



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on February 17, 2011

Camp of the Saints Comes to Italy?

Last month, revolutionaries [brought down](#) Tunisia's President, Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. This week, Tunisians boarded boats en masse and sailed for this small outpost of European civilization. An Italian official, [reported the New York Times](#), called the flight of Tunisians an "unprecedented biblical exodus."



Such is the influx to the small island that its Mayor Bernadino Rubeis [declared a state of emergency](#). [So did](#) the Italian government. With a population of just 6,000, the arrival of the Tunisians meant the population doubled in just a few days. [The Mayor told](#) the Associated Press that Lampedusa's detention center was unguarded because the island does not have enough police to stand the post.

Italy [put Europe](#) on alert" [and asked](#) the European Union for help, and [then asked](#) the Tunisian government if it could station border police in the African nation. After [Italy pledged](#) 100 million euros to help stop the mass exodus, Tunisia flatly turned down the request.

"There is an entire nation trying to escape Tunisia to reach Italy and then to go on to other countries," Lampedusa Mayor [Bernadino Rubeis said](#).

Thus far, European officials are merely stating the obvious about the crisis.

Laura Boldrini of the [United Nations Refugee Agency](#) "told the BBC World Service that the situation on the island was 'critical'," the [British network reported](#).

Ms Boldrini said migrants were either saying they wanted to escape "insecurity" in Tunisia or had left to look for jobs in Europe.

She said some planned to travel on to France and other European countries to be reunited with family members already there.

Italian Interior Minister Roberto Maroni [told BBC](#). "It is a question that risks igniting an extremely fast process of change in North African countries, that can have devastating consequences on the institutional and social structures of European nations. ... It's not a question of traditional immigration involving Italy alone."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who, with two other European heads of state, [has declared](#) multiculturalism a failure in Europe, said the exodus cannot go on forever:

Naturally, not all people in Tunisia who do not want to stay there can come to Europe.... Our goal is to solve the problems in the home country to give the people there prospects and give them a chance to live in their own home country.



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But [financially strapped Europe](#) can barely solve its own problems without tackling Tunisia's.

Camp of the Saints

The mass exodus from Tunisia to Italy, from which the Tunisians will disperse and travel across Europe, sounds eerily similar to the fictional scenario Raspail described in his frightening novel, [Camp of the Saints](#). It describes the departure of one million Indians on the "last chance armada," a fleet of 100 ships headed for France.

Paralyzed by the fear of defending themselves, the French permit the "last chance armada" to land. And that is the end of France, and indeed, of Western civilization.

At Lampedusa, life imitates art.

Tunisian immigrants in Lampedusa: AP Images



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