

France backs Egypt's threat to intervene against Turkey in Libyan war

By Alex Lantier
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French President Emmanuel Macron's support for Egypt's threat to intervene militarily against the Italian-backed Turkish intervention in Libya marks a major escalation of the nine-year imperialist carve-up of Libya launched by the 2011 NATO war.

Africa is facing a surge of the COVID-19 pandemic: it took 98 days from the first reported case to the first 100,000 cases, but it took only 18 days to double to 200,000. Libya is located, moreover, between two of Africa's worst-hit countries: Egypt (with 57,000 cases) and Algeria (12,000). Yet instead of working to send food and medical supplies to Africa, where millions also face famine due to the pandemic's disruption of agriculture and trade, the major powers are threatening to intensify the nine-year intervention into an all-out regional and even global war.

On June 21, Egypt's bloodstained dictator, General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, threatened to intervene in Libya to defend warlord Khalifa Haftar's forces against the Turkish-backed Government of National Accord (GNA). Speaking while inspecting troops at a military base near the Libyan border, he warned that a GNA capture of Sirte, a strategic town and gateway to Libya's oil industry, would be a "red line."

"Any direct intervention from the Egyptian state has now acquired international legitimacy," Sisi said. He told Egyptian air force pilots and special forces units: "Be prepared to carry out any mission, here inside our borders—or if necessary, outside our borders."

Echoing the rhetoric he used to justify a 2013 coup against Islamist President Mohamed Mursi and the savage repression of a two-year revolutionary upsurge of the working class in Egypt, Sisi said Egypt would intervene in Libya in self-defense against "direct threats" from "terrorist militias and mercenaries." He added: "If the Libyan people ... asked us to intervene, this would be a signal to the world that Egypt and Libya are one country, one interest."

The target, Egyptian officials made clear, is the Turkish intervention in Libya, launched in January, to support the UN-recognized GNA against Haftar's forces. "The aim is deterrence: Egypt does not want a single Turk to cross the

line into eastern Libya," Ziad Akl of Egypt's Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies told London's *Financial Times*.

The French government, which together with Russia, the UAE and Egypt has backed Haftar in Libya, promptly intervened to declare its support for Cairo in the war. Speaking alongside Tunisian President Kaïs Saïed at the Elysée presidential palace in Paris, Macron accused Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government of "playing a dangerous game in Libya." This comes shortly after a dangerous confrontation between French and Turkish warships in the Mediterranean.

With brazen hypocrisy, Macron, who has helped oversee Egyptian, UAE and Russian arming of Haftar, denounced Turkey for intervening in the country. Calling for "the belligerents to cease fire," he demanded "the reunification of Libyan institutions and the launching of reconstruction in the interests of all Libyans." He continued, "This is a hard road requiring all of us to show responsibility, end foreign intervention and end unilateral actions by those who hope to win new positions through war."

Macron then promptly endorsed Sisi's threat to intervene militarily in Libya, saying he understood "the legitimate concern of President Sisi as he sees troops arriving on his border." This was yet another lie. GNA troops are not at the Egyptian border, but in central Libya, threatening to overrun Sirte and key oil fields and refineries taken over by French oil firm Total after the 2011 war.

Finally, Macron repeated his remarks last autumn, blaming the NATO alliance for being "brain dead" and unable to coordinate common action between its members. The ostensible target of his anger was Turkey, which has armed the GNA with drones and helped it turn back Haftar's attack on Libya's capital, Tripoli. However, Macron's comment was also a barely veiled attack on Italy and on the rest of the NATO alliance, which has largely declined so far to publicly take sides in the mounting inter-imperialist conflict between France and Italy in the Mediterranean.

Italy, the former colonial power in Libya, whose oil firm

ENI has taken over GNA-held oil fields in western Libya, is working closely with Turkey. On June 19, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi di Maio went to Ankara to meet his Turkish counterpart, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, and discuss the Libyan war. Di Maio and Çavuşoğlu then held a press conference where di Maio called for “cooperation, not conflict” between NATO member states in the region.

“We are thankful to Italy for not siding with putschist Gen. Khalifa Haftar in Libya, unlike many other countries,” Çavuşoğlu said. He added that Italy and Turkey would cooperate not only on meeting Libya’s energy needs, but also on mounting Turkish-Greek conflicts over natural gas deposits in the Eastern Mediterranean. Ankara has increased its efforts to get support from Washington for its policy in Libya. On June 8, Erdoğan called US President Donald Trump over Libya, after which Çavuşoğlu declared, “We received instructions [from Erdoğan] to work together” with their US counterparts.

What is unfolding in Libya is the direct result of the bloody imperialist war waged by the NATO powers in 2011 against oil-rich Libya. Terrified by revolutionary uprisings of the working class in neighboring Egypt and Tunisia, the NATO powers led by France, Britain and the United States launched a war on Libya under the cynical pretext of intervening to protect Libyan protesters from Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s regime. Arming Islamist and tribal militias as proxies, they bombed Libyan cities and in six months toppled and destroyed the Libyan government.

This operation was marketed to the European and American public as a war for democracy by petty-bourgeois pseudo-left operatives like the French New Anti-capitalist Party’s (NPA) Olivier Besancenot, who demanded that French intelligence arm Libyans against Gaddafi. Besancenot has been thoroughly exposed by what followed as a stooge of imperialism and a propagandist for French oil interests.

The NATO war quickly led to the disintegration of Libya into civil war between rival Islamist and tribal militias, loosely overseen by a succession of UN-backed governments or warlords like Haftar. NATO powers divided up what they could salvage of Libya’s oil industry and set up concentration camps for migrants where they face murder, sexual assault and being sold into slavery. Over the last years, moreover, the conflicts among the imperialist powers over who would profit from the rape of Libya has only grown bloodier and more dangerous.

The European media repeatedly criticized the Russian intervention to back the ostensibly secular warlord Haftar, in the context of the post-Soviet Russian regime’s hostility to all manifestations of Islamism and its military intervention against the NATO proxy war in Syria. There is clearly deep

frustration in the imperialist capitals of Europe at the mounting role Russia and Turkey play across the region. However, a pall of silence generally covers the underlying rivalry between the NATO imperialist powers and transnational corporations over the division of the spoils.

This rivalry briefly emerged into view last year, when France withdrew its ambassador to Rome in protest and warned that Franco-Italian relations were at their lowest point since fascist Italy’s invasion of France in 1940, during World War II. While these differences were patched over, the conflicts inside NATO have only continued to mount. They underlay both this winter’s Libyan conference in Berlin, and the recent declaration of a top French general that France must prepare for major, “state on state” conflicts.

The way forward is the independent political mobilization of the working class in an international anti-war movement. The neo-colonial appetites of the European powers and the various Middle East bourgeois proxies through which they work—in Egypt, Turkey, or inside Libya—are all unflinchingly reactionary.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the horrific failure of the ruling classes around the world to adopt policies halting its spread are further, unanswerable proof of the need for workers internationally to return to the revolutionary road opened by Tunisian and Egyptian workers a decade ago.

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