

Spain increases its presence in Africa

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3 September 2015

Spain's military deployment in the African continent has seen a major increase since 2013. It is an expression of the new scramble for Africa spearheaded by the continent's former imperialist masters.

Since 2013, Spanish armed forces have been involved in European Union military missions and supported French and US imperialist interventions on the continent. There are currently around 1,000 soldiers in 10 land, air and naval missions on African soil.

In Mali, Spain has deployed 122 troops since the 2013 intervention by France, which continues to maintain troops there.

Madrid has sent forces to Senegal and Gabon to provide aerial transportation for European Union (EU) and French troops across the continent. In the Central African Republic, Spain is second only to France in the number of troops deployed and in Somalia it leads the mission, with a battleship, 185 troops and one surveillance plane.

Madrid has spearheaded the call for military intervention in Libya within the EU under the pretext of combating Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It has the aim of "stabilising" the country after NATO overthrew the Gaddafi regime in 2011 and establishing a pliant pro-Western government.

Libya is explicitly mentioned in the 2016 annual budget passed by the Spanish parliament in April. It states that the "progressive deterioration of [Libya's] security, with internal, regional and international implications, and the difficulties for the construction of a democratic political model demands the commitment from the international community and Spain to stabilize the country."

All these missions are being promoted as a struggle against jihadism and instability. This is a fraud. It was Spain and other Western powers that aided Libyan jihadists to oust the Gaddafi regime that completely destabilized the Sahel region, and supported Islamist forces in NATO's proxy war against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Now, having fostered Islamist terrorism, imperialism seeks to exploit the crimes of ISIS for its own purpose.

Spain's support for interventions in Africa and the Middle East is in line with the Western powers' fundamental interests in this resource-rich area. As the 2016 budget states, Spain's strategic objectives in foreign policy are to "participate actively participate in efforts to achieve greater stability and development in the Mediterranean and North Africa. [...] This is a priority area for Spain."

However, Spanish imperialism lags behind in the race to plunder and redivide Africa. Determined not to be left out, think tanks, the media and the government are constantly calling for military interventions to increase Spain's global profile.

Last year, the state-aligned Real Instituto Elcano published "Towards a Strategic Renewal of Spanish Foreign Policy," insisting that Spain "has to elaborate an integral strategy of action in the area of Sahel, from the Gulf of Guinea to the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa ... considering that the business ties between Sub-Saharan Africa and Spain are intensifying rapidly."

To strengthen its position, Spain is supporting both French interventions and more importantly, US geostrategic interest in Africa aimed against China, which has eclipsed the US as the continent's leading trade partner. Madrid has signed a new bilateral agreement with Washington allowing permanent use of and increased forces at the Morón Air Base and the Rota Naval Base in the southern region of Andalucía.

The bases will be the centre of this autumn's NATO military manoeuvres code-named Trident Juncture 2015 in Spain, Portugal and Italy involving around 30,000 troops from over 30 countries. According to the Spanish Ministry of Defence, this will be "the largest NATO military exercise since the end of the Cold War," with the objective of "testing different naval, aerial, land offensive, amphibious disembarkations, parachutist launchings, actions in urban areas, interventions in NRBQ environments [nuclear, radiological, bacteriological and chemical] and the intervention of special forces, amongst others."

These objectives disprove the claims of NATO that the exercises are aimed against jihadism. Rather, they are designed to step up pressure on Russia and China, and prepare for war on both countries.

The growth of Spanish militarism and neo-colonialism is a warning to the Spanish working class. Spain was one of the lesser imperialist powers that intervened at the end of the 19th century in the Scramble for Africa, which saw 90 percent of the continent under direct control of European powers in the forty years leading up to World War I in 1914.

Severely weakened in the 19th century after the independence of its former Latin American colonies, and loss of Cuba and the Philippines to the US after the Spanish-American War of 1898, Spain was incapable of competing against the economically and military superior French and British forces. It ended up with one of Africa's smallest countries, Spanish Guinea (currently Equatorial Guinea), and the Western Sahara, an area that is mostly desert and one of the world's most sparsely populated areas.

This did not prevent Spain from carrying out brutal repression of the native populations. Between 1921 and 1927, Madrid and Paris jointly collaborated in repressing the Moroccan Bedouin resistance in the Third Rif War, indiscriminately using mustard gas and carrying out rape, pillage and mass killings. Many of the veterans of the colonial war, including General Francisco Franco, went on to use the same brutal methods they had learnt during the Civil War that followed the counter-revolutionary coup of July 1936.

The lessons of the 20th century must be assimilated. Under the pressure of the renewed global capitalist crisis, the mechanisms through which the Spanish ruling class was able to regulate social tensions in the post-Franco era are breaking down. Spain is once again embarking on militarist interventions. The same brutal measures will, as before, be imported back to the home country to be employed against the working class.



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