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Who is responsible for the massacre in the Mediterranean?

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“We came, we saw, he died,” exclaimed Hillary Clinton to a television reporter on October 20, 2011. The then-secretary of state was cackling in uncontrollable glee after being shown a gruesome video of the torture and murder of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Nearly five years later, Clinton is the Democratic presidential frontrunner, and the dying continues: in Libya, Syria, Iraq and in the Mediterranean Sea.

With estimates of up to 900 refugees drowning in the Mediterranean, the past week has been the deadliest thus far this year.

Over 8,000 refugees have died attempting to make the dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean to Europe since 2014, the vast majority of them having begun their fatal voyages from the coast of Libya.

Neither Clinton nor her rivals in the race for the US presidency, Democrat Bernie Sanders, the self-described “democratic socialist,” and Republican Donald Trump, have said a word about this ongoing massacre in the Mediterranean.

There is every reason why it should be a prominent issue in the US election, however.

First and foremost, Washington, the two major capitalist parties and Clinton personally have played decisive roles in unleashing the mayhem that has driven tens of millions from their homes in a desperate flight for their lives.

The toll inflicted by a quarter century of US military interventions, proxy wars and regime-change operations is nothing short of staggering. Every country subjected to these acts of aggression today contributes decisively to the worst global refugee crisis since the Second World War.

In Iraq, the target of the illegal war of aggression in 2003, the deaths inflicted by US intervention total well over a million. The systematic destruction of physical and social infrastructure, together with the pursuit of a deliberate policy of divide and rule led to the bitter sectarian divisions, spawned the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) along with the ongoing civil war that threatens to produce new and terrible massacres in already blood-soaked cities like Fallujah and Mosul.

In Afghanistan, the number directly killed by the US-led war is conservatively estimated at over 100,000, while the continuing conflict has “exacerbated the effects of poverty, malnutrition, poor sanitation, lack of access to health care, and environmental degradation,” leading to premature deaths of many more, as one recent study found. At least 3 million are now refugees.

In Syria, the war for regime change orchestrated by Washington and its principal regional allies has killed well over a quarter of a million, with more than half of the population displaced and some 4 million living as refugees in four countries alone: Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq. ISIS and similar Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias have served as proxy forces for the regime-change operation, inflicting terror on the people of Syria, Iraq and beyond.

Also swelling the refugee tide are Africans from countries like Nigeria and Somalia, where US Special Operations troops and drone strikes are being employed in a further extension of the global war on terror.

And Libya itself, where the ill-fated boats embark overcrowded with refugees seeking to reach Europe, remains economically and socially shattered and enmeshed in bloody civil war as a result of the 2011 US-NATO war to topple the government of Muammar Gaddafi. Nearly five years after this war, it has three governments, one of them set up recently with Western support in order to sanctify another military intervention. None of them exert control over a sizable part of the country. The disastrous effects of the criminal war of 2011 are now being invoked by Washington and its NATO allies to justify a further intervention, with US and British Special Forces commandoes already on the ground.

Hillary Clinton was a leading advocate of the US intervention in Libya, just as she was in Syria. In both cases, wars of imperialist plunder and for the imposition of Washington’s hegemony over strategic areas of the globe were promoted under the filthy and hypocritical banner of “human rights.”

On the phony pretext of protecting Libyan and Syrian civilians, hundreds of thousands have been butchered and millions driven from their homes.

Washington's "human rights" propaganda was echoed by a whole coterie of pseudo-left organizations around the globe, from the International Socialist Organization in the US to the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France and the Left Party in Germany. Some went so far as to proclaim these CIA-organized operations as "revolutions" in their attempt to secure a broader constituency among the privileged layers of the middle class. They too bear criminal responsibility for the present real humanitarian crisis.

None of these historic crimes of US imperialism are the subject of debate in the ongoing US elections, just as a veil of silence has been imposed over the preparations for far greater bloodbaths, leading inexorably toward a Third World War. Once the ballots are cast, it is certain that the global eruption of American militarism will accelerate rapidly.

Moreover, outside of Trump's fascistic and asinine calls to "build a wall," there has been no real debate about refugees, which is a vital issue in the US as in Europe. Just as Fortress Europe anti-refugee policies and the whipping up of xenophobia and anti-immigrant chauvinism have contributed to the horrific death toll in the Mediterranean, policies pursued in the US have led to similar results. While the European Union's sealing off of the so-called Balkan route for refugees has diverted them to the far more perilous Mediterranean, the crackdown on the US-Mexican border has sent those attempting to enter the US into more and more dangerous areas of the desert where many die of exposure.

Again, this is a policy embraced by both major capitalist parties, from the presumptive Republican nominee Trump to the real walls erected by Obama and the support by Hillary Clinton for the deportation of child refugees from Central America.

The defense of refugees and immigrants is inseparable from the struggle against war. No section of the ruling establishments in Europe or America has any interest in doing either. A halt to continuing and escalating bloodbaths, including the tragedy unfolding in the Mediterranean, requires the building of a new independent mass movement of the international working class based upon a socialist program and a revolutionary strategy to put an end to capitalism.