

Trident Juncture 2015: NATO's biggest manoeuvre since 2002

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NATO is due to carry out a massive operation in the Mediterranean region from September 28 to November 6. The NATO manoeuvres, under the name Trident Juncture 2015 (TRJE15) is referred to by participants as “the biggest NATO exercise since 2002”.

The manoeuvres will be held in Italy, Spain, Portugal and the Mediterranean with 36,000 soldiers from all 28 NATO partner countries and five other allies taking part. The exercises involving around 160 aircraft and 60 warships, including nuclear submarines, thousands of vehicles and additional military equipment, is aimed at dealing with an “emergency” scenario.

In the exercise, the scenario is based in Africa and involves disputes about water rights. NATO forces are tasked with taking over a region in which the water dispute is raging and eliminating “terrorist groups”. The manoeuvre is to be used primarily to prepare for a military intervention in North Africa, in particular the oil- and gas-rich state of Libya, but also beyond. The US Department of Defence cited NATO commander General Philip M. Breedlove: “Our members are facing the consequences of instability in North Africa, Sahel and sub-Sahara as well as other regions.”

According to German army sources: “The exercise will focus on the use of the NATO Response Force (NRF) in a multinational strategic, operational and tactical environment”. The NRF was founded in 2002 on the initiative of the then-US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld. It has been systematically expanded since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine to enable NATO to deploy a massive force on the Russian border within a few days.

Trident Juncture 2015 will therefore test the capabilities of the new troop units and their ability to mobilise against Russia. “Theoretically, one could have shifted this exercise to the eastern part of Europe,” declared Bundeswehr Lieutenant General Richard Rossmanith in March. “The exercise sends out strategic messages relatively independent of where it takes place. And this message will certainly also reach Mr. Putin.”

The Bundeswehr is participating in the manoeuvres with 3,000 soldiers. Four years ago Germany refrained from taking part in the NATO bombing campaign against Libya. Now it is keen to be in the forefront of a renewed military campaign. The

German media has been campaigning for some time for a stronger military intervention in Africa and the Middle East.

NATO, the UN and the EU, in particular Germany and Italy, have their sights on Libya, which has rich oil and gas deposits. The country has been plunged into chaos and oil production severely hit since the NATO bombing campaign of 2011, which culminated in the brutal murder of Libyan ruler Muammar al-Gaddafi.

Libya currently has at least two warring governments, with Western powers seeking for months to set up a pro-Western “government of national unity”. The government that they currently recognise was forced to flee from Tripoli to Tobruk, after the Islamist coalition Alba Libica (Libyan Dawn) took the capital. To the east the city of Sirte has been taken over by Islamic State (IS) forces.

The drastic situation in the country was underlined by an appeal by the government in Tobruk for an extraordinary meeting of the Arab League in Cairo on August 18. It appealed to “Arab brother countries” to carry out “air strikes against the positions of the terrorist ISIS group”.

The region’s former colonial power Italy has a special interest in the military occupation of Libyan oil refineries. The semi-state-owned Italian ENI energy company is practically the only major corporation operating in Libya, even after the Italian embassy was closed in the spring of 2015. ENI continues to run the Mellitah coast complex, which produces much of Libya’s oil and gas exports.

On July 20, four Italian construction workers working for a Mellitah subcontractor were kidnapped. Already six months ago the Italian defence minister Roberta Pinotti stated that an intervention in Libya was “urgently needed”.

Italy is particularly important as a site for the NATO manoeuvres. Trident Juncture 2015 is coordinated from Naples, where NATO maintains a command post at Largo Patria with a personnel strength of 1,500. This is also the seat of the NATO-African command centre Africom.

The Italian government is keen to support an armed conflict against Libya, if carried out as part of an “international anti-ISIS coalition”. This was confirmed on August 17 by Italian Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni in the daily *La Stampa*. He said that military intervention was necessary to curb terrorism.

“Either we make an end to it in a few weeks or we will find we face a new Somalia just two steps away from our coast, and then we have to respond very differently.”

An important part of the manoeuvre will take place in Sicily, where 5,000 soldiers and 80 aircraft will be operational. The Italian air force insisted that the NATO manoeuvres be moved from the originally planned US Decimomannu Air Base in Sardinia to the military base at Trapani-Birgi airport on the Sicilian west coast.

Protests by the Sardinian population were one reason for the transfer. Hundreds took to the streets on June 11 to protest against NATO. At the same time, Sicily is much closer to Libya. The transfer has been officially carried out “for reasons eminently logistical, operational and for the distances to be covered and the previous experience gained in the course of other operations conducted by the base.” This refers to the flights launched from Sicily during the bombing campaign against Libya in 2011. At that time Sicily was the most important starting point for NATO fighter jets against Libya.

Notoriously the Mussolini regime maintained a military airfield for its African campaign at the same site at Trapani in the late 1920s. The base was used to launch bombs and poison gas on the population of North and East Africa, resulting in hundreds of thousands of deaths.

For 30 years the Italian air force has maintained a squadron on a base at Trapani in dangerously close proximity to a civilian airport, which was closed during the Libyan war. The NATO AWACS association stationed in Geilenkirchen, Germany also maintains a base at Trapani.

In Sicilian Sigonella there is also a base for the US 6th Fleet and the Italian air force. Europol and Frontex have set up their news service centre AGS here. The US base in Sigonella is also the starting point for US Global Hawk drones. These drones can now be controlled by the military transmitter in Niscemi, Sicily, where a ground station for the “Mobile User Objective System (MUOS)” was established in 2014. Once again protests took place here against the base.

Along with Italy, the European Union’s major powers are also preparing to recapture their former colonies. The mass refugee deaths in the Mediterranean are the public pretext for this process. The more the flow of refugees swells, the louder are the calls for military intervention in Africa.

Already in May, EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, a close confidante of Italian government head Matteo Renzi, lodged an application in the UN for a “robust mandate” to cover military attacks on Libya.

There is a video featuring Mogherini with other politicians, including NATO commander Philip Breedlove and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, singing the song “We Are The World”. The video was recorded by the Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet* on May 14 during a party of NATO foreign ministers in Turkey. To the fore in the group of singers is the foreign minister of the Syriza government, Nikos Kotzias, a former

central committee member of the Communist Party of Greece (KKE).

Two days earlier, on May 12, the European Commission officially decided to intervene militarily in northern Africa. On May 25, 2015 Wikileaks published a secret document that describes how EU defence ministers explicitly talked about their strategy for Libya, including reference to a “military intervention” against the country. All 28 EU member states agreed on the text.

The EU defence ministers not only plan to destroy smugglers’ boats in Libyan ports, but also to undertake military actions on Libyan soil in the event that the smugglers “operate onshore”, or if an intervention against “extremists and terrorists”, such as the IS terrorist group, were necessary.

Such a decision lacks a UN mandate and representatives of the Libyan government in Tobruk have made clear that they are opposed. But there can be no doubt that European powers, in particular Germany and Italy, regard the upcoming NATO manoeuvres as a further step in this direction.

In alliance with the United States, European governments have waged war in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya and have unleashed a devastating civil war in Syria. The ruination of entire civilisations is forcing millions of people to flee their homelands. The subsequent havoc on EU borders is now being used to coordinate military forces, intelligence and police services and border control agencies and prepare new wars.

The sheer hypocrisy of the EU and the Western powers in their treatment of refugees is clear from their military exercises. While thousands of exhausted refugees land in Greece, Italy and Spain every day and are housed in indescribable conditions, the German Bundeswehr is erecting comfortable tent cities in Zaragoza, Spain. The tents are equipped with modern infrastructure: solid floors and double walls to retain heat and keep out cold, together with sanitation, electricity, water and Internet.

The tents are not intended for refugees, but rather for the soldiers currently preparing for war in Africa, the Middle East or against Russia.



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