

# German General: NATO “Played Decisive Role” In Libyan War

## Interview

By [General Egon Ramms](#)

Global Research, August 27, 2011

[Deutsche Welle](#) 27 August 2011

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

NATO has ‘played a decisive role’ in Libya

*NATO has played and continues to play a decisive role in the Libyan rebels’ campaign to topple Moammar Gadhafi and his regime, says retired German General Egon Ramms.*

*NATO is continuing its air campaign in Libya and turning its attention to Moammar Gadhafi’s hometown of Sirte. The alliance is also providing Libyan rebels intelligence so they can get a clearer picture about what is happening around the capital Tripoli, according to retired German General Egon Ramms.*

*Bettina Klein of Deutschlandfunk radio spoke to Ramms about NATO’s role in Libya and if it has stayed within the bounds of its UN-approved mandate.*

Bettina Klein: In your estimation, what role have NATO countries played in the recent developments in Libya?

Egon Ramms: In considering NATO’s mission that began in March, I think the alliance has played a decisive role in helping the rebels push forward. If you remember, Gadhafi almost succeeded in pushing the rebels back to Benghazi at one point. I think that without NATO support, the rebels would not have been able to make it to Tripoli. NATO is still engaged in giving the rebels intelligence and, I’d say, clarifying the situation on the ground in Tripoli. You see now in the reporting on Gadhafi, his sons and the events in Tripoli that we are still faced with a very fluid situation.

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British Defense Minister Liam Fox made statements, perhaps inadvertently, about the participation of NATO troops or troops from NATO member states in the hunt for Gadhafi. Would that be covered by NATO’s mandate?

No! That would clearly not be covered by the NATO mandate. Mandate 1973 from March talks about air support and the protection of the civil population – it does not allow for anything else. That means any additional actions or participation would have to be approved in a new mandate in the UN Security Council. I don’t see that happening right now. And the question of armed forces in Libya when Gadhafi is captured and the fighting is over is a difficult one, because you have a lot of different interest groups involved in the equation.

That means it look like troops there are acting without a mandate?

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What do you make of the German government's position? It's trying to draw attention to its own contribution by saying that its abstention on the Libya vote in the UN Security Council was right.

I don't see it that way. The abstention in the Security Council was not right because it simply sent out the wrong message to NATO's underlying principle of solidarity. The decision made at the time – where Germany sided with Russia, China, Brazil and India – sent the wrong message to the other NATO members in the Security Council as well as NATO member states in general. In retrospect, it has to be said that when you consider the critical situation in Benghazi in the latter half of March, the rebels' progress was actually made possible by the British and the French who intervened very quickly.

The NATO mission is basically meant to protect the civilian population. Earlier this year, we had a debate about what protecting the civil population actually means – possibly that it means providing the rebels with weapons and intelligence to support them in their fight against Gadhafi. So we're in a legal grey zone. Is it just a kind of interpretation that hasn't been thought through or discussed to the end?

It's certainly true that it hasn't been discussed to the end. And I'd like to point out that due to different national laws in the individual NATO member states, different interpretations of the mandate are possible. Some countries such as France and Britain interpret it more offensively and some like the United States a bit more reservedly. And then there are states, for example like Poland and Germany, who interpret the mandate from a much more defense-oriented standpoint.

*Interviewer: Bettina Klein Editor: Rob Mudge*

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