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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Alex Lantier
04.01.2020

Wider war over Libya looms as France, Egypt denounce Turkish intervention

The nine-year civil war between rival militias unleashed by NATO's destruction of the Libyan regime in its 2011 war threatens to escalate into all-out war between major regional powers. As the Turkish parliament voted yesterday to authorize a military intervention to back Fayez el-Sarraj's Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, key backers of Khalifa Haftar's rival Libyan National Army (LNA) were denouncing the vote as illegal and threatening to intervene.

After a call with French President Emmanuel Macron on December 30, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi issued a communiqué denouncing the Turkey-GNA accords as "illegal foreign intervention" in Libya. Sisi said Libya, whose border with Egypt is 1,115 kilometers (693 miles) long, is a "matter of national security" for Egypt. Yesterday, the Egyptian foreign ministry published a statement condemning the Turkish vote "in the strongest terms."

Reporting on the Macron-Sisi call, French authorities warned of "the danger of military escalation" and called "all international and Libyan actors ... to exercise the greatest caution." Both Paris and Cairo hypocritically expressed hopes that a conference on Libya in Berlin next month would lead to a peaceful negotiated settlement of the Libyan war.

On the ground, however, the GNA and LNA, and the sprawling array of international backers behind each faction, are all arming for war. At stake is not only domination of oil-rich Libya, but undersea oil and gas resources in the eastern Mediterranean that could provide 10 percent or more of Europe's energy supply. As a result, the world is suddenly

confronted with the very real and imminent danger of all-out confrontation between major military powers, including nuclear-armed imperialist states, over domination of north Africa and the Mediterranean Sea.

Yesterday, the Turkish parliament voted 325-184 for armed intervention in Libya, giving President Recep Tayyip Erdogan full powers to decide on its scope. The resolution also supports Erdogan's agreement with the GNA on dividing eastern Mediterranean energy resources. Its stated purpose is to protect "the interests of Turkey in the Mediterranean basin and in North Africa," as well as blocking regional refugee flows and bringing humanitarian aid to Libya.

Erdogan threatened to send Turkish troops to Libya "by land, air and sea" and denounced Egypt and the United Arab Emirates for backing Haftar, asking: "What business do they have in Libya?"

Ankara is already sending Islamist militiamen to Libya from Idlib province in Syria, where they were deployed as part of the NATO proxy war in Syria but are surrounded by Syrian and Russian troops. NATO-linked sources including the Syrian Observatory on Human Rights claimed 500 Syrian fighters are already in Libya, citing videos issued by the fighters. Radio France Internationale cited anonymous sources at Tripoli's Mitiga Airport, claiming fighters were transported by al-Ajniha Airlines, which belongs to militia leader and CIA asset Abdelhakim Belhaj.

Donald Trump called Erdogan after the Turkish parliament vote. The White House issued a brief statement but did not return press calls about his talk with Erdogan. Its communiqué blandly stated, "The leaders discussed bilateral and regional issues. President Trump pointed out that foreign interference is complicating the situation in Libya. The leaders agreed on the need for de-escalation in Idlib, Syria, in order to protect civilians."

In the meantime, however, the backers of Haftar's LNA are all rapidly arming it and advancing their strategic and financial interests. Hundreds of Russian-backed mercenaries allegedly linked to the Wagner Group company are fighting in Libya, raising the prospect of a Russian-Turkish conflict over Libya as well as Syria. *Middle East Monitor* reported that three cargo planes, one from the UAE with troops and two from Egypt with arms, recently arrived at Haftar's bases in eastern Libya.

Haftar, whose troops advanced last spring but are now under sustained attack by GNA forces, said yesterday that he could take Tripoli "in hours" if Egypt sent troops to help him crush Sarraj. In talks on January 1 in Cairo, however, he threatened Sisi that if Egypt did

not intervene militarily when Turkey did, Sisi would soon “find Erdogan’s soldiers on (his) border.”

Also yesterday, Israel, the Greek Cypriot regime and Greece signed a rival eastern Mediterranean energy deal for a pipeline opposed by Turkey, transporting natural gas from waters off Israel and Cyprus to Greece, Italy and beyond. This sets the stage for explosive conflicts in the eastern Mediterranean that are now directly bound up with the decade-long civil war in Libya.

Cyprus has been divided between Turkish and Greek zones since the 1974 war over the island, and competing claims between Turkish and Greek gas exploration vessels off Cyprus in recent months have led to violent ship collisions. Greece violently objected to the Turkish-Libyan deal signed last month, expelling the Libyan ambassador to Greece in protest. Greece’s right-wing *Kathimerini* wrote that the Greek and Greek Cypriot governments hurried to finalize yesterday’s deal “to counter any attempt by the Turkish neighbor to stop the project.”

The threat of all-out regional war over Libya is the consequence of the imperialist wars for regime change launched by the NATO powers in Libya and then Syria in 2011. Hundreds of thousands have died, the two countries have been devastated, and tens of millions have been forced to flee their homes. While the Syrian conflict escalated into a proxy war involving Iran, Russia, China and the NATO powers that nearly led to US missile strikes on Iran last year and a war directly involving Russia and China, a similar danger of escalation is now posed in Libya.

NATO launched the Libyan war to respond to revolutionary uprisings of the working class in Egypt and Tunisia, but it also reflected conflicts among the major imperialist powers. Washington backed London and Paris, who were eager to crush Colonel Muammar Gadhafi’s regime, a rival for influence in France’s former colonial empire in northwest Africa. Berlin and Rome, the former colonial power in Libya, publicly refused to join the war, however.

Commenting on the role of US President Barack Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the time, the WSWS noted: “it is not to be assumed that Obama has fully worked through the implications of his support for Sarkozy’s schemes. By participating in a war publicly opposed by Berlin, Washington has all but repudiated its decades-long policy of maintaining the political and military unity of Western Europe. ... Washington has set into motion events which will have disastrous consequences.”

This was borne out by the course of the Libyan conflict after NATO and its allied Islamist and tribal militias finally destroyed the Gaddafi regime in August 2011. Conflict erupted in particular between Paris and Rome—who ultimately backed Haftar and Sarraj, respectively—while Washington had to withdraw from Libya in a rout after the destruction of its consulate and the killing of its ambassador, J. Christopher Stevens, in Benghazi in 2012.

Since then, shifting coalitions of international backers have lined up behind the various militia factions that emerged in Libya. In the more recent past, France, Russia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates unofficially backed Haftar, while Italy, Turkey and Qatar supported the GNA and Sarraj, who formally enjoys UN recognition. Trump tried to split the difference, recognizing Sarraj but also calling Haftar, reportedly to declare his sympathies for the LNA.

These conflicts have periodically erupted into view, however, as last year when France recalled its ambassador from Rome for consultations—a move unprecedented since the two countries went to war during World War II.

The danger of a military clash involving Turkey, Egypt, Russia and major NATO imperialist powers is a warning to workers not only in North Africa but around the world. As the 21st century enters its third decade, it is clear that the major capitalist governments have no progressive solutions for the disasters unleashed by decades of imperialist wars in the Middle East and North Africa. As mass social protests against inequality and class struggles spread across Europe and the Middle East, it is critical to build a socialist anti-war movement in the working class.

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