NATO OTAN

Research Report

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NATO's Role in a Post-Conflict Libya

NATO's Operation Unified Protector was a clear success. It prevented atrocities against civilians and supported the Libyan people in their struggle for freedom, democracy and good governance. Now that the National Transitional Council (NTC) is about to assume responsibility for the entire country, what is an appropriate role for NATO?

The following remarks (in bullet point style) are the result of discussions among the analysts of the NATO Defense College in Rome.[1] They do not represent a NATO view or the positions of individual member states.

1. The Situation in Libya

- Even if Muammar al Gaddafi survives with limited support in a few outlying regions, efforts for security, stability and transition have to start immediately. Given Gaddafi's failure to develop sustainable institutions, the elimination of Gaddafi's power and influence in Libya is no guarantee of stability.

- Security and stability require a longer range approach which should be operationalized in three steps: 1. Provide a security umbrella to enable the Libyan people to organize their daily lives; 2. Establish essential services (food and water supplies, electricity, medical care, etc.); 3. Support capacity building for functioning state structures. All steps need to be started immediately - step three might take the longest time.

- International efforts to support these steps might require a new UN Security Council resolution. However, should international consensus for such a resolution fail due to the opposition of some members of the UN Security Council, UNSCR 1973 could provide sufficient flexibility to serve as a legal basis for stabilization efforts in Libya.

2. NATO's Interest in the Region

- NATO has a strong interest in a secure and prosperous Libya as part of a stable and flourishing region. As a community of values, NATO regards

[1] Florence Gaub, Sandy Guptill, Richard D. Hooker, Karl-Heinz Kamp, Pierre Razoux, Heidi Reisinger, David Yost.

democracy and free market economics as essential tools to achieve these goals for the country and the region.

- NATO will not push actively for a certain model of democracy but will always respect the will of the people in the country and the region.

- With regard to strategic priorities, NATO's first concern remains the success of ISAF in Afghanistan. Any engagement in Libya should not distract the Alliance from this priority.

3. NATO's Role

- NATO should end its involvement in Operation Unified Protector as soon as the security situation in Libya permits. Ending the military operations is not necessarily dependent on the capture or death of Gaddafi.

- It is not NATO's task to pursue and prosecute the previous Libyan leadership even if individual NATO member states might support the NTC in its efforts to seize Gaddafi and certain members of his family.

- Notwithstanding the fact that individual NATO member states might send military personnel on a bilateral basis to assist the new government in providing security, in current and foreseeable circumstances NATO as an institution should not be engaged in a stabilization mission with NATO forces on the ground.

- NATO's role is not to become actively engaged in nation building. The Alliance should not become the impresario of reconstruction efforts in Libya.

- After the completion of Operation Unified Protector, NATO will stand ready to support a democratic Libya with the entire toolbox of its partnership policies - if such assistance is requested by the new Libyan national authorities and agreed by member states.

- Given NATO's expertise, the Alliance's partnership mission should focus on providing support and assistance in security sector reform. It is crucial, though, that the new government in Libya always remain in the driver's seat.

- Following the experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, NATO might - if asked - conduct a training mission in Libya to prepare Libyan security forces for their future tasks.

- To enable Libya to profit from NATO's expertise in security sector reform, the country should be invited to join NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue partnership program as swiftly as possible, initially with observer status and as a full member as soon as a functioning Libyan government is established.

- NATO could – upon request – provide its support to the Arab League in the planning of stabilization missions in the region.

4. Stabilizing Libya

- An international security force for Libya could be provided by the United Nations. However, setting up a blue helmet force might prove to be time-consuming (up to six months) and might be ill-suited for the immediate needs in Libya.

- The African Union has proven disunited on the Libya case. Even the Arab League, which had supported NATO's efforts in Libya, might not be able to agree on organizing a stabilization force, given the policies of Syria and Algeria.

- If an international stabilization force is needed, a coalition of the willing, perhaps involving both regional forces and military capable forces from outside the region, is likely the best answer. A request for assistance from the new Libyan government, and recognition by international bodies, would be needed. Given its other ongoing responsibilities, NATO is not well suited for this mission at this time.

- The NTC has already expressed its preference for a peacekeeping force and police support from Arab/Muslim countries. Jordan, Qatar, and Tunisia have already signalled their readiness for a potential engagement.