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US Bombs ISIS in Libya, US and Allies Support ISIS in Libya

Par Abayomi Azikiwe
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Pan-African News Wire Editor Abayomi Azikiwe [pictured left] says the U.S. is acting like the chief policeman of the region after it participated in the destruction of the Libyan state in 2011.

SHARMINI PERIES, EXEC. PRODUCER, TRNN: It's the Real News Network. I'm Sharmini Peries coming to you from Baltimore.

For some time now concerns over the Islamic State have been specific to the nation of Iraq and Syria. But in recent months, with the recent attacks and bombing campaigns, the group has seen a reduction in its ranks in those countries, and around the same time, however, Libya has seen its ISIL membership double to roughly 6,000 fighters. Reports from the intelligence community indicate that ISIL is attempting to establish a caliphate in the West African nation.

On to talk about what's going on in Libya is Abayomi Azikiwe. He is the editor of the Pan-African News Wire, an electronic press agency that was founded in 1998. Abayomi, thank you so much for joining the Real News Network.

ABAYOMI AZIKIWE: Thank you.

PERIES: So Abayomi, there appears to be much consternation over the international community in terms of recent spread of ISIL in Libya. Do you assess this development as a threat?

AZIKIWE: It's clearly a threat to the people of Libya, who have been imperiled over the last five years as a result of a counter-revolution that began in February of 2011. It led very quickly to the passage of two United Nations resolutions authorizing a naval blockade and economic embargo, and of course a massive bombing campaign that continued from March 19 of 2011 all the way to October 31 of the same year.

Since 2011, Libya has gone from being the most prosperous and stable state on the African continent to being one of the most unstable, that is fostering an instability throughout the entire region of North as well as West Africa. This instability has extended, as well, into the Mediterranean area, because at this point Libya has become perhaps the largest source for human trafficking across the Mediterranean into Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe.

Now, the migration of so-called Islamic State fighters to Libya is in part due directly to the

intervention of the Russian Federation, which has been carrying out air strikes against Islamic State positions, as well as bases of other armed groups that are fighting against the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad. They therefore have new ground, new territory, which many of them have relocated to the northwest coast of Libya. They've taken over the hometown of the former leader of the country, who is now deceased, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, of Sirte. And they have spread out from Sirte to other areas of the country. The problem in Libya, as well, is that you have numerous militias and political factions that are vying for authority within their own areas, as well as nationally. They are two competing rival regimes, which they are attempting to force into a merger or an alliance, [inaud.] an interim government. [Inaud.] that interim government is really not functioning as a unified entity. There are still major differences between the two rival regimes as well as in each respective rival junta.

So the context for all of this, it's a very difficult place to stabilize.

PERIES: The U.S. is dropping bombs on Libya as we speak, and the Pentagon recently proposed spending another $200 million on training and equipping security forces in the North, and in West Africa. What are the long-term implications of this kind of engagement again in Libya?

AZIKIWE: This Kurd engagement is actually a precursor for the deployment of 6,000 United Nations-led so-called peacekeeping forces. Italy is supposed to be the titular head of this military unit. However, there is disagreement among the two rival camps in Libya over the deployment of these UN peacekeeping forces. Martin Kobler, who is a career German diplomat who was also involved in Iraq, as well as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and spearheaded this effort to implement this unity accord between the so-called House of Representatives as well as a general national congress. These are the two rival regimes, one of which is based in Tripoli, the capital, and the other in the eastern part of the country, in Tobruk.

The bombing that was carried out on February 19 in Sabratha was an action ostensibly designed to halt the spreading of the Islamic State. It's reported that at least 40 people were killed, two of whom were Serbian diplomats who had been kidnapped by IS operatives who were being held. The Serbian government protested against the bombing, because they were in the midst of negotiating for the release of these diplomats, and the United States did not make them aware that this bombing operation was going to take place. Also, the interim government protested the air strikes because they say they were not informed prior to the strike that it was going to be carried out.

So it looks as if the United States, under the Obama administration, engaging in the same policies that the United States has been known for for years. And that is disrespect of the sovereignty, and of course the right to self-determination of all of these states. So you create conditions for the destruction of Libya in 2011, and after the country has been destroyed, when all efforts to put it back together have failed, the United States now is acting as if it is the chief policeman to bring about some type of stability inside the country against the Islamic State.

But even if we look at the Islamic State itself, its origins go back to Iraq as a direct result of another intervention that failed. That was against the government of Saddam Hussein in 2003, and the rise of the resistance in Iraq against the U.S. occupation. Now, there's a

different configuration of the so-called Islamic extremist organizations today, but within the context of developments in Iraq, you had the birth of ISIL and later the Islamic State which spread into Syria, and of course now has spread into Libya as well.

PERIES: Now, let's take a specific example. You mentioned Sirte earlier, which is the hometown of Muammar Gaddafi, and supporters of Muammar Gaddafi that are still there obviously are very upset, and still remember the end of Gaddafi's reign. And these are very susceptible folks, in terms of getting involved with ISIL. Give us a flavor of how these kinds of sentiments feed and fuel the evolution and the growth of ISIL.

AZIKIWE: The growth of ISIL is clearly connected with U.S. and NATO foreign policy throughout the Middle East. There was an attempt to balance the growing influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran after the intervention by the United States and Britain and their allies in Iraq. The consequence of that was Iran becoming the most stable and most politically influential government throughout the region. Also, you have, you have Hezbollah, which is a resistance movement in Southern Lebanon, which is also a Shia-based movement, which is in alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the same time in Yemen, we have the growth of the Ansar Allah, the so-called Houthi movement, which last year nearly took control of the entire, most of the territory in Yemen.

These entities, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hezbollah, the Ansar Allah in Yemen, are allied with Syria, with the government of Bashar al-Assad in Syria, which is an Alawite-dominated government, but is working in alliance with the so-called Shia crescent. This is the terminology that's been utilized by the West to characterize its alliance, which I just outlined.

So the Islamic State, being a Sunni-based guerrilla and political movement, they, of course, are very sectarian in their approach and view the Shia-dominated movements as their moral enemies, even more so than they do the United States, and even the state of Israel. Consequently, it is a political game of brinkmanship that's being played out right now, and it appears to many people that the U.S. and its allies, including–there are Turkey, which is a part of NATO, and Saudi Arabia, which is a very close ally of the United States, are actually working in conjunction undermining Iranian influence in the Middle East, and also on the African continent as well.

So it's been documented that ISIS fighters have had free transport, as well as economic relations and interactions with the Turkish state, because the Turkish state is also committed, along with the U.S., with the overthrow of the Arab Baath socialist party government of President Bashar al-Assad.

PERIES: And what kind of evidence are you pointing to that there is this alliance between the Turkish government and ISIL?

AZIKIWE: Well, the fact that various journalists from numerous news agencies, including Press TV, including RT, have documented the movement of ISIS fighters between Turkey and Syria. Also, the bombing by the Russian federation of these supply lines for oil and weapons and other goods has in fact fueled tensions between Turkey and Moscow. We saw the shooting down of a Russian fighter plane several months ago, claiming that it had veered into Turkish territory, which the Russians denied.

So these are some of the variables that are involved in making these connections between

Turkey and the Islamic State, as well as Washington, and also Saudi Arabia.

PERIES: Abayomi, you're referring here to RT, which is Russia Today, and Press TV, which is the international arm of the Iranian state TV network. Now, how do we know that these sources you are citing are actually in fact correct?

AZIKIWE: They are independent of the Western based corporate as well as governmental media outlets. They provide a different perspective than what you would get over the BBC or CNN, or National Public Radio, or the public broadcasting system. So they are independent of the West. They do have correspondents on the ground in those areas. The alliance between Russia, Syria, Iran, and other forces, they represent the bulwark of opposition against the Islamic State, and as allies and as benefactors within NATO, and also within the United States.

So in that regard, even if you do not accept, totally, the editorial policy or direction of Press TV and RT and other media agencies that operate outside the influence and the control of the West, they still provide a balance in regard to assessing what is actually going on in these geopolitical regions of the Middle East, as well as in North Africa.

PERIES: All right, fair enough. I thank you so much for joining us today, and giving us a perspective that is different from what we see on the mainstream media. Thank you so much for joining us today.

AZIKIWE: Thank you.

PERIES: And thank you for joining us on the Real News Network.

Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of the Pan-African News Wire, an electronic press agency that was founded in 1998. He has worked as a broadcast journalist for the last 14 years, and has worked for decades in solidarity with the liberation movements and progressive governments on the African continent and the Caribbean. Azikiwe is the co-founder of several Detroit-area organizations including: The Detroit Coalition Against Police Brutality, the Michigan Emergency Committee Against War & Injustice, and the Moratorium NOW! Coalition to Stop Foreclosures, Evictions and Utility Shut-offs. Between 2007-2011 Azikiwe served as the chairperson of the Michigan Coalition for Human Rights(MCHR) and is currently the president of the organization.

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Articles Par : Abayomi Azikiwe

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