

The refugee crisis and the new “scramble for Africa”

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At their summit in Brussels today, the European Union heads of state and government will adopt a ten-point plan negotiated at a special meeting of EU foreign and interior ministers held in Luxembourg on Monday.

The plan calls for an extension of police/military operations to keep refugees fleeing poverty and violence in North Africa and the Middle East from reaching “Fortress Europe.” That, however, is only its immediate aim. Under discussion are much broader plans for the former colonial powers to reassert control in a new “scramble for Africa.”

The EU’s response to the refugee crisis is as cynical as it is criminal. The European powers, having collaborated with Washington in devastating Libya and much of the Middle East in a series of “humanitarian” wars and regime-change operations, turning millions into refugees, now use the chaos they created to further subordinate and plunder their former colonies under the guise of “solving the refugee problem” and fighting human trafficking.

Politicians and media commentators in Brussels, Berlin, Paris, London and Rome are with increasing openness discussing military action. They are seeking a UN mandate for operations to destroy refugee boats off the Libyan coast and deploy Special Forces to hunt down traffickers within the country.

Other, more extensive operations are envisaged, including the seizure of oil refineries in Libya, the installation of a pro-imperialist “unity government” in Tripoli, the “stabilization of Tunisia and Morocco,” and the creation of refugee camps in sub-Saharan Africa.

Germany, which abstained from the NATO air war against Libya four years ago, is now at the forefront of discussions of a coordinated military intervention in Africa. Following the call by President Gauck at the

beginning of 2014 for Germany to rearm and more aggressively assert German imperialist interests, the ruling class is eager to demonstrate the return of German militarism on the world arena and secure a share of the spoils from the subjugation of Africa.

We need to “bring more stability to Libya” and “put a stop to trafficking organizations” on the ground, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier told the ARD program “Report from Berlin.”

Roderich Kiesewetter, the Christian Democratic representative on the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee, said in an interview with broadcaster Deutschlandfunk that while a UN mandate was needed for a “police action in North Africa,” such an operation would be “easier to achieve than in Iraq or Syria.”

In an interview with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière called for “a robust mandate to take action against traffickers,” including intervening “in ports and their infrastructure.”

“Robust mandate” is code language for a United Nations Security Council resolution under Chapter 7, Article 42, which sanctions “such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security,” i.e., an open-ended mandate for war. The NATO war that overthrew the government of Muammar Gaddafi and left the country at the mercy of warring militias was similarly sanctioned under Chapter 7, Article 42 of the UN Charter.

According to *Spiegel Online*, preparations are under way in the German Defence Ministry “for possible German participation in both an EU rapid rescue mission and a long-term...military operation against the trafficking gangs in the Mediterranean.”

The web site reports that German Chancellor Angela

Merkel has asked her defense minister, Ursula von der Leyen, to prepare “a list of possible German contributions to both operations” for today’s EU summit. *Spiegel Online* continues: “The military has already presented the minister with lists of German ships that are available for the two options.”

Under the headline, “What our Navy can achieve in the Mediterranean,” the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* calls for Germany to play a leading role in any military operation. The newspaper writes that Atalanta [the EU’s antipiracy operation in the Horn of Africa] shows “what role German forces could play in such a multinational formation in the long run.” It continues, “German frigates would be able to lead such a flotilla of warships or patrol boats.”

That what is being proposed is not humanitarian assistance, but a new war, is so obvious that the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* has felt obliged to admit, “This is not a humanitarian initiative.”

The “Africa Policy Guidelines” adopted by the German government in the spring of 2014 provide insight into the real aims behind the plans being discussed by the European powers. The document speaks of the “growing relevance of Africa for Germany and Europe,” stemming, in part, from the growing economy and “rich natural resources” of the continent. The statement calls on the German government to act “early, quickly, decisively and substantially,” and to “use the full range of its available resources.”

Germany’s ruling elite, 70 years after the end of the Second World War and the horrific crimes of the Nazis, views the deaths of more than a thousand refugees over the past week as an opportunity. It and its counterparts in France, Britain and Italy are exploiting the human disaster in the Mediterranean—for which they are responsible—to advance their competing geostrategic and commercial interests.

The return of German militarism and the new “scramble for Africa” raise critical historical questions. At the beginning of the 20th century, the struggle of the imperialist powers for control of the continent not only led to crimes against the indigenous population, it also exacerbated the inter-imperialist tensions that exploded in the First World War. Today, the global capitalist crisis is once again fueling a frenzied drive for imperialist conquest and plunder and creating the

conditions for a new world war, this time carrying the risk of nuclear incineration.

Renewed military aggression in Africa and the danger of a Third World War can be averted only by the mobilization of the international working class on the basis of a socialist and revolutionary program. Hence the crucial importance of the International Committee of the Fourth International’s International May Day Online Rally to be held Sunday, May 3.

Its central slogans are: Down with capitalism and imperialism! For the international unity of the working class against war, dictatorship and poverty! For peace, equality and socialism! We urge all readers and supporters of the *World Socialist Web Site* to register for the rally today.



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