

NATO Incorporates Libyan Experience For Global War Template

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As the West's war against Libya has entered its fourth month and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has flown more than 11,000 missions, including 4,300 strike sorties, over the small nation, the world's only military bloc is already integrating lessons learned from the conflict into its international model of military intervention based on earlier wars in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq.

What NATO refers to as Operation Unified Protector has provided the Alliance the framework in which to continue recruiting Partnership for Peace adjuncts like Sweden and Malta, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative affiliates Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates and Mediterranean Dialogue partnership members Jordan and Morocco into the bloc's worldwide warfighting network. Sweden, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates also have military personnel assigned to NATO's International Security Assistance Force in the nearly ten-year-long war in Afghanistan. In the first case, troops from the Scandinavian nation has been engaged in their first combat role, killing and being killed, in two centuries in Afghanistan and has provided eight warplanes for the attack on Libya, with marine forces to soon follow.

The military conflicts waged and other interventions conducted by the United States and its NATO allies over the past twelve years – in and against Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Macedonia, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Pakistan and Libya – have contributed to the American military budget more than doubling in the past decade and U.S. arms exports almost quintupling in the same period.

The Pentagon and NATO are currently concluding the Sea Breeze 2011 naval exercise in the Black Sea off the coast of Ukraine, near the headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet based in Sebastopol. Participants include the U.S., Britain, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Belgium, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Macedonia, Moldova, Sweden, Turkey and host nation Ukraine. All but Algeria and Moldova are Troop Contributing Nations for NATO's Afghan war. The once-annual maneuvers resumed again last year after the Ukrainian parliament banned them in 2009. This year's exercise was arranged on the initiative of chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen. Last year's Sea Breeze drills, the largest in the Black Sea, included 20 naval vessels, 13 aircraft and more than 1,600 military personnel from the U.S., Azerbaijan, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Moldova, Sweden, Turkey and Ukraine.

This year the guided missile cruiser USS Monterey joined the exercise. The warship is the first deployed to the Mediterranean, and now the Black, Sea for the Pentagon's Phased Adaptive Approach interceptor missile program, one which in upcoming years will include at least 40 Standard Missile-3 interceptors in Poland and Romania and on Aegis class

destroyers and cruisers in the Mediterranean, Black and Baltic Seas. Upgraded versions of the missile, the Block IB, Block IIA and Block IIB, are seen by Russian political analysts and military commanders as threats to Russia's long-range missiles and as such to the nation's strategic potential.

As former Indian diplomat M K Bhadrakumar wrote in a recent column:

"Without doubt, the US is stepping up pressure on Russia's Black Sea fleet. The US's provocation is taking place against the backdrop of the turmoil in Syria. Russia is stubbornly blocking US attempts to drum up a case for Libya-style intervention in Syria. Moscow understands that a major reason for the US to push for regime change in Syria is to get the Russian naval base in that country wound up.

"The Syrian base is the only toehold Russia has in the Mediterranean region. The Black Sea Fleet counts on the Syrian base for sustaining any effective Mediterranean presence by the Russian navy. With the establishment of US military bases in Romania and the appearance of the US warship in the Black Sea region, the arc of encirclement is tightening."

USS Monterey, whose presence in the Black Sea has been criticized as a violation of the 1936 Montreux Convention, will return to the Mediterranean where the U.S.'s newest nuclear supercarrier, USS George H.W. Bush, and its carrier strike group with 9,000 service members and an air wing of 70 aircraft is also present, having recently visited U.S. Naval Forces Europe/Africa and Sixth Fleet headquarters in Naples, Italy, due north of Libya.

Last week the amphibious assault ship USS Bataan engaged in a certification exercise with its French counterpart FS Tonnerre in the Mediterranean. The U.S. Navy website stated that the certification "will provide Tonnerre with additional flexibility during their support to NATO-led Operation Unified Protector," the codename for the Alliance's war against Libya. The USS Bataan Amphibious Ready Group includes an estimated 2,000 Marines from the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit and dozens of warplanes and attack and other helicopters, and is poised for action in Libya and, if the pattern holds, Syria.

The U.S. and NATO allies and partners – Albania, Algeria, Croatia, Egypt, Greece, Italy, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Spain, Tunisia and Turkey – conducted the Phoenix Express 2011 maritime exercise in the Eastern and Central Mediterranean from June 1-15, which included maneuvers in support of the U.S.'s global Proliferation Security Initiative.

Also earlier this month NATO held this year's Northern Viking air and naval exercise, the latest in a series of biennial drills under that name, in Iceland with 450 NATO military members from the U.S., Denmark, Iceland, Italy and Norway. The United States European Command website cited the Norwegian detachment commander saying, "exercises like [Northern Viking 2011] allowed the pilots to prepare for real-world scenarios, like Operation Odyssey Dawn," the name for the Western military campaign in Libya from March 19-30.

This week NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen visited Britain and Spain, meeting with Prime Minister David Cameron and Foreign Secretary William Hague in the first country and Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero, Foreign Minister Trinidad Jimenez and Defence Minister Carme Chacon in the second.

While in London Rasmussen focused on the wars in Libyan and Afghanistan, both under NATO command, and promoted the implementation of the European wing of the U.S.

international interceptor missile system.

Perhaps in part responding to the dressing down NATO member states had recently received by the person Rasmussen truly, if unofficially, has to account to – U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates – he boasted:

“NATO is more needed and wanted than ever, from Afghanistan to Kosovo, from the coast of Somalia to Libya. We are busier than ever before.”

In Spain he addressed the nation’s upper house of parliament in a speech titled “NATO and the Mediterranean: the changes ahead” and, according to the bloc’s website, emphasized “NATO’s changing role in the Mediterranean, particularly focusing on Operation Unified Protector and NATO’s future role in the region.” He also pledged that “we can help the Arab Spring well and truly blossom.” Libya and Syria, tomorrow Algeria and Lebanon, come to mind as the objects of NATO’s false solicitude, and Egypt and Tunisia too, as Rasmussen has already mentioned, in regard to NATO training their militaries and rebuilding their command structures in accordance with Alliance standards, as is being done in Iraq.

The war against Libya, NATO’s first armed conflict in the Mediterranean and on the African continent, is solidifying control of the Mediterranean already established by the ongoing Operation Active Endeavor surveillance and interdiction mission launched in 2001 under NATO’s Article 5 collective military assistance provision.

While Rasmussen was in Britain, Russian ambassador to NATO Dmitri Rogozin said that the Atlantic Alliance “is being drawn into a ground operation,” and asserted “The war in Libya means...the beginning of its expansion south.”

Two days before, the U.S. and NATO completed Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) 2011, which included 20 ships from eleven European nations and the flagship of the Mediterranean-based U.S. Sixth Fleet, USS Mount Whitney, other American warships and Commander, Carrier Strike Group 8.

Concurrently in the Baltic Sea, the 11-day Amber Hope 2011 exercise was launched in Lithuania on June 13 with the participation of 2,000 military personnel from NATO members the U.S., Canada, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Poland and Partnership for Peace members Georgia and Finland. Former Soviet republics and Partnership for Peace affiliates Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Ukraine are attending as observers.

The second phase of the exercise will begin on June 19 and, according to the Lithuanian Defense Ministry, “troops will follow an established scenario based on lessons learnt by Lithuanian and foreign states in Afghanistan, Iraq and off the Somali coast,” in the last case an allusion to NATO’s ongoing Operation Ocean Shield. The bloc has also airlifted thousands of Ugandan and Burundian troops into Somalia for fighting in the capital of Mogadishu.

Earlier this week NATO also held a conference with the defense chiefs of 60 member and partner states in Belgrade, Serbia, which was bombed repeatedly by NATO warplanes 12 years ago, also focusing on the bloc’s current three-month-long war in Libya.

The Strategic Military Partner Conference was addressed by, inter alia, French General Stephane Abrial, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander for Transformation based in Norfolk, Virginia, who said, “I’m convinced that the operation in Libya will be successful,” though conceding that the hostilities may be prolonged well into the future in his opening

statement.

The Black Sea Rotational Force, a Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force, followed military training exercises in Romania with a two-week exercise in Bulgaria on June 13 with troops from the host nation and, for the first time, Serbia on one of the four air and infantry bases in the country the Pentagon has moved into since 2006. The earlier training in Romania was at one of another four bases acquired in that nation.

The local press reported that most of the U.S. Marines involved arrived at the Novo Selo Range “straight from Afghanistan” on Hercules-C-130 transport aircraft.

Lieutenant Colonel Nelson Cardella of the U.S. Marine Corps said of the drills, “Our troops will be trained to improve the interoperability of our staffs” for the Afghan and future wars.

Bulgaria’s Standart News announced that “next year the Black Sea Rotational Force exercise will take place in Serbia.”

The mission of the Black Sea Rotational Force, formed last year, is to integrate the armed forces of twelve nations in the Balkans, Black Sea region and Caucasus – Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine – through NATO for deployment to Afghanistan and other war zones and post-conflict situations.

Each of the wars the U.S. and its NATO allies have waged since 1999 has gained the Pentagon and the Alliance new military bases and expeditionary contingents in subjugated and adjoining nations in Southeastern Europe, the Eastern Mediterranean and Persian Gulf, and South and Central Asia.

Just as the Yugoslav, Afghan and Iraqi wars contributed to developing a U.S.-led NATO international military intervention capability for use against Libya today, so the Libyan experience is being employed for future conflicts.

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