

Libya: NATO's African War

The Role of US Africa Command (AFRICOM)

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Global Research, March 20, 2011

[Stop NATO](#) 20 March 2011

Region: [Russia and FSU](#), [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Following similar developments in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt, anti-government protests began in Libya on February 15. On March 19 the U.S., France and Britain delivered air and cruise missile attacks against targets in Libya: 112 Tomahawk missile strikes from U.S. and British submarines and warships in the Mediterranean Sea and attacks by French warplanes on what were identified as government military vehicles on the ground.

Twenty French Rafale and Mirage jet fighters took to the country's skies and U.S. stealth bombers delivered 40 payloads to its main airfield.

A Russian parliamentarian pointed out that the attack on Libya represented the fourth country targeted for armed assault – the fourth war launched – by the U.S. and its allies in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 12 years: The current one, codenamed Operation Odyssey Dawn, and Operation Allied Force in Yugoslavia in 1999, Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in 2001 and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq in 2003. The beginning of the war against Libya occurred on the eighth anniversary of the attack on Iraq and five days before the twelfth anniversary of that against Yugoslavia.

However, whereas it took several months for the U.S. and its NATO allies to selectively identify developments in Yugoslavia (Kosovo) and Iraq as crises requiring international attention before proclaiming them grounds for war, with Libya the process has been reduced to a month's duration. The slaying of unarmed civilian protesters in Yemen and Bahrain has not evoked a comparable outcry and has not produced analogous military actions from Western military powers.



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This time equipped with a United Nations Resolution, 1973, passed in the Security Council with the BRIC nations – Brazil, Russia, India and China – and Germany in opposition, the U.S. and its NATO partners are prepared for an indefinite conflict more closely resembling that in

Afghanistan, which will be ten years old in less than seven months, than the wars against Yugoslavia and Iraq.

Despite opposition from the BRIC nations, since yesterday echoed by the 53-nation African Union, the 22-member Arab League and several Latin American nations like Bolivia, Cuba, Nicaragua and Venezuela, Washington and its allies are portraying their attack against Libya as an international effort – because the West has recruited the kings of Morocco and Jordan and the emirs of Qatar and Abu Dhabi as allies in what is presented as a humanitarian campaign to bring democracy to an Arab nation.

In the current reincarnation of the “humanitarian war” model of the 1990s, an estimated 65 Libyan civilians were killed and 150 wounded on the first day of the bombing onslaught. Oil depots and a medical facility were among the targets of bombing and missile attacks.

President Barack Obama was in Brazil at the start of the attacks, and by rights should have been declared persona non grata and expelled for his role in ordering U.S. Tomahawk strikes and bombing runs.

If anyone had doubted that it was possible to out-Herod Herod in surpassing his predecessor George W. Bush’s record of waging military aggression internationally, that illusion should be finally laid to rest. The Obama administration has increased American troop strength in Afghanistan (which has become the longest war in U.S. history on Obama’s watch) to 100,000, with another 50,000 foreign forces serving under NATO’s International Security Assistance Force.

It has also massively escalated unmanned aerial vehicle (drone) strikes in Pakistan, killing nearly 2,000 people in the last 26 months, including over 80 civilians slain in 12 missile strikes, the deadliest on a tribal meeting, in North Waziristan only two days before the attack on Libya was launched. The U.S. is a far better candidate for an international no-fly zone than any other nation in the world.

The Obama government has launched cruise missile strikes and run special forces operations in Yemen and conducted a deadly helicopter raid in Somalia.

It has also acquired the use of seven military bases in Colombia to assist the decades-long counterinsurgency war in the country and to threaten neighboring Venezuela and Ecuador.

The rapidity with which the U.S. and its NATO cohorts built the case for the attack on Libya should be cause for serious concern to the last two South American nations, as it should for Bolivia, Nicaragua and Syria and for former secretary of state Condoleezza Rice’s “outposts of tyranny”: Belarus, Cuba, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea and Zimbabwe.

Last year NATO airlifted thousands of Ugandan troops to and from Somalia for the war in that country (its civilian counterpart, the European Union, is training Somali government troops in Uganda) and is currently conducting a naval operation off the Horn of Africa, Ocean Shield, but the ongoing attack on Libya is the Atlantic Alliance’s first direct war in Africa.

It is also the first war for the newest Pentagon overseas military command, U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM).

AFRICOM spokesman Lieutenant Commander James Stockman boasted that American and British missiles hit at least 20 of 22 intended targets in Libya on March 19, and newly appointed AFRICOM chief General Carter Ham pledged to “degrade the Qadhafi regime’s capability” under his command’s Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn the same day.

Taking part in the attacks were the U.S. submarines USS Florida, USS Providence and USS Scranton, guided missile destroyers USS Barry and USS Stout, amphibious assault ship USS Kearsarge, amphibious transport dock USS Ponce, flagship of the Mediterranean-based Sixth Fleet USS Mount Whitney, B-2 Spirit stealth bombers, AV-8B Harrier II ground-attack aircraft and EA-18G Growler electronic warfare planes.

The USS Bataan helicopter-carrying amphibious assault ship and USS Whidbey Island dock landing ship are on their way to the coast of Libya.

The U.S. maintains 42 F-16 Fighting Falcon jet fighters at the Aviano Air Base in Italy and has the use of two air bases in Bulgaria and one in Romania.

The USS Enterprise carrier strike group, with 80 planes, is in the Arabian Sea and can cross back through the Suez Canal for action against Libya.

The above is to be recalled as the White House continues to disavow a direct, much less a leading, role in the war.

Although to date not formally a NATO operation, the air and sea campaign against Libya began with the Alliance subjecting the targeted country to around-the-clock surveillance by Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft assigned to the nearly ten-year-old Operation Active Endeavor naval surveillance and interdiction mission. NATO’s E-3A AWACS planes fly at a height of 30,000 feet and cover a range of 120,000 square miles.

The military buildup in the Mediterranean Sea by other NATO nations matches that of the U.S.

In addition to 20 warplanes flying over Libya, on March 20 France deployed the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier, the only non-American nuclear-powered carrier, from its base in Toulon for air strikes against Libya.

Britain has warships and a submarine off the coast of Libya which participated in the first round of missile strikes. The BBC reported that London has also deployed Eurofighter Typhoon and Tornado warplanes and Nimrod surveillance aircraft to the region.

Canada, whose prime minister Stephen Harper has identified the attacks on Libya as “acts of war” while acknowledging that Libyan civilians will be killed by them, has sent the HMCS Charlottetown frigate to the area and has deployed six CF-18 Hornet multirole jet fighters to Italy for air patrols over Libya. Defence Minister Peter MacKay has stated that the Charlottetown is available to assist in enforcing a naval blockade of the North African country.

Norway has committed six F-16 jet fighters and Belgium eight F-16s, a frigate and 200 military personnel in an effort to, in the words of Defense Minister Pieter De Crem, “topple the Gaddafi regime.”

The Belgian F-16s are currently in Greece and the warship in the Mediterranean, with

European Affairs Minister Olivier Chastel stating his government has decided to “tell NATO that we are available, offer what we have and wait for a common command.”

Spain has provided four F-18 jet fighters, a maritime surveillance plane, a submarine and a frigate in addition to turning over to NATO its military bases at Rota and Moron de la Frontera in the south of the country.

Italy has offered eight combat aircraft and the use of seven bases on its mainland and in Sardinia and Sicily for the war effort. It has also activated five ships, including the Andrea Doria destroyer, for action against Libya.

Denmark has six F-16s in Italy prepared for deployment to Libya.

According to the Sabah newspaper, Turkey will also supply F-16s for NATO’s Libyan campaign.

Greece has provided the U.S. and NATO the use of bases at Aktio and Souda Bay in Crete.

More military assets are being added by NATO nations almost hourly, which indicates that a no-fly zone is the least of Western plans for Libya and that the campaign is not expected to end in the foreseeable future.

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