

European Union’s “migrant mission”: War plans in a humanitarian cloak

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The flood of desperate refugees seeking to escape carnage and war in North Africa and the Middle East continues to swell. On Wednesday alone, more than 900 migrants were rescued from three overcrowded boats en route from North Africa to Europe.

Nearly all survived, but just this year 2,000 refugees have died gruesome deaths trying to make the Mediterranean crossing and an estimated 5,000 have perished in the last 18 months. The highest death toll was the drowning of nearly 900 men, women and children off the coast of the Italian island of Lampedusa on April 19.

In response, the representatives of the imperialist powers shed crocodile tears. But this was only a cynical cover for the overarching militarist and colonialist strategy now being enacted.

The European Union (EU) is rapidly moving to further subordinate and plunder their former colonies, under the guise of “solving the refugee problem” and fighting human trafficking.

On May 18 the EU approved Operation EUNAVFOR Med. It will establish a naval force in the Mediterranean and in Libyan territorial waters backed up with fighter jet support, under the excuse of clamping down on people smugglers. The plan should properly be understood as a launching pad for a renewed military intervention in Libya and the rest of North Africa—and as an extension of ongoing operations in Iraq and Syria.

The mission statement allows for the destruction of boats operated by “smugglers.” Ships can be intercepted, seized or destroyed even when they are in Libyan coastal or international waters. Such military action would require the agreement of the United Nations Security Council.

The remit of EUNAVFOR goes far beyond its stated

aim of finding and stopping boats used by people traffickers. A *Guardian* report of a 19-page strategy paper for the mission notes that ground operations may also be needed.

The document states, “A presence ashore might be envisaged if agreement was reached with relevant authorities.” It continues: “The operation would require a broad range of air, maritime and land capabilities. These could include: intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; boarding teams; patrol units (air and maritime); amphibious assets; destruction air, land and sea (sic), including special forces units.”

The paper refers to a possible “presence or tasks in the Libyan territory.” Land operations could include “action along the coast, in harbour or at anchor [against] smugglers’ assets and vessels before their use.”

This could result in significant casualties, with the planning document admitting: “Boarding operations against smugglers in the presence of migrants has a high risk of collateral damage including the loss of life.”

The *Guardian* leak gives the lie to Federica Mogherini, the EU’s chief foreign and security policy coordinator, who claimed, “We are not planning in any possible way a military intervention in Libya.”

Up to 10 EU countries have volunteered to take part in the campaign, including Italy, Britain, France and Spain. These countries are all opposed to taking in even a few thousand refugees. But they are united in staking out a place in what is in fact a war plan.

Any such operation would be sanctioned under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter. In recent years Chapter VII has been used to sanction military interventions in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Somalia, Haiti, Iraq

and Libya itself.

In addition the EU is also prepared to invoke Article Five of the NATO Charter, mandating action by the entire alliance when any individual member or its armed forces come under attack. Such an attack is highly likely and could provide the imperialist powers with a suitable *casus belli*.

The document even warns of “militia and terrorist” threats to the EU forces. It states, “The existence of heavy military armaments (including coastal artillery batteries) and military-capable militias present a robust threat to EU ships and aircraft operating in the vicinity.”

Under conditions of raging civil war in Libya, the EU powers are preparing to use this tragedy, one entirely of their own making, to justify a military invasion.

According to reports, the operation will be launched from the June 25 EU summit in Rome. In preparation, Mogherini has lobbied the UN Security Council for support. NATO has also offered its help if requested.

The filthy imperialist operation being planned is as cynical as it is criminal. The fact that millions of refugees in North Africa and the Middle East have been uprooted from their homes, and are desperately fleeing the carnage they face is due to decades of imperialist wars and intrigues in the region.

The imperialist powers have entirely absolved themselves of any responsibility. Indeed it was only due to massive public outrage against what is essentially a policy of mass murder of thousands of refugees that the EU countries even put into place the token rescue plan now in operation.

On Thursday Reuters reported on a proposed new European Commission draft plan to relocate across the continent just 40,000 asylum seekers who have arrived by boat in Italy and Greece. Reuters noted that the tiny figure had been likely “set to guarantee acceptance after some EU states, notably France, had initially baulked at the idea of opening their doors to migrants.”

This follows last week’s announcement by the EU that it would take in just 20,000 asylum-seekers currently living outside the bloc. In Libya alone nearly two million refugees—more than a quarter of the population—have been forced to flee to Tunisia.

The drive to war and attacks on democratic rights, including the freedom of immigration, is being driven by the global crisis of capitalism. The struggle against

war and its attendant evils must be led by the working class, the only class that has no interest in the maintenance of militarized borders, prison camps for desperate refugees, and the entire apparatus of repression that constitutes the nation-state.

The only way to prevent this drive to war is through the overthrow of the capitalist system, based on the perspective of uniting the working class internationally in the struggle for socialism. Central to this is the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe, as part of a world socialist federation. This is the perspective advanced by the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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