Libya two years after the NATO aggression began

The British warship HMS Kent visited the port of Tripoli for the first time in 40 years. It was carrying an exhibit featuring various types of military hardware produced by Britain’s defense industry. Members of the British military and representatives of British companies touted their wares: helicopters, boats, submarines, and sophisticated systems for border surveillance and dealing with intruders, among other items.

This visit by a British naval frigate came on the second anniversary of the date NATO’s air campaign in Libya got underway after the UN Security Council adopted Resolution No. 1973 okaying a no-fly zone in March 2011.

Then the military coalition, which included both Britain and France, perverted the resolution and became a club that rained powerful blows on military and civilian targets alike in Libya.

During the six-month military operation, a number of Arab analysts questioned the West’s widely publicized intentions to protect Libyan civilians against “victimization by a dictator.”

They suspected the perpetrators of wanting to harm the country in order to cash in on the reconstruction of oil-rich Libya after the war and squeeze competitors out of the market.

Time has proved them right. They destroyed what the Libyan people had created. Now, however, they simply hope to get extract billions from the country in contracts to rebuild its economy and military capability, sell it weapons and train its personnel.

Against this backdrop, the second anniversary of the start of NATO operations in Libya passed almost unnoticed, without fanfare either by the government or in the media.

After all, what is there to celebrate? That is not surprising according to the British newspaper The Independent: the Libyan government is in ruins and its people are at the mercy of armed groups.

Security in Libya today is fragile: Authority is shaky in various parts of the country due to the former rebels’ independence and tribal skirmishes.

The clashes during March that occurred in Mezda 170 kilometers southwest of the capital between the al-Kantrar and al-Masshia tribes are examples of that. Hundreds of houses were burned and looted, and more than 1500 families fled their homes.

Blood was shed again in the southern town of Sebha during fighting between members of the Berber Tubu tribe and Arab tribes. The region is dominated by the language of vengeance and revenge that relies on unregulated access to weapons. According to members of the National Congress, 70% of all weapons remaining after the war are still in the hands of the populace.

The trouble is that a sea of abandoned weapons left after the regime was overthrown is being dispersed to many
countries where conflicts are ripening or actively unfolding. According to a recently published UN report, Libya has become a major source of illegal weapons for neighboring countries and the entire region. The report was prepared by a panel of UN experts monitoring an arms embargo imposed on Libya in February 2011. The document says that the deadly flow from Libya includes light and heavy weapons, including various types of air defense systems, explosives and mines.

These illicit weapons flows are fueling armed conflicts in Africa and the Middle East and are enriching the arsenals of non-state actors, including terrorist groups.

It says that the largest flow of weapons originates in Misurata and Benghazi and reaches civil war-torn Syria through Turkey and Lebanon.

In 2012, weapons smuggling from Libya into neighboring Egypt also increased, and some reached the Gaza Strip through Egyptian territory.

The report says that the most dangerous thing is that 18 months after the overthrow of the regime most of the weapons remain under the control of non-state actors and former rebel brigades.

Such a large flow of weapons and goods cannot go unnoticed by the local government. The authors say that it is probably aware of what is happening even if it is not directly involved in the transactions. The authorities have been unable to seal the borders, which have a total length of 6000 kilometers.

Libya, which was drained by the war and by the loss of thousands of its sons, needs stability, security and a return to normality. Realizing its weakness, official Tripoli has said that it expects the European Union to help train security forces to protect the country’s borders.

This is the background of the visit to Tripoli by the HMS Kent and other military delegations from EU countries. According to the British newspaper The Guardian, Great Britain is competing with other European countries, particularly France and Italy, to increase military sales in Libya.

But what will become of the weapons in the current unstable environment in which the former security forces were disrupted with NATO’s help and the formation of new ones is stalled? Could they fall into the hands of people who disobey the authorities, and could they add to the arsenals of various extremist elements outside Libya?

The lesson to be learned from the turbulent events in Libya since February 2011 is that those who organized them relied heavily on foreign support and foreign forces that have their own interests. The country is in debt to its patrons, although its leaders reject rumors that they are granting NATO any bases or facilities.

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