

Mediterranean Catastrophes, Impoverished African Migrants: It's Time for the People of Europe to Stand Up

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About a fortnight ago — just before midnight on the 18th of April 2015 — the Mediterranean witnessed one of the greatest catastrophes that has ever occurred on its waters. More than 800 migrants in a small fishing boat were drowned off the coast of Libya as a result of a collision with another vessel.

This was the latest in a series of tragedies of this sort. Just before the 18th April episode, there were two other shipwrecks that left 450 people dead. In September 2014, 500 migrants drowned when the traffickers navigating their boat rammed it in an attempt to force the passengers on board to get into another smaller vessel. In October 2013, 360 Africans perished when their tiny boat caught fire within sight of the Italian coast.

There is clear evidence now to show that migrants packed into untrustworthy boats dying in various disasters on the Mediterranean is increasing at an alarming rate. This year, up to the end of April, at least 1750 of them were killed crossing the Mediterranean. This is 30 times more than for the same period in 2014!

These desperate, largely poor migrants are from different countries. Libyans, Syrians, Iraqis, Sudanese (both North and South), Somalians, Eritreans, Malians and even Bangladeshis would be some of the nationalities involved. The vast majority of them are fleeing to Europe from the turmoil and chaos in their countries, often typified by unbearable violence, or are seeking to escape grinding poverty and gnawing hunger. The media portrays their countries as “failed or “failing” states.

What the media does not highlight is the role of certain Western governments in creating the chaos and violence in a number of these so-called failed states. In the case of Libya for instance which now supplies some of the traffickers and generates many of the migrants, it was the NATO engineered ouster of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011 that set into motion the forces that are responsible for the current upheaval in the country, as a consequence of which there is no functioning government. Gaddafi's violent overthrow — it is worth emphasizing over and over again — was primarily to enable French, American and other Western companies to control Libya's vast oil reserves and to nip in the bud his plans to ensure that Africa would not be under the sway of Western imperial interests.

Likewise, if hundreds of thousands of Syrians have fled their country in the last three years, including those who are trying to cross the Mediterranean, it is mainly because of a brutal, violent uprising orchestrated by the US and Israel, with the active collusion of regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey and executed on the ground by fanatical

religious bigots like the Jabhat al-Nusra and Da'ish (ISIL) which seeks to eliminate Bashar al-Assad who is a critical link in the resistance to Western-Israeli dominance over West Asia. Yet another example, it is the Anglo-American invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 that triggered sectarian violence leading to the present instability which has now conducted to a situation where a group like Da'ish is able to control a swathe of territory further driving Iraqis from home and hearth. Needless to say, the principal reasons for the imperial conquest of Iraq were control over oil and buttressing Israel's position.

Turning to another country in the Arab world which has produced a number of migrants seeking refuge in Europe, it appears that by helping to create South Sudan in pursuit of their own agenda, Western powers and Israel have only exacerbated an already dire situation. Somalia is another country which has only known perpetual instability since the early nineties partly because of US meddling through its proxies in the region. The inevitable outcome of this is the exodus of migrants as the Somali presence in a number of boat tragedies in the Mediterranean reveals. One can expect US collaboration with Saudi Arabia in the latter's assault upon Yemen to give rise to yet another exodus, a portion of which will find its way to the Mediterranean.

As with Libya, Syria and Iraq, US direct and indirect intervention in South Sudan, Somalia, Yemen and other countries, sometimes abetted by other Western powers and Israel, has undoubtedly made life much worse for the affected people and in many instances forced them to brave the treacherous waters of the Mediterranean in search of security and certainty. In looking for solutions to the tragedies occurring in the Mediterranean, European governments and European civil societies should focus upon this paramount issue: how US, Israeli and other Western agendas aimed at control and dominance — or hegemony — have been a fundamental factor in creating chaos and instability thus compelling millions of men, women and children right across West Asia and North Africa (WANA) to risk their lives in the hope that they will reach other shores that will provide them with shelter and succor.

This does not mean that there are no other causes for the outflow of people from WANA. Bad governance within a nation-state, especially massive corruption, oppression and religious and ethnic discrimination have all contributed to the exodus, to people fleeing the land of their birth and ancestry. But incontrovertible evidence convinces us that the determined drive by the US and its allies to pursue their hegemonic agenda in WANA and elsewhere has been the principal — sometimes the root — cause of people trying to cross the Mediterranean and reach Europe for a better life.

The people of Europe some of whom have been deeply moved by the 18th April catastrophe should demand that their governments cease to support a hegemonic power on the other side of the Atlantic or participate in hegemonic adventures that bring death to so many and cause so much pain and misery to their fellow human beings.

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