

NATO Involvement in Libya and the African Continent

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Global Research, March 02, 2011

[Voice of Russia](#) 2 March 2011

Region: [sub-Saharan Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Radio interview with Rick Rozoff

[Rough transcript]

NATO's potential involvement in Libya has spurred more speculation on NATO's ongoing enlargement. In this program we are discussing the issue with Rick Rozoff, US journalist covering NATO enlargement and analyst with Canada's Center for Research on Globalization (CRG).

Last Friday NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen convened an emergency meeting of NATO's main decision-making body, the North Atlantic Council. The Council met in Brussels to discuss how it should react to what is going on in Libya.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who chaired the meeting, said the alliance did not intend to intervene in Libya, that it has received no requests to do that, and that such an action would require a U.N. mandate.

That's right, but however, earlier on Friday Anders Fogh Rasmussen attended a meeting of European Union defense ministers in Budapest, Hungary, and was quoted as saying: "What's happening in Libya is of great concern to us. This crisis in our immediate neighborhood affects Libyan civilians and many people from NATO allies. Clearly this is a massive challenge."

Besides, before the North Atlantic Council meeting began Friday afternoon, Spain said it will propose that NATO deploy radar-equipped surveillance aircraft off Libya's coast to monitor the situation.

The Spanish Defense Minister told reporters that Spain was going to suggest that NATO deploy its ships off the North African country's coast.

But NATO already has a naval force in the Mediterranean Sea, this force is known as Active Endeavor, it monitors shipping to protect it from terrorist activity.

Besides, Africa Review has recently run a story saying that the 53-nation African Union is preparing to sign a military partnership treaty with 28-nation strong NATO.

After the referendum in Sudan the African Union will get another member which makes it 54-nation strong.

Algeria, Egypt, Mauritania and Tunisia are already members of the NATO partnership program called the Mediterranean dialogue.

That makes one wonder if NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, really looks to become global.

This is the question we addressed to Rick Rozoff, US journalist covering NATO enlargement and analyst with the Canada's Center for Research on Globalization:

There is talk currently about military intervention in Libya which can take a number of forms. I think it is important to recall that the chief military commander of European Command is also the Supreme Allied Commander of NATO. So currently, for example, US Admiral James Stavridis occupies both posts. But until Africa Command became an independent Command, the first new overseas US military command since the end of the Cold war, I believe the launching of Africa Command is a signal. It is also worth mentioning that recently the population of Africa was estimated to exceed 1 billion people, which makes it the second most populated in the world next to Asia.

My point was that the US European command launched Africa, it was very much in conjunction with NATO, including the fact that the European command and the NATO are run by the same person, so there is an organic connection between these two organizations. NATO became involved openly in Africa, in 2006. The African stand-by force is based on NATO's response, and of course we had NATO first operation in Africa in 2005, when NATO airlifted over 30,000 African Union peacekeepers in the West of Sudan.

We know NATO actively involved in airlifting and sea lifting both troops and suppliers in Somalia.

Starting last March, NATO airlifted several thousand Ugandan troops both in and out of Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia. Until now NATO has conducted two operations, currently the name is "Ocean shield" operation, which has been extended till the end of next year. So we are seeing the extension of NATO from its Cold War traditional boundaries, between 1999 and 2009 we saw NATO's expansion to include the countries of Eastern Europe.

There is also one major European country, excluding microstates like Vatican and Monaco, there is only one nation in Europe that is not either a member of NATO or engaged in a partnership program with NATO, and that is Cyprus. Its parliament avoided to bring the country into the NATO partnership for Peace program. Every single nation is either a member of NATO or engaged in a transition program in some sort. So it seems now that NATO is moving onto the next continent.

But such extension makes them less operational?

Currently there are 152 000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, a much larger figure than during the Soviet intervention. 140 000 are under the NATO's International assistance force command, so you have a NATO army of 140 000 troops from 50 nations. When people are talking about NATO's overextending itself, you know, it's the world's only military bloc, it's one that increases its membership by 75% in 10 years, that has conducted operations on 4 continents, that has partners or members on 4 continents, five actually with Africa. And it is

talking now about the signing of a partnership program or agreement treaty with 53, soon there will be 54 members of the African Union, that is a pretty substantial development.

A large number of members still do not facilitate decision-making?

Yes, that's true. For example, Macedonia was not welcomed as a full NATO member 2 years ago because of the main dispute with Greece. However if we need to recall the invasion into Iraq in 2003, there is now more unity than there has ever been; nevertheless the NATO was unanimous, France being absent at that time, even Belgium and Luxembourg and Germany, three countries that supposedly opposed the war being present. Every single NATO member has troops in Afghanistan, every new NATO member and every NATO candidate (there is a partnership for Peace members) had troops in Iraq, it's something like 33 nations.

The NATO training mission in Iraq has graduated hundreds if not thousands of officers, soldiers. It is worth looking at the NATO websites to see what they managed to do in Afghanistan. It is the longest continuous operation in history of the United States, and this is the longest operation in history of Afghanistan. I believe a few days ago it was the anniversary of the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. Afghanistan has not had foreign troops for as long as it currently has.

All the main nations remain involved, so do the Partnership for Peace nations: Armenia, Azerbajdjan, Georgia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Kazakhstan. It's a part of global NATO expansion in the Asian-Pacific region, but they don't have military partnerships under the country category with Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan. At the end of the day, if NATO or the United States were to pick up and leave Afghanistan tomorrow - highly unlikely - I think it is worth recalling about the US and Great Britain's initial invasion in Afghanistan in October 2001. Over 50 000 US-NATO troops are transited in and out to Afghanistan through a base in Kyrgyzstan every month, which is an impressive figure. I think I have underestimated it, the figure should be larger than that. The personnel is still German.

Local reports from the Pentagon confirm that the US is going to deploy a military base in Pakistan. So you have a US-NATO military infrastructure in South-Asia that is really built for a long time. So you remember the recent comment by Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai stating that US is seeking permanent military bases in Afghanistan, and I would suspect these are going to be built into strategic airbases, near the Iranian border. They may follow the Iraqi model, at some point they may draw down the US-NATO troops in Afghanistan, but what's going to remain? The Afghan army is trained by NATO trainers in Afghanistan, the Afghan officers are trained in NATO bases in Europe, so there is some discussion about NATO's potential role in intervening in the ongoing and expanding crisis in North Africa.

Very important is Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which states that there should be unanimous response of the entire alliance. The activation of this article accounts for 52 000 troops in Afghanistan. After the September 2001 attacks in the United States NATO invoked Article 5. There are actually 8 components to this commitment, Afghanistan is one of them.

An operation called "Active Endeavour" in the Mediterranean Sea was launched by NATO which continues. It is a maritime surveillance also, and it may come into play right now with developments in Libya. The General-Secretary talked about NATO becoming an international security guarantor, there is a meeting on a new strategic concept adopted in London in

October or September 2009, which laid out 70 different distinctly non-military pretexts to which NATO would respond, everything from energy security to climate change, to demographic transformation etc.

So you have a self-appointed US dominated global military bloc now that states that it has the right to address and maybe to intervene with military forces for about 70 different reasons, none of which has anything to do with the military threat to NATO as a whole or any of its members individually. And there is no question who is the dominate partner of the alliance is - it is the United States. That's why every single supreme commander in Europe is American. The United States doesn't trust it to the Europeans. Serbia is developing an individual partnership plan with NATO.

The fact is that 20-30 years ago in Europe there were movements about nuclear disarmament, hundreds and thousands in Europe took to the streets, the US still has many tactical nuclear weapons in Europe in NATO bases, but nobody says a word! Swedish and Finnish troops are in charge of 5 provinces in Northern Afghanistan for NATO international security assistance force, and the other day another Finnish soldier was killed, so you have Finland which was not engaged in operations since World War II, its troops killing and dying in Afghanistan under NATO command; you have Sweden which has not been in war for 200 years, with troops being killed, and killing Afghans and in return. I have a feeling that 20 or 30 years ago in the Cold War period surely, there would have been much more protests and opposition in Europe and in the North America than now. There seems to be the acceptance of the fact that the United States dominating the military bloc has the right to intervene worldwide for as long as it chooses and it is not accountable to anybody, and it is very frightening.

But then let's imagine that the NATO is covering the whole of the globe - what's next?

That's a very interesting question! Condoleezza Rice in 2005 explained on what in January 2003 George W. Bush referred to be as the "axis of evil", at that time being Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Iraq was taken off the list because we invaded it, and it was no longer a threat. The countries she referred to were: Belarus, Zimbabwe, North Korea, Iran, Cuba and Burma. Iran - of course, Belarus - they needed to find some villain in Europe since they overthrew President Slobodan Milosevic in Yugoslavia in 2000, and it is one of the key points. Zimbabwe stands for Africa, Cuba for both Americas. There was also discussion about NATO desire to build partnership with India and China, and of course we know that last November the NATO-Russia Council was revived and reactivated at the Lisbon Summit. I would say that the only part of the world so far comparatively untouched is Central America.

There has been talk of the last few years that the internal security forces from Columbia have been operating in Afghanistan. But there were reports that the Columbian soldiers were going to be deployed to Afghanistan not under the US operation but under the NATO International security assistance force. There is a small contingent of military personnel from Egypt already operating in Afghanistan, which means that there are troops in Afghanistan serving under NATO from all 6 inhabited continents. I would suggest the North Atlantic Treaty Organization look at the revision of its name. The 12 new members that have joined since 1999 do not border the Atlantic Ocean. So now the majority of the members now unlike the majority of the members in 1949 when the bloc was formed with 12 members, are not at the Atlantic Ocean. What we see is the expansion. And there is interest

toward the Arctic Ocean. There was a meeting in February 2009 in Iceland, when the then Secretary-General of NATO recommended transformation, and major NATO leaders got together and talked about the strategy.

Thank you very much!

So to sum up what we've been discussing in this program, it really looks like NATO is bound to become a global security organization present in all six continents of our planet.

However, the question is who will be its potential enemy in that case? And what will a global NATO do if a war sparks off between its members?

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