

Migrant Crisis Fueled by Libya War

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Battle for Sirte and continuing division prompts imperialist rationale for further intervention

Fighting for control of the western coastal city of Sirte, Libya has resulted in the fleeing of more people from this embattled North African state which five years ago was targeted for regime-change by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the Pentagon and NATO.

Sirte is the hometown of former leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi who was brutally assassinated while attempting to leave the city amid the massive bombing by the imperialist states during late October 2011. Since 2015, the Islamic State (IS) has controlled the city along with other areas extending across the western coast of the Mediterranean.

IS presence in Libya has accelerated in the aftermath of the bombing of their positions in Syria and Iraq by numerous countries including the United States, Britain, France, and Russia. Forces loyal to the recently-imposed United Nations "Government of National Accord" (GNA) have laid siege to the city in an effort to drive out the organization.



The bulk of military forces involved in the efforts to oust IS are militias from the city of Misrata who were notorious for their violence and racism during the war of regime-change in 2011. In addition, the Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG) is also deployed under the banner of the GNA.

Anti-war.com reported on June 19 that the GNA spokesman "Reda Issa suggested the focus right now was not offensive, but rather to 'bolster positions on the outskirts of Sirte to reinforce the siege and provoke ISIS fighters to come out of hiding.' ISIS is estimated to

have 5,000 fighters in Libya, with a large chunk of them in Sirte. Given the unity government's forces mostly consist of the old Petroleum Facilities Guard (PFG), which was never built for offensive operations, it is unsurprising that the offensive isn't the quick mop-up it was initially suggested to be."

These heavily-armed fighters have taken some territory away from IS in Sirte but the Islamists remain dug into their positions slowing the drive to force them out of the area in order to break their main base in the central-western region of the oil-rich state. 80 percent of the country's oil reserves are located under the Sirte basin.

War Continues for Oil in the Eastern Region

If this was not enough for the GNA regime to contend with, there are additional flashpoints in the eastern region where a renewed round of attacks have targeted oil installations. Another militia in the East calling itself The Benghazi Defense Forces (BDF) carried out attacks on PDF units said to be loyal to the GNA in an area close to oil facilities on June 19. The areas struck by the BDF included three oil terminals located north of the country's major oil fields. At least three people were reportedly killed during the fighting.

BDF is composed of rebels that have been largely defeated by militias loyal to the Khalifa Haftar, the renegade general under Gaddafi who later became a CIA asset. Haftar was flown back to Libya from Virginia during 2011 to ostensibly lead the counter-revolution supported by the imperialist states and their allies. Haftar's forces have been clashing with rebels for two years, including some with ties to IS.

PFG spokespersons stated that the oil installations were not under imminent threat. However, they reiterated that the PFG were prepared to prevent a serious attack. This flare-up in fighting followed a previous day of clashes between the BDF and the UN-backed GNA Libyan regime.

On June 18, the BDF clashed with militias loyal to the Eastern government in the town of Ajdabiya. The rival regime based in Tobruk called the House of Representatives (HoR), has not thrown its support behind the GNA which is headquartered in the capital of Tripoli in the West.

The Tobruk regime has been in constant conflict with both the General National Congress (GNC) faction in Tripoli as well. At present there are two different National Oil Corporations (NOCs) which are claiming to be the legitimate controllers of the petroleum resources.

Libyan oil production has dropped off considerably from the 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd) under the Jamahiriya governing system led by Gaddafi and his supporters. Libya for years was the most prosperous state in Africa has now been reduced to producing less than 400,000 (bpd) leaving the country scrambling for foreign exchange amid an extreme decline in oil prices over the last year.

Migrant Crisis Continues Amid Internal Divisions

Despite the endorsement of the imperialist governments in Washington and the European Union (EU) member-states, the GNA junta has generated controversy among the two rival regimes and other factions vying for military and political control of the oil-rich state.

Compounding the Libyan instability in recent weeks is the fact that hundreds have died in their attempts to cross the Mediterranean to Europe. Officially well over 52,000 people have made the journey just this year alone. Many of the people who are subjected to the worst treatment by the human traffickers and militias occupying Libya are migrants coming from West Africa.

In a detailed article published by the British Guardian on June 17, it says “To even reach the sea, these West Africans all had to survive a horrific journey across the Sahara. If they don’t fall off the back of the smugglers’ pickup trucks, passengers are often kidnapped or beaten or die of dehydration.”

This same report goes on stressing “Their worst experiences, however, probably came inside Libya itself. Claimed by three rival regimes, and torn apart by a civil war waged between dozens of rival militias, Libya has become a hell on earth for migrant workers. In the security vacuum created by the absence of a strong central government, migrants have become easy prey for kidnappers and militias looking to raise money through ransoms, businessmen looking for slave labor and smugglers looking for passengers to exploit.”

The chaos engendered by the imperialist war of 2011 and its aftermath has turned Libya into a major source of African and even European instability. Governments controlling territories which are points of entry for the migrant population are seeking to halt the flow of people into their countries. Resistance to migration of people from Africa, the Middle East and Asia has strained relations between the European states in the South, Central and Eastern regions with those in the North and West.

Negotiations have taken place with the fractured regimes in Libya and the NATO state of Turkey to either prevent or return migrants and refugees who enter EU countries. In Europe itself, the displaced persons from the oppressed nations are subjected to institutional racism, xenophobia and violence from the security apparatus along with right-wing vigilantes.

The migrant, internally displaced and refugee crisis is one of the major issues facing the internationally community today yet remains absent from the discourse surrounding electoral politics and foreign policy. Reports from the UN Refugee Agency and other humanitarian organizations say that the problems of displacement is worse than it has ever been since the conclusion of World War II.

June 20 is designated as World Refugee Day and the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for Europe said in a statement that “Around 75 million international migrants are estimated to be living in the European Region alone, accounting for one third of all international migrants worldwide.” WHO also notes the rapid escalation of the crisis saying “Europe has experienced this acutely: over 1 million refugees and migrants arrived in European countries in 2015 alone, and over the course of the first 5 months of 2016 there have been over 200,000 new arrivals on European shores and at borders.”

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