

Libya: war of all against all?

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Clashes between tribes sometimes happened under Gaddafi as well. But after he was ousted, they became much more frequent. As a rule, the conflicting sides are very well armed, because during the revolution, many foreign countries, helping Gaddafi's opponents, flooded Libya with arms.

Twelve people were killed and dozens wounded as a result of a clash between representatives of two antagonistic tribes in Libya's northeast.

The country's security services do not say why these people clashed, but say that when the security forces suppressed the conflict, they confiscated more than 100 tanks and 26 missile launchers from one of these clans, which is opposed to Libya's current authorities.

According to preliminary data, the conflict, which took place in the town of Zliten, was a clash of two family clans. A source in the Libyan police says that the conflicting sides used heavy weapons, including anti-aircraft machine-gun devices. The bloodshed stopped only after government forces entered the town.

Clashes like this take place nearly every day all over Libya.

"The reasons for these clashes can be very different," Russian expert in Middle Eastern affairs Evgeny Satanovsky says.

"It can be said without much exaggeration that a war of all against all is now taking place in Libya. The country is populated by several hundred various tribes, who are, as a rule, positioned very antagonistically towards each other. A conflict can emerge over any reason – a dispute over a pasture-land or a water pond, or, say, out of blood revenge."

"But, probably, most frequently, conflicts occur over oil," Mr. Satanovsky continues. "Before the revolution, Libya was one of the world's largest producers and exporters of oil. But when the country was, in fact, ruled by one man, Muammar Gaddafi, he decided it single-handedly (or, maybe, sometimes he consulted with the Ministry of Oil) who would have control over the country's oil. Now, in a situation of a total chaos, nearly everyone in Libya is trying to seize control of the oil."

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Terrorist acts have also become frequent in Libya. For example, on August 19, three cars exploded in Tripoli's center. Three passers-by were killed and five others wounded. On August 20, an attempt to kill an Egyptian diplomat took place in Libya's second largest city, Benghazi. Fortunately, neither the diplomat nor anyone else suffered.

Libya's authorities have two suppositions about who was behind these terror acts – either Al Qaeda or supporters of the ousted Gaddafi.

“After Gaddafi was ousted, Libya, in fact, started to fall apart – although, officially, it is still one state,” Vladimir Isaev from the Institute of Oriental Studies says.

“It is no secret that Libya's current authorities, in fact, have little control over the country. The old army exists no more, and a new one has not been formed yet. The same is true about the police. Every chief of a small tribe is now trying to arm his supporters. It is very easy now to get nearly any kind of weapon in Libya, because during the revolution, large arsenals were pillaged. Now, weapons from these arsenals may emerge in any place – for example, in Sudan or Mali, which are now also gripped with internal conflicts.”

The instability in Libya will, most likely, last for long. The new authorities are obviously not strong enough to stop the war of tribes once and forever.

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