

African, Asian Migrants Dying in Mass in the Mediterranean

European Union, United States attempt to distance imperialism from crisis

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An accident on a substandard boat resulted in the deaths of over 900 refugees from Africa, the Middle East and Asia on April 19. Many of the passengers seeking asylum in Europe, were locked in the lower decks of the vessel which was overloaded with people fleeing Africa from Libya, a nation which is a source of instability throughout the region.

This recent tragedy has brought attention to the growing problem of out migration stemming in part from the imperialist wars of regime-change in Libya, Syria and other states in the region.

Four years ago, the United States and NATO engineered and carried out a dreadful war against the people of Libya. After financing and coordinating counter-revolutionary militias to attack and seize cities and villages in the east of the country, the-then Jamahiriya government headed by Col. Muammar Gaddafi mobilized military forces and volunteers to take back areas overrun by the rebels.

By March 19, 2011, the rebels were in retreat and the Pentagon-NATO alliance embarked upon a massive naval blockade, arms embargo and aerial bombardment of Libya, at the time the most prosperous state in Africa. After over seven months of bombing and rebel activity, the imperialists declared victory placing in government many individuals who had not been in Libya for decades.

Although there was outmigration from Africa and the Middle East prior to 2011, the crisis has recently surpassed anything seen in modern history. Just since the beginning of 2015, it is estimated that over 1,800 people have died in the Mediterranean in route to southern Europe.

Libya has two rebel regimes claiming authority over the state with additional militias which act as the law unto themselves. The economic status of the country has deteriorated while the country which had once chaired the African Union (AU) under Gaddafi is now shunned as a haven for criminal activity and reactionary political trends.

In addition to the destruction of Libya by the West, the Middle Eastern nation of Syria has been subjected to a similar destabilization campaign through a U.S.-NATO funded and strategically-directed civil war prompting the mass exodus of hundreds of thousands from the country.

In the Horn of Africa, war is still raging in Somalia and spilling over into Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti through the failed attempts by Washington to shape the political structures which

govern Mogadishu and its environs. The 22,000-member African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) and the Somalia Federal Government are largely subsidized by the U.S. and the European Union.

Hundreds of thousands of additional internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees are relocating out of the East African states of Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea. The Pentagon maintains a large military base in Djibouti at Camp Lemonnier where the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) directs its operations in the region.

The Atlantic Slave Trade in the 21st Century

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi likened the current situation in the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Slave Trade. Italy, the former colonial power in Libya, Somalia and Eritrea, is a relatively underdeveloped southern European state in comparison to the countries of the north and west of the continent, nevertheless is taking the majority of migrants from Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Renzi has called upon other European states to assist his country in addressing the migration issue. During the same week that the 900 migrants perished, some 1,200 others were retrieved by Italian vessels in the Mediterranean.

The prime minister said that the rest of Europe must take an active role in the crisis of migration, urging the United Nations to become more involved. Renzi urged Europe to invest in countries where migrants originate, calling on the EU bloc to make a “long-term investment” on the continent.

“We are asking for this to be a priority for an EU that wants to be something other than an assembly of member countries in an economic club, something other than a club of learned technicians that knows all the geopolitical dynamics and forgets to respond to the pain of our times,” the prime minister told parliament.

Nonetheless, other more developed countries are speaking about the situation in the Mediterranean and Libya as if it is an accident of nature. However, some western media outlets have drawn attention to the root cause of the horrendous situation involving migrants.

The Guardian newspaper noted that “a large number of these people are displaced by wars. The top three nations from which maritime refugees to the EU come are Syria, Afghanistan and Eritrea. The country where they are most likely to start their journey is Libya, which is now effectively a failed state. In other words, many are running for their lives through countries we have bombed. Those in the west who insist we cannot take in ‘the world’s misery’ must, at the very least, acknowledge how much of that misery we are responsible for.” (April 26)

Imperialist War and Genocide

Maltese Prime Minister Joseph Muscat said in the response to the situation in the Mediterranean that “Gangs of criminals are putting people on a boat, sometimes even at gunpoint. They’re putting them on the road to death, really, and nothing else.”

It’s “genocide — nothing less than genocide, really,” Muscat told CNN. (April 19).

Nonetheless, the EU at an emergency summit in Brussels called for the further militarization of the Mediterranean. Several countries held a meeting on April 23 where further assistance was requested to destroy the vessels that transport migrants. Such an approach will only cause more deaths. The flow of migrants from these regions cannot be halted by utilizing purely military means. The problems stem from the crisis of world capitalism and burgeoning racism in the foreign policy of western states. In attempts to control the regions of Africa, the Middle East and Asia, the U.S. and its allies are creating deeper crises through dislocations and deaths. Within Europe there is a fierce debate and political struggle over immigration from African and Asian states. Numerous political parties and fascist groups have sprung up to oppose migrants from countries of the South.

The ruling parties in Europe and North America have also stepped-up their attacks on migrants. At the same time the wars of regime-change utilizing aerial bombardments and surrogate armies are fueling the desperation and shattering of post-colonial nations and communities.

In the same above-mentioned article in the Guardian it points out that:

“Around 3 billion people live on less than \$2.50 a day. The global 99% did not come about by accident. It’s the result of centuries of colonization, decades of imperialism and the current corruption that has allowed a handful of people, in different ways at different times, to steal natural resources and pilfer public goods. As Winston Churchill once said of Britain, ‘This small island is dependent for our daily bread on our trade and imperial connections. Cut this away and at least a third of our population must vanish speedily from the face of the earth.’”

In the U.S. the narrative surrounding the migration crisis is also framed within the context of criminality devoid of any serious reflection on the character and impact of the foreign policies of Wall Street and Washington. Only when there is a redistribution of wealth, resources and political power as it relates to international relations, the problems of migration and mass death on the seas will continue.

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