

# US NATO has Started the Invasion Of Libya, Ground Operations Next Step

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Western Coalition: Air Operation may turn into Ground Operation

-“We have the NATO countries staging an intervention in Libya. They are taking part in military action on the side of the opposition: rather than enforcing a no-fly zone, they are bombing the equipment and facilities of the Libyan troops. Against this background, the West’s assurances of the Libya-bound ground troops only escorting the humanitarian convoys look cynical and deceitful.”

The West has already started its invasion of Libya and a ground coalition operation would merely be the next step. Russian experts have come to this conclusion in the wake of the EU’s readiness to send ground troops to Libya to support the UN humanitarian mission in Tripoli.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton has said that the EU is ready to send up to 1000 troops into the battle zone.

There have already been media reports that NATO countries are developing a plan for a ground operation in Libya. It may begin at the end of April or in early May. At the same time, the Western coalition stresses that the operation would only start after the UN files the respective request. France, Italy and the UK are ready to take part, but Germany is not.

The head of Arab and Islamic Studies at the Oriental Studies Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Alexander Filonik, considers the EU’s intentions to guard the UN humanitarian convoy a precursor to a ground operation.

“Such a turn of events cannot be ruled out and indirect indicators support this. You could consider the disembarkation of troops from ships the start of the ground operation. They are not just doing things on the Libyan coast, they are penetrating deeper inside the country to carry out some sort of reconnaissance. Perhaps they are seeking out contacts with the local elite and with authoritative figures, who may provide support in the future.”

On Tuesday, the UK announced that it will send its military advisors to Benghazi to provide consultations to the National Transitional Council, which France, Britain, Italy and Qatar have recognized as the legitimate government. This is nothing other than a de-facto involvement in the civil war on the opposition’s side, contrary to the UN mandate, says Alexei Podtserob, an expert at the Oriental Studies Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

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Russian political analyst Alexei Malashenko supposes that while the EU is formally talking about escorting humanitarian cargoes, in practice this will become a confrontation with those who obstruct their delivery. And the death of someone from the European military or the UN will become a reason to start a ground operation.

French politicians, who are calling for a speedy resolution of the Libyan problem, are more and more often saying that it would be good to sort Gaddafi out not just in the sky, but also on land and at sea. Furthermore, the Libyan opposition says NATO isn’t doing enough. This is yet more temptation to switch into ground operation mode, given that Gaddafi’s use of women and children as shields in air raids ties the allies’ hands.

However, the UN Security Council never set the goal to change the regime in Libya, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently reminded. “Thus those who are essentially using the adopted resolution to justify this cause are violating the mandate approved by the Security Council,” - the diplomat emphasized. The problem is that seeing such a position from the West, the oppositional forces in Libya are refusing to sit down for talks, which is why Moscow urges the UN SC to encourage dialogue, not confrontation. Lavrov is sure that only Libyan political and public leaders can decide how they will live in their own country moving forward.

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