

UN Security Council agrees to military intervention off Libyan coast

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20 June 2016

Last week, the UN Security Council in New York adopted unanimously a resolution which empowered European member states to search all ships off the Libyan coast for weapons and munitions. With the passage of this resolution, a new war in Libya draws ever closer.

The UN declared its aim was to impose an arms embargo on terrorist groups like Islamic State and Al-Qaida in Libya. Russia and China assented to the resolution.

This enables the European naval mission in the Mediterranean (EUNAVFOR MED), initiated by a decision of an EU emergency summit in April 2015, to enter its third stage. During the first two stages, the mission aimed to monitor and combat people smugglers on the high seas. Now, it has the task of using force to block shipments of weapons and munitions to and from Libya.

The mission, named Operation Sophia, is to reassert an old embargo enforced on the Gaddafi regime in 2011. This embargo served at the time as the prelude to NATO's war in Libya. Today, the resolution also lays the basis for a military intervention by the western powers.

Operation Sophia consists of a large number of warships, submarines, surveillance aircraft, drones, and 1,300 soldiers from 24 NATO states, including Germany, Italy, Britain, Spain, France, Greece, the Netherlands and Sweden. The German navy is involved with 950 soldiers and a rotation of warships, while Italy, the former colonial power in Libya, officially leads the mission.

German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier announced the initiation of stage three at a NATO foreign ministers' meeting on May 19 in Brussels. As he declared, the European armed forces would not only

enforce the arms embargo, but also establish a Libyan coastguard. This had already been approved by EU foreign ministers on May 23, 2015, when they extended the mission by a year. The so-called "robust" mandate still required the approval of the UN Security Council, which has now been given.

The German government is fully behind, and is participating in the war plans. Foreign minister Steinmeier declared about the latest UN Security Council decision that he very much welcomed the council "proving its ability to act," and added, "Firmly combatting the threat posed by ISIS in Iraq, Syria and also in Libya is in all of our interests."

In 2011 Germany remained on the sidelines during the NATO war in Libya, but now the German government is leading the war policy. In addition to the operations in Libya, the German government is engaged in a military build-up against Russia, deploying tanks in Eastern Europe. In Syria, German aircraft are providing the NATO intervention with surveillance information.

The Libyan operation is a component of more comprehensive military activities planned for the North African country. The imperialist powers have been preparing for months to march into Libya and establish military bases. Their goal is to secure direct control over the country's large oil and gas reserves and ease their access to Africa.

Three weeks ago, General Joseph Dunford, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon's top officer, stated that a new military mission potentially with thousands of US soldiers could begin at "any time." Heavy equipment for the intervention in Libya is sitting ready at airbases in Sicily, Cyprus and elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Greece, Italy and Malta have already closed their airspace to aircraft from the Libyan air

force.

American Special Forces are already openly active on the streets of Misrata, where they are coordinating the battle against Islamic State forces in the neighbouring city of Sirte.

Unofficially, US, British and Italian Special Forces and intelligence operatives have been active in Libya for months. The German government now intends to train Libyan security forces in neighbouring Tunisia, although this deployment could also occur in Libya itself.

To give the military operation a fig leaf of legality, the UN has recognised the puppet regime of Fayeze Sarraj “as the sole legitimate government in Libya.” This “government of national unity” can now send an official request for assistance to the western powers and in this way legitimise the invasion. The “government” is exempt from the arms embargo.

In reality, Sarraj has no base of support in Libya. Two months after his arrival in Tripoli, the “Prime Minister,” has hardly set foot on Libyan territory outside his provisional headquarters at Abu Sita, Tripoli’s port. But he has visited Turkey, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The country he allegedly governs is dominated by competing militias and groups involved in fierce fighting over territory and control of the country’s oilfields.

In the war-ravaged country there are now two competing central banks and two money systems, since the rival government in the eastern Libyan city of Tubruk printed its own banknotes in Russia and brought them into circulation on 1 June.

Since May, there have been power cuts lasting days in the capital, Tripoli. They are linked to strikes by electricity employees, who have not been paid wages for weeks.

Officially, the UN stated that it backs the Sarraj government because it is leading the fight against Islamist terrorism. But this is contradicted by the fact that Sarraj relies on Islamist forces, forming a “presidential guard” made up of elements from the Muslim Brotherhood and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), which is close to al-Qaida.

Accepting this arrangement, the German daily *Die Welt* stated, “The participation of the Muslim Brotherhood is the price which the international community—above all the EU—is paying for the

stabilisation of Libya.”

Last week, the bodies of 32 brutally murdered prisoners, former soldiers in Gaddafi’s military, were discovered. Libyan newspapers are accusing Sarraj’s new presidential guard of carrying out the murders.

The soldiers had been detained in al-Hadba prison for the last five years. According to a court ruling they were to have been released at the beginning of June, but were instead found executed with a shot to the head.

This episode demonstrates that the regime receiving the UN’s stamp of approval is virtually indistinguishable from the terrorist groups it claims to be combatting in alliance with NATO and the EU. Media reports in fact indicate that sections of the Islamist militias in Sarraj’s presidential guard retain ties to ISIS in Sirte.



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