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Berlin conference prepares military occupation of Libya

The Libya conference, which took place this past Sunday in Berlin, was not about “peace” in the war-torn country, but about the distribution of the loot. It is reminiscent of the conferences at which the colonial powers of the 19th century divided up entire regions and continents among themselves.

The composition of the conference alone shows this. At the table sat the heads of state and government of the most powerful great and regional powers, but no representative of the country whose fate was being decided. The two main adversaries in the Libyan civil war, Prime Minister Fayeze al-Sarraj and General Chalifa Haftar, had indeed been summoned to Berlin, but they had to wait in the anteroom until they were told what the conference had decided. Moreover, neither of them represents the Libyan people, serving rather as puppets of the various powers fighting for control of the oil-rich country.



French President Emmanuel Macron, center left, speaks with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, center right, during a group photo at the conference on Libya in Berlin on Sunday (AP Photo - Michael Sohn)

In 2011, France, Great Britain and the US, soon to be joined by numerous other countries, bombed Libya and brutally murdered the long-time head of state, Muammar al-Gaddafi. Since then, the country, which once had a well-developed infrastructure and the highest standard of living in North Africa, has been transformed into a hell by militias fighting each other.

The militias, which rely on Islamist mercenaries and local tribes, are financed and armed by foreign powers. Behind General Haftar, who has American citizenship and was long considered an asset of the CIA, are the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France and Russia. Al-Sarraj is supported by Italy, Turkey, Qatar and officially also Germany. The US had long been committed to al-Sarraj, but recently tended to support Haftar again.

The goals pursued by the various powers are contradictory. Geopolitical and regional political goals are mixed up with economic interests. For example, the conflict between Italy and France is primarily about control over Libyan oil and gas. With 48 billion barrels, the country has the ninth largest oil reserves in the world. The former colonial power, Italy, controls almost half of the market with the oil company Eni, the largest oil and gas producer in Libya. Its biggest competitor is the French Total group. France is also dependent on Haftar's support for its colonial war in the Sahel.

The civil war in Libya would probably have dragged on in this form for years if Russia and Turkey had not intervened. Russian mercenaries of the Kremlin-affiliated Wagner group have recently made a major contribution to Haftar's military successes. Turkey, in turn, has sent its own soldiers as well as mercenaries of the Free Syrian Army to Libya to support al-Sarraj. In return, al-Sarraj signed an agreement on the "delimitation of spheres of influence at sea," which divides the eastern Mediterranean between the two countries. Based on this agreement, Turkey claims large gas reserves, which Greece and Cyprus also claim.

The fear that Russia and Turkey would gain influence in Libya brought the European powers closer together. Germany saw its chance here. It had not taken part in the Libyan war in 2011 because it had good economic relations with the Gaddafi regime, and it has had little influence in the North African country since then. Now, Chancellor Merkel slips

on the mask of Otto von Bismarck, who at the end of the 19th century had cleverly exploited the conflicts between other great powers, and in the guise of an “honest broker” asserts Germany’s great-power interests.

The Berlin Libya Conference and the agreements reached there help Germany establish itself in the country and strengthen its political and economic influence in Africa. To this end, Merkel called together all adversaries, a total of 16 states and organizations, in Berlin. French President Macron attended the conference, as did the heads of government of Italy and Britain, Conte and Johnson. President Putin came from Russia and President Erdogan from Turkey. The US government was represented by Secretary of State Pompeo. High-ranking members of government also came from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The UN and the European Union were also involved through their leading representatives.

The conference agreed on a 50-point declaration. According to it, the ceasefire, which had already been established earlier through the mediation of Russia and Turkey, is to be extended permanently. The militias are to be demobilized and disarmed, and the existing arms embargo, which has already been violated by everyone, is to be respected and monitored.

There is little doubt, however, that this is only the preliminary stage to a military occupation of the country. EU Foreign Affairs Commissioner Josep Borrell had already told *Der Spiegel* prior to the conference, “If there is a ceasefire in Libya, the EU must be prepared to help implement and monitor this ceasefire—possibly also with soldiers, for example as part of an EU mission.”

Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio also told the German news magazine, “We need a European peace mission.” He said that European blue helmets were needed, with a mission on water, land and air to monitor compliance with the agreement.

Demands for a deployment of the Bundeswehr (Armed Forces) are coming thick and fast from the German media and politicians. Christian Democratic Union (CDU) chairwoman and Defence Minister Kramp-Karrenbauer declared her support, and CDU parliamentarian Johann Wadephul called for monitoring the implementation of the arms embargo and armistice. “We cannot tolerate Libya remaining a playground for arms smugglers, human traffickers and Islamic terrorists in the long run.”

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* commented, “Germany will have to play a major role in both the establishment of security and the construction of a Libyan polity, not only for

the sake of its role in Europe, but also because it is in Germany's interest to spare Libya the fate of Syria.”

The German ruling class sees the Libyan conflict as an opportunity to push ahead with the long-propagated return to militaristic great power politics. Seventy-nine years after Hitler's favourite general Erwin Rommel landed in Libya to pursue his disastrous Africa campaign, they sense the chance to establish a military presence in North Africa. They are supported by all parties. Not only the governing parties—CDU, Christian Social Union (CSU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD)—but also the Greens and the Left Party have enthusiastically welcomed and supported the Berlin conference.

There is no doubt, however, that the cease-fire in Libya, if it is concluded at all, is only a breathing space before the war, which has already devastated the country, intensifies further. None of the conflicts that are driving the imperialist powers into ever more brutal wars has been resolved. Experts believe that the civil war in Libya will flare up again in a short time. “For both sides, the current situation is militarily and economically unacceptable in the long term,” writes *Die Zeit*. “Therefore, a renewed outbreak of major fighting in the coming weeks is not unlikely.”

The conflict between Turkey and Greece, which was not invited to Berlin despite outraged protests by the Athens government out of concern for gas deposits in the eastern Mediterranean, has also intensified. Over the weekend, Turkish hackers paralysed the websites of the Greek Foreign Ministry and secret service. Greek hackers retaliated by doing the same to the website of the Turkish Foreign Ministry. The two hostile NATO members have previously been on the verge of war.

Besides the struggle for oil, markets and influence, it is above all the intensification of the class struggle to which the imperialist powers are reacting with war and militarism. The mass protests in Iraq and Lebanon have intensified in recent days, despite brutal repressive measures. And in Europe too, especially in France, governments are facing massive resistance.

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