

Italian soldiers fighting in Libya

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Without the consent of parliament, the government of Matteo Renzi (Democratic Party) is deploying Italian soldiers to Libya. It is basing itself on a new law which allows it to carry out the “the fight against terror”, even without parliamentary approval.

All parties, from the left to the right, have endorsed this course of action and contributed to its secrecy. It is a genuine conspiracy, and only rarely does the official media grant a brief glimpse into its actual operations.

What is known is that the US Air Force has been using Sicilian bases to carry out bombing runs against the Libyan city of Sirte since the beginning of August to drive out the Islamic State (IS). Italy also wants to reopen its embassy in Tripoli in the near future.

Now, however, it has been revealed by reports appearing in several newspapers on August 10 and 11 that Italian soldiers have been on the ground fighting at the side of militias in Misrata for several weeks. The Misrata militias are under orders to liberate the coastal city of Sirte from IS and consolidate control by the Tripoli-based “Government of National Accord.”

Apparently, several dozen members of the Italian secret service and Carabinieri are active in the protection of Tripoli, along with 50 individual soldiers belonging to the 9th Parachute Assault Regiment Col Moschin. They are under the direct command of Prime Minister Matteo Renzi.

Col Moschin are a special forces unit named after a hill that the unit defended against Austrian forces during the First World War. Nicknamed “Arditi” (The Daring), they quickly took on a prominent position in the Italian armed forces and later played a role in the seizure of power by the Fascists. In the 1980s, they were deployed in Lebanon, and in the 1990s in Somalia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Albania, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan. In Libya, these elite soldiers, trained in the deactivation of mines, are to be tasked with disarming explosive traps left by IS in Sirte.

Up to now, the Western powers have been working closely with Fayeze al-Sarraj’s Government of National Accord (GNA), which they installed as a puppet regime in Tripoli, and through which Sarraj officially requests imperialist aid. On August 21, the counter-parliament in Tobruk (House of Representatives, HoR) refused to support Sarraj, robbing him of any legitimacy. On August 24, Sarraj declared his readiness to accept the decision of the HoR and said that he viewed his own cabinet as a purely transitional government.

Nevertheless, the US, Italy and Germany continue to base their intervention on Sarraj’s government. France and Egypt are also working with Khalifa Haftar’s rival Libyan National Army in the East.

According to a Stratfor report, representatives of the EU Mediterranean operation “Sophia” signed an agreement on a joint training programme with the Sarraj government in Rome on August 23. The agreement is primarily intended to enable the Libyan coast guard to curb the flow of refugees from Africa to Italy. Approximately 100,000 refugees have already taken the route across the Mediterranean this year. Almost 5,000 of them have drowned in the attempt.

The legal foundation for the military operation in Libya was created last November, shortly after the terror attack in Paris, when the Italian government modified its law on participation in international missions. The new regulation permits Matteo Renzi to send military special forces abroad without parliamentary consent, as long as they are under the command of the foreign intelligence service rather than under the control of Italian troops.

The law on “Italy’s participation in international missions” was first adopted by parliament on July 14, 2016. It met with the approval of practically every party. The Five Star Movement and Nichi Vendola’s Left Ecology Freedom party (SEL) facilitated the law with their abstention from voting and their public

silence on its consequences.

According to one plan published by the *Corriere della Sera* on April 25, the government next wants to deploy between 600 and 900 soldiers to Libya, “to protect certain sensitive points, including the oil wells, and to train local forces.”

The reference to oil is revealing. In fact, the main objective of combat is to gain control over the lucrative oil resources of the north-African country. The Western governments hasten to gain a footing in Libya so they can bring the oil and natural gas facilities and the oil terminals in the Mediterranean under their control. That is why the Col Moschin troops in Libya have explicitly been given the task of keeping IS militias, driven from Sirte to the interior of the country, away from the oil fields further south.

Under the headline “Renzi’s secret war in Libya,” the *Il tempo* newspaper reported on August 10: “Italian special forces operate under direct control of the Prime Minister. However, the battle for Sirte goes on ... Italy has begun its fight in Libya, but it’s supposed to be a secret.” The report continues: “Together with Germany, the US, France, Britain, and Spain, Italy is now taking part in the situation centred on the oil terminal in Zuwaytina.”

Zuwaytina is an important port for the transportation of oil south of Benghazi. Its current potential of 70,000 barrels per day could increase substantially at full capacity. As an August 19 Stratfor report explained, Zuwaytina is more and more in the focus of the rival governments, the GNA in Tripoli and the HoR with its Libyan National Army under Haftar. Stratfor writes that it is certainly possible to get oil production at all three Eastern oil terminals—Zuwaytina, Ras Lanuf and as-Sidra—back on track. But five years of war and civil war have clearly left their mark on Ras Lanuf and as-Sidra. Stratfor reports, “Zuwaytina is the best option for the immediate exportation of oil on a large scale.”

To satisfy their greed for these valuable resources, the Western governments—as in Syria and Iraq—haven’t the slightest problem collaborating with Islamists. The militias in Misrata, on whose side Italian special forces now fight, are made up of Islamists. They belong to an organisation associated with the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Renzi government is obviously attempting to banish this topic as quickly as possible from the headlines. As several reports revealed the presence of

Italian soldiers in Libya on August 11, Foreign Minister Paolo Gentiloni attempted damage control: “We do not have a military mission in Libya. If we did, Parliament would have been informed.” Asked about secret service missions in Libya, Gentiloni replied, “By definition, I do not comment on operations of a classified nature.”

From Renzi’s seat of government, the Palazzo Chigi, came the succinct statement: “The participating Italian structures are authorised by parliament. We can neither confirm nor deny a military presence in Libya because they belong to the secret service and not to the army.”

A foreign military intervention, and particularly one launched without parliamentary consent, would be deeply unpopular in the Italian population. It would also contradict Article 11 of the Italian constitution which forbids war against another nation. An intervention in Libya, in particular, would meet with outrage and opposition. The Fascist Mussolini regime established a brutal colonial rule over Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, the region today known as Libya.



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