

UK to send troops to Somalia and South Sudan

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UK Prime Minister David Cameron announced in New York Monday that Britain would be sending hundreds of troops to the war-torn countries of Somalia and South Sudan to provide combat training, as well as medical, logistical and engineering support.

His aim is to shore up unpopular pro-Western regimes and “stabilise” the countries as part of a wider effort to curb migration to Europe. He said it was important to “step up” British contributions, adding, “The outcome in Somalia, if it’s a good outcome, that’s good for Britain. It means less terrorism, less migration, less piracy. Ditto in South Sudan.”

Cameron deliberately eschewed the fact that piracy off the coast of Somalia has all but subsided and that South Sudan is a landlocked country with no links to piracy.

About 70 British troops are to join the 22,000-strong UN-African Union (AU) contingent in Somalia to shore up the transitional government of President Hassan Sheikh Mohamed who has little support within the country or within the clan-dominated parliament where a few weeks ago nearly half the MPs sought—unsuccessfully—to impeach him for corruption and incompetence.

Government forces face ongoing attacks from the Islamist militant group al-Shabaab in the capital Mogadishu. Last week, a car bomb exploded at the presidential palace, killing at least four people. A few weeks ago, al-Shabaab fighters briefly seized control of an AU base manned by Ugandan forces, killing dozens of soldiers and capturing many more.

Such is the government’s fragile hold over the country that in July President Mohamed announced the postponement of elections scheduled for next year, as the state authorities had been unable to register voters. Last month, following a visit by US Secretary of State

John Kerry to Mogadishu, Washington opened its new embassy for Somalia—but in the Kenyan capital Nairobi.

Somalia has all but disintegrated in the wake of the political machinations of the various imperialist powers during the colonial and Cold War eras, and as a result also of the IMF interventions in the 1980s that wrecked Somalia’s pastoral economy and led to the civil wars and famine that have bedevilled the country ever since. Neighbouring countries have backed rival groups within Somalia and have been fighting proxy wars.

Three million out of Somalia’s 10 million people need humanitarian assistance, including 731,000 who face very severe needs. More than 1.1 million people are internally displaced and many of them face acute malnutrition. The situation has been exacerbated by the influx of tens of thousands of refugees from Yemen, fleeing the fighting there.

Britain will also send up to 300 troops to join the African Union contingent in South Sudan. Rival factions of the ruling elite have been fighting a bitter civil war for control of oil revenues since December 2013, less than two and a half years after South Sudan celebrated its independence from Sudan in July 2011 following a decades-long war against its northern neighbour.

The imperialist powers backed the break-up of Sudan in order to limit China’s rising influence in the region. Since then, fierce fighting in South Sudan has killed more than 10,000 people, rendered 1.5 million people homeless within the country and forced a further 500,000 to seek safety in neighbouring countries. Nearly 5 million people, out of a total population of 9 million, are in need of urgent humanitarian support—including 200,000 children suffering severe acute malnutrition. Some 7 million risk not having

enough to eat in the months ahead.

As many have abandoned their possessions, crops and livestock or sold what little they have in order to escape, they have no means to buy food, water and other essentials. Unable to plant crops, they will have nothing to harvest in the coming months. Such camps as exist are overcrowded and the totally inadequate sanitation is increasing the risk of disease, leading to a rise in the number of reported cases of cholera in the capital Juba.

The desperate situation in Somalia and South Sudan is part of the ongoing fragmentation and disintegration of the countries in the Horn of Africa, which includes Ethiopia, Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti.

The US and its European allies are engaged in a ferocious struggle with China for control of the region's oil resources. The Horn is an arena of intense great power rivalry for the control of oil reserves in neighbouring countries and the sea route through the narrow Bab al-Mandeb straits through which much of Europe's oil passes.

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China recently signed a \$185 million military agreement giving Beijing access to a Djibouti port next to the American base at Camp Lemmonier, a key US intelligence-gathering post, in a move sharply criticised by Washington. In January, China joined a UN Peacekeeping Mission in Juba, South Sudan, as part of a bid to protect its investment in oil production in the country, which has been cut by a third as a result of the civil war and ongoing hostilities with Sudan, as well as its annual \$200 billion trade with Africa as a whole.

This is the broader context for the wars that have prompted hundreds of thousands to risk the dangerous journey to Europe.

Britain's move to dispatch troops to the Horn marks an expansion of its aggressive role in Africa, alongside France's efforts to dominate North Africa and the Sahel. Britain's main military presence is currently based on two centres in Kenya, a training centre in Sierra Leone, and an advisory centre for "defence management" in South Africa.

Cameron is using the refugee crisis as a cover for the direct involvement of its armed forces in a new scramble for Africa to gain control of its rich mineral

and energy resources.

He boasted of Britain's Armed Forces having "a long history of delivering security and stability to some of the most difficult environments in the world." It would have been more honest to have said that Britain has a long history of suppressing the colonial and semi-colonial peoples of Africa, not to mention its record of engaging in military conflict every year for more than 100 years. No other country has been involved so continuously in combat over such a long period.

This year alone, Cameron and Defence Minister Michael Fallon 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.

In March, Fallon announced that Britain would send 75 military trainers and staff to aid the so-called "moderate" opposition forces in Syria. The decision, taken without the consent of the Syrian government, is a violation of international law and tantamount to a declaration of war. It followed in the wake of the decision by Cameron to send military "advisers" and "non-lethal aid" to Ukraine.

In August, it was revealed that Britain would be sending hundreds of troops to Libya as part of a European-wide mission to "stabilise" the war-torn country and stem the flow of refugees to Europe.

At the same time, Fallon announced that Britain would extend its air campaign in Iraq against ISIS militants by a year, adding that it would use its eight Tornado fighter jets, originally due to be taken out of service last March, to conduct strikes until at least early 2017. In addition, Britain has about 150 military "advisers" training the Kurdistan Regional Government's Peshmerga forces to fight ISIS.



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