

Battle for Libya rages on

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The civil war in Libya has intensified, writes Simon Hardy, as both sides struggle for control of major cities and towns

Fierce fighting continues across Libya as the revolutionaries struggle to bring down Gaddafi's regime.

Rebel fighters, mostly a hastily assembled militia of men who only 8 weeks ago were shepherds, engineers and students, are fighting against Gaddafi's well armed and trained mercenary force. The rebel held city of Misrata has seen fierce fighting, street by street, house by house as the fate of Libya is decided by arms in front of the worlds media. The rebels are battling Gaddafi's snipers who were trained and armed by the British up to a year ago, while Grad rockets and banned cluster bombs rain down indiscriminately on schools and markets.

Nato's supposed humanitarian intervention has done nothing to protect them. Rebel fighters, medics and journalists think as many as a thousand people have died in the siege of Misrata alone.

But still the revolutionaries will not be bowed. Even without Nato help, the rebels are holding their own. Gaddafi admitted as much when he threatened to bring in tribal loyalists to boost army forces. The truth is, the dictator cannot suppress the popular revolution.

To understand why Libyans are so prepared to die for their cause, listen to how one Benghazi resident spelt out what the revolution meant for him: "This is total freedom. Before, somebody was in charge ? really in charge ? of everything. Now we can do whatever we want, and it means nobody is in charge and we are discovering the meaning and the borders of freedom.?"

The fake "humanitarian" intervention by the Western powers, however, threatens to strangle the revolution. In the first month of the revolution they refused to send arms to the rebels. Now military special forces from Britain, France and Italy have been sent to train the anti-Gaddafi forces. The US has sent its unmanned Predator drones, notorious for slaughtering wedding parties in Pakistan, to patrol the no-fly zone.

The revolutionaries need to beware: the West is cynically abusing the desperately unequal struggle to secure their total submission to its interests: control over the oil and stem the flow of migrants into Europe. Nato has intervened not at all to replace Gaddafi with a regime based on mass popular democracy, but on "reliable" forces drawn from the old regime. As they get bogged down, they will increasingly sacrifice Libyans in their bid for control of the revolution.

It is crucial that socialists fight to end the no fly zone and get Nato's military advisers out of the country. If the West really wanted to help the rebels establish democracy then it would arm them with no conditions. It has not done so.

Libyan revolutionaries should call on volunteers from Egypt and Tunisia ? especially those with military skills ? to fight alongside them. At the same time Libyan revolutionaries should make it clear to the European and US multinationals that they will not sell their country or support its occupation by Nato.

Although the self-appointed Transitional National Council is adopting an openly pro-imperialist position, this does not reflect the aspirations of many of the young fighters. They must fight to replace it with an anti-imperialist one, based on the workers and the youth, which can defeat Gadaffi, reject the West?s interventions, and link up with the revolutions across the Arab world.

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