

# The Refugee Crisis is a Crisis of Imperialism

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Region: [Canada](#), [Middle East & North Africa](#), [USA](#)

*The widely circulated photo of Aylan Kurdi, a three-year-old Syrian boy whose body was found on a beach in Turkey and whose family was “making a final, desperate attempt to flee to relatives in Canada even though their asylum application had been rejected” [1] by the Harper Government, has caused widespread outrage and forced Western leaders to acknowledge that there is a “refugee crisis”.*

In Canada, the leaders of the Liberal and New Democratic parties have used the news of Kurdi’s tragic death, along with the deaths of his five-year-old brother and his mother, to criticize the Harper Government’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Trudeau and Mulcair have called on Canada to accept more Syrian refugees, while the Harper Government, with its lust for military action, insists on more illegal bombing raids in Syria and Iraq as the solution to the surge of Syrian refugees [2].

The real tragedy is the refusal of Western leaders to acknowledge the cause of the refugee crisis – Western imperialism’s genocidal and never ending wars on the people of the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa.

There are now more refugees than at any time since World War 2, and the number of refugees has increased markedly since the start of the “Global War on Terror” [3]. Wherever the U.S. and its imperialist allies have intervened, whether through direct military action or indirect proxy wars, economic sabotage, and coups, in the name of “democracy”, the “War on Terror”, or the “responsibility to protect”, death and despair have been forced upon millions of innocent people, who have been left no other choice than to abandon their native lands to embark on a dangerous future of desperate struggle.

In Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, Mali, Korea, Vietnam, East Timor, Sudan, Ukraine, and elsewhere the livelihoods of millions have been destroyed by the forces of U.S. and Western imperialism.

In the 1980s, Afghanistan had a “genuinely popular government”, according to John Ryan, retired professor from the University of Winnipeg, that was implementing widespread reforms [4]. Labour unions were legalized, a minimum wage was established, hundreds of thousands of Afghans were enrolled in educational facilities, and women were freed from age-old tribal bondage and able to earn an independent income. U.S. and Western imperialism, fearful of that kind of equitable distribution of wealth, supported the feudal landlords and fundamentalist mullahs to sow chaos across the country, bringing rise to elements that later formed al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The Afghan people were once more dealt a severe punishment by the forces of Western imperialism following 9/11, despite a lack of conclusive evidence linking either the Taliban or al-Qaeda to the attacks. 30 years of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan have left the people of Afghanistan impoverished,



traumatized, and desperate.

The conflicts in Libya and Syria are eerily similar to the Western destabilization of Afghanistan. In 2011, when the Arab Spring protests swept across the Middle East and North Africa, Western imperialism hijacked legitimate grievances of the masses as a pretext for intervention in the name of the “responsibility to protect” and “democracy promotion”.

Prior to the 2011 U.S./NATO intervention, Libya was among the wealthiest and most stable countries in Africa, with the continent’s highest standard of living. Housing was enshrined as a human right, education and healthcare services were free for all citizens, and the country was pushing to establish an African currency linked to gold to help end the endless cycle of debt and impoverishment of the African masses by Western imperialism [5]. Under the cloak of the United Nations, Western imperialism, using the pretext of protecting the people of Libya from Gaddafi’s murderous rule, launched airstrikes on Libya and allied themselves with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and other Libyan extremists [6]. NATO airstrikes killed hundreds of civilians and forced Libya back into the Stone Age; Gaddafi was mercilessly tortured and murdered by the rebels. Thousands have been killed as rival tribal and extremist factions, some now allied with ISIS, battling for control of the country.

The conflict in Syria has frequently been referred to as “Libya 2.0”. U.S. imperialism with the support of Israel, Turkey, and the Persian Gulf States, trained and financed “moderate” rebels to overthrow the secular and popularly supported government of Bashar al-Assad. The “Free Syrian Army”, i.e., the “moderate” rebels, has been virtually eliminated in the conflict despite millions of dollars in aid from the U.S. and its regional allies [7]. FSA fighters have deserted to the ranks of ISIS en masse, itself a product of the illegal U.S. occupation of Iraq that killed 1 million Iraqis. There is overwhelming evidence that the U.S. and its allies have been actively training and supporting ISIS elements since the start of the proxy war in Syria [8][9]. It wasn’t until ISIS invaded Iraq with its new Toyota technicals, courtesy of U.S. imperialism, that ISIS was declared a threat to the world. Western imperialism changed its tactic from supporting ISIS to airstrikes on Iraq and Syria, with the support of other Western imperialist states, Turkey (which is also conveniently bombing anti-ISIS Kurdish fighters [10]), Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf States, but without consultation with the Syrian government, Iran, or Hezbollah that have been fighting ISIS and al-Qaeda elements since the start of the conflict. Hundreds of thousands have died in the West’s proxy war against the Syrian government.

From Libya to Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Pakistan and Somalia, U.S. and Western imperialist interventions, coups, and sanctions have displaced and killed millions of people. Physicians for Social Responsibility estimates that in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan alone Western imperialist interventions have caused the deaths of 1.3 million people [11]. It is no wonder then that hundreds of thousands seek asylum elsewhere; however, after traveling huge distances overland and on water, refugees find themselves abused, discriminated against, held in detention, or rejected from Europe, Canada, the U.S., and Australia.

More than 2, 500 have died this year trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe, while the International Organization for Migration estimates that 30, 000 could die by the end of 2015 [12].

Refugees attempting to enter Europe, even if they are granted asylum in a mainland European country such as Germany, have been met with police violence in Greece, Italy, and other countries on the Mediterranean that are the first landing points for boats sailing from North Africa and Turkey.

Greek riot police have beaten refugees protesting the failure of local governments to process their applications. Conditions are so poor for refugees that while waiting for processing newborn babies have died in Greece [13].

On the Macedonia-Greece border, where more than a thousand refugees are crossing daily, refugees that broke through the barbed wire fences were shot at with stun grenades, and the Macedonian police have treated refugees as rioters, according to Amnesty International [14].

Italian police forcibly removed African refugees camping out at the French border after France refused to grant them asylum [15]. Hungary is building a fortified wall, similar to the barbaric wall that divides the U.S.-Mexico border, to stop refugees from crossing the border [16].

The thousands of refugees that seek asylum in Australia are detained in Australia's detention facilities in Papua New Guinea and the small island nation of Nauru, dubbed the "Guantanamo Bay of the Pacific" [17]. Refugees can be detained for several years in these facilities, where social workers have observed "profound damage" to those detained through "prolonged deprivation of freedom, abuse of power, confinement in an extremely harsh environment, uncertainty of future, disempowerment, loss of privacy and autonomy and inadequate health and protection services" [18]. An Australian Senate investigation received reports of guards raping women on tape and sexually exploiting children as young as 2-years-old [19]. Just as Britain refuses to assist drowning refugees in the Mediterranean out of fear that it will encourage more migrants to seek asylum [20], the unannounced policy of Australian authorities is to make refugees suffer abuse and inhumane living conditions to deter them from seeking asylum in Australia, as if Australian imperialism hasn't inflicted enough suffering on the people of the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia.

U.S. and Western imperialism is the root cause of the "refugee crisis". Everyday men, women, and children are killed by U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan, U.S. and Western-backed militias in Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia, European and North American mining and oil conglomerates in Central and Western Africa, or are starved to death in Yemen by the U.S.-backed Arab blockade of the country. Until the genocidal aims of U.S. imperialism, with the

support of Canada, Australia, the European Union, and regional allies, are defeated, the “War on Terror” will continue to make life too unbearable for working people in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East to remain in their home countries.

## Notes

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