used as an internal refugee camp for about 1,500 predominantly dark-skinned former residents of the town of Tawergha. The camp inhabitants told Reuters that militiamen from the coastal city of Misrata arrived, searched the camp and attempted to remove several young men. When the unarmed refugees protested, the militia opened fire, killing at least five people.

Female camp resident Huda Bel-Eid told Reuters: "Around 15 of them started shooting us. All the women escaped but the young men stayed. My brother was there and I went to help him because he was shot in the head and neck, then they shot me (in the leg)."

A woman and an elderly man were confirmed dead at a morgue in Tripoli, both with gunshot wounds to the chest. A resident of Janzour told Reuters: "We found two bodies of black people who had been shot on the beach. We told the police, and they have taken them now."

Former Tawergha residents marched through Janzour later that day in protest, but were again fired upon. According to the "Libya S.O.S." blog, two Tawerghan children, Mohammad Attia Saleh and Freih Abdel Moula, were among those killed. The report puts the number of dead throughout the day at 12, with 31 wounded.

The reprisals against the Tawerghan population are only the latest revelations of war crimes committed by the US and NATO proxy forces. Amnesty International and Doctors Without Borders have recently published statements protesting against the systematic abuse and torture of prisoners in detention centers controlled by the TNC and tribes.

The town of Tawergha, whose residents were predominantly dark-skinned on account of its history as a slave trading post, is now a smoldering ghost town. Last August, militias from Misrata—located 50 kilometres east of Tawergha—backed by US-NATO airstrikes, sought to wipe the town off the map.

The brigades looted and set fire to homes and public buildings, declaring that more than 30,000 residents had to leave and could never return. A Misrata commander asserted that Tawergha "no longer exists." At the time, the *Wall Street Journal* reported: "Nearly four-fifths of residents of Misrata's Ghoushi neighborhood were Tawergha natives. Now they are gone or in hiding, fearing revenge attacks by Misratans, amid reports of bounties for their capture."

The destruction of Tawergha is ongoing. Reuters last week quoted Human Rights Watch Director Peter Bouckaert as saying: "Every time we visit the area, we have witnessed rebels looting and burning homes."

Last year, the Misrata brigades openly stated that the terror against the Tawerghan population was a collective punishment for some residents' participation in the attacks on Misrata by Gaddafi's army.

The TNC government—composed of disparate regional and tribal militias, former officials in the regime of Moammar Gaddafi, Islamists and CIA assets—made clear its approval of these crimes. The TNC's then-prime minister, Mahmoud Jibril, declared in September, well after the mass reprisals were underway: “Regarding Tawergha, my own viewpoint is that nobody has the right to interfere in this matter except the people of Misrata.”

An estimated 29,000 Tawerghans are now living in squalid refugee camps throughout the country—19,000 near the eastern city of Benghazi alone. Ahmed Ali Farhat, originally from Tawergha and now living in a camp in Benghazi, told Reuters: “People fled from Tawergha to all over Libya, but they are still being harassed, especially by roaming Misrata rebels who pursue them.”

Farhat said a group of Tawerghan refugees were beaten by Misrata tribesmen in Benghazi on January 30. “Another group of eight Tawergha people were caught in Sirte. One was stamped to death.” Tawergha residents have reported disappearances of arrested family members and friends.

Throughout the war, the TNC repeatedly made unfounded claims that Gaddafi was using “African mercenaries” against Libyans, appealing to the most backward layers in an attempt to stir racist sentiments against dark-skinned African migrant workers, who make up roughly one-fifth of the Libyan population.

A September 2011 Amnesty International report quoted a speech by TNC President Mustafa Abdul Jalil, in which he claimed that, during his role as justice minister under Gaddafi, he discovered that “40 percent of criminals [in Libya] are ‘Africans,’ who invade Libya through its Southern borders, passing through it, greedily wishing to live in Europe.” Jalil reportedly pledged to “close the doors on these Africans.”

For the TNC and the various militias, such racist sentiment serves to divert from the anti-democratic character of the new government, whose members are largely unknown and function on behalf of different regional elites and the foreign powers that spearheaded the NATO-backed war.

A recent report by the Arab Organisation for Human Rights and other humanitarian groups stated that black-skinned Libyans and migrants were being arrested on the assumption of being “mercenaries” for Gaddafi. The report quoted a senior Libyan military official who “confirmed that a number of other ‘loyalist’ villages throughout Libya had met a similar fate” to Tawergha.

Misrata forces have played a particularly notorious role. As well as the assault on Tawergha, Misrata tribes were involved in the brutal siege of Sirte, where a Misrata militia faction captured, savagely beat and then murdered Gaddafi on behalf of the US and NATO.

The war crimes and abuses being perpetrated by the new regime further expose the claims that the NATO allies intervened for humanitarian purposes to rescue the Libyan people from violent repression. In fact, the atrocities flow directly from the predatory nature of the war, which installed the unelected TNC regime as a pliant government to control the country's significant economic and geo-strategic resources. This is part of a wider drive to quell the “Arab Spring” uprisings and establish unchallenged hegemony over the Middle East, a drive now being continued against Syria and Iran.

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