

Imperialist powers prepare another military intervention in Libya

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A joint US-European mission to Libya involving soldiers from six countries is being hatched under the pretext of combating Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and with the aim of establishing a pliant pro-Western government and “stabilising” the country.

On August 1, the *London Times* reported, “Hundreds of British troops are being lined up to go to Libya as part of a major new international mission.” It stated that the UK soldiers would join “Military personnel from Italy, France, Spain, Germany and the United States...in an operation that looks set to be activated once the rival warring factions inside Libya agree to form a single government of national unity.”

It is part of an expansion of imperialist military interventions in the resource-rich Middle East and North Africa, coming on top of the war in Iraq and Syria, in which Britain and the other powers are pursuing their own geostrategic and commercial interests.

The *Times* notes that Italy, the former colonial power in Libya, is expected to provide the largest contingent of ground troops. France has colonial and commercial ties with Libya’s neighbours, Tunisia, Mali and Algeria. Spain retains outposts in northern Morocco and the other major power involved, Germany, is once again seeking to gain access to Africa’s resources and markets.

The new mission follows proposals earlier this year to launch a “humanitarian” military operation targeting people traffickers bringing impoverished migrants in unsafe boats from Africa and the Middle East to Europe. Such justifications can now be seen a part of a softening-up process to legitimise yet another criminal and unpopular imperialist venture.

The five European forces will work with US forces, the European Union and the United Nations (UN),

under the moniker of “P3+5,” in an operation expected to number several thousand. A UK government source said, “You might see movement towards the end of August.”

The US and European powers are using the UN to broker a peace deal between Libya’s warring factions aimed at establishing a national unity government.

A spokeswoman for the UK’s Ministry of Defence said that Britain, “along with international partners, is supporting the process to form a recognised Libyan government and we are developing plans to provide support once this is done; it is too early to discuss the exact nature of this.”

Last month, UK Prime Minister David Cameron admitted that he was considering military action in Libya. He said, “If there is a threat to Britain or to our people or our streets and we can stop it by taking immediate action against that threat, then I as Prime Minister will always want to try to take that action and that’s the case whether that problem is emanating from Libya, from Syria, or anywhere else.”

While UK forces will “train” the army, coast guard and police and provide “counterterrorism” units, alongside Special Forces units from France and the US, it is not expected that the British air force will be involved, as it is already fully extended in Iraq and in Syria.

Following the 2011 NATO-led war to topple the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, government and rule of law collapsed, and the country has descended into complete chaos that has inflicted untold suffering on the Libyan people, and spread to Mali and the Central African Republic in the Sahel.

Rival militias are fighting for control of the country’s oil, estimated at 46.4 billion barrels of proven reserves, the largest in Africa.

The Islamist-backed Libya Dawn regime, made up of the General National Council (GNC) that refused to recognise the outcome of the 2014 elections, took control of the Libyan capital Tripoli in the west. Meanwhile, the internationally recognised government is holed up in Tobruk, a city of about 120,000 people more than 1,000 km away in the east and one of its last footholds. Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have backed the Tobruk-based authorities, who accuse Qatar, Turkey and Sudan of backing the Islamists in Tripoli.

There are frequent clashes between the various militias in different parts of the country, while fighting continues on an almost daily basis in the eastern city of Benghazi. The country is awash in arms, narcotics, people traffickers and smuggling of all kinds, and kidnappings to extort ransoms are rife.

Libya has also seen the emergence of militias affiliated to ISIS, which have taken control of the city of Sirte—midway between Tripoli and Tobruk—where 21 Coptic Christian workers were beheaded last February. This was just one of a string of atrocities carried out by Islamists trained in Libya, both within the devastated country and in France and Tunisia.

The major powers believe that UN envoy Bernardino Leon is close to reaching an agreement between Tobruk and Tripoli over the formation of a national unity government, whose permission will be necessary if the US-European task force is to have any legal cover.

But success has so far eluded Leon, as Tripoli is demanding a greater role in any such a government and rejects the dominant role given to the so-called Libyan National Army headed by CIA asset, former Libyan General Khalifa Hiftar, allied to Tobruk.

Should an agreement be reached, a UN resolution will be sought to authorise the “P3+5” military intervention, which will include the patrol of Libyan waters by European aircraft and gunships, including Britain’s flagship helicopter carrier HMS Bulwark. This can only lead to further atrocities and the intervention of NATO.

This week, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon also announced that Britain will extend its air campaign in Iraq against ISIS militants by a year, adding that it would use its eight ageing Tornado fighter jets, originally due to be taken out of service last March, to conduct strikes until at least early 2017.

He ruled out any possibility of British ground troops joining the fight against ISIS. This is another lie, as

Britain has about 150 military “advisors” training the Kurdistan Regional Government’s Peshmerga forces. Their effectiveness and role is now being undermined by Turkey’s bombing of Kurdish forces in Iraq and Syria.

Despite inflicting death and destruction on the Iraqi people and their homes, the US-led forces have made little headway against the Sunni Islamist forces that have captured huge swathes of Iraq, including its second city Mosul, from which it has been able to generate \$40 million a month in oil revenues.

Several commentators have criticised Britain’s policy as incoherent and called for “boots on the ground.” Former Chief of Defence Staff Lord Richards recently argued that the West needed “tens of thousands” of trainers on the ground if it wanted to make a difference. He said that the West’s efforts against ISIS were “woefully insufficient,” and “If you want to get rid of them [ISIS] we need to effectively get on a war footing.”

Britain’s expanded military ventures are going ahead with virtually no public discussion, let alone approval or popular support, and in the case of Syria, in defiance of explicit assurances to the contrary.

Britain only has parliament’s authority to carry out air strikes against ISIS in Iraq, as part of the US-led coalition, but not in Syria. Nevertheless, Prime Minister David Cameron and Defence Secretary Michael Fallon covertly authorised the participation of British pilots, embedded with US, French and Canadian forces, in bombing operations against ISIS positions in Syria in defiance of parliamentary votes in 2013 and 2014.



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