

Towards a Lengthy War Scenario? NATO To Stay In Libya For A Long Time

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map; Libya's colonial boundaries

-[A] lengthy war in Libya can destabilize the situation in neighboring countries, like it was in Afghanistan and Iraq - the more so, because the whole north of Africa is now gripped with revolutions.

NATO has prolonged its mandate for staying in Libya for another 90 days.

This was done without asking any permission from the UN or any other similar organization. It looks like NATO commanders just consider it unnecessary to waste time on asking for the UN's permission. Why all this "bureaucracy", if the war, as they claim, is very close to an end? At least, NATO's official reports say that now, Gaddafi's supporters are incapable of serious resistance.

However, analysts believe that the real reason why NATO has prolonged its mandate is that, in reality, it is too early to say that the Gaddafi regime is living its last days.

It is not the first time that NATO's commanders say that the Libyan war is very close to an end - and, then, do something which shows that they have realized that they'd hurried a bit to say so. Still, they try to put a brave face on the sorry business. Recently, Lieutenant General Charles Bouchard, who commands the NATO operation in Libya, said that NATO's mission in Libya is not yet over, but it continues quite successfully. According to Mr. Bouchard, only three regions in Libya are still controlled by Gaddafi's supporters, including isolated enclaves around the towns of Bani Walid and Sirte (the latter is Muammar Gaddafi's birthplace).

NATO commanders don't know where Gaddafi himself is. However, he keeps on ordering his supporters not to surrender.

According to NATO's estimates, in total, 200,000 Libyans are living on territories which are still controlled by Gaddafi's supporters. At the same time, all Libya's major cities have already returned to normal life, and law and order have been re-established there.

NATO does not intend to supply the Libyan oppositionists (who now in fact rule Libya) with weapons - this is not envisioned by the mandate. However, Lieutenant General Bouchard says, NATO would have nothing against this if any country, on its own initiative, supplies them with weapons.

NATO also doesn't intend to persecute Gaddafi's supporters who are retreating to neighboring Niger and Sudan. This is Niger and Sudan's internal problem, Mr. Bouchard says.

However, many analysts say that NATO's official reports about the success of Gaddafi's opponents and their Western helpers are too optimistic.

"This is already the second time that NATO has prolonged its stay in Libya," Russian analyst Veniamin Popov says. "This speaks of the fact that NATO is still far from reaching its aims in Libya."

"It is too early to say that Gaddafi's regime is already done with," Mr. Popov believes. "His supporters are still resisting. At the same time, there is no unity between the members of the Transitional National Council, which also hampers their full victory."

It looks like NATO has drawn no lessons from its unsuccessful operation in Afghanistan - in the Libyan operation, they are following the same dubious scenario.

Another analyst, Stanislav Tarasov, says:

"Let us remember the beginning of the Afghan operation. At first, international forces were introduced there on a resolution from the UN Security Council. Then, the UN announced that the command over the international forces in Afghanistan belongs to NATO. Now, these forces in Afghanistan are still being commanded by NATO - and hardly anyone can say that they have achieved great success. However, in Libya, NATO is acting according to the same scenario - and the fact that it is prolonging its mandate for another three months says that it is still far from success."

Most analysts agree that, most probably, NATO will stay in Libya for a long time. Gaddafi's supporters, weak as they may seem, still may keep resisting for long. Moreover, a lengthy war in Libya can destabilize the situation in neighboring countries, like it was in Afghanistan and Iraq - the more so, because the whole north of Africa is now gripped with revolutions.

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