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Congressional Testimony

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

Benghazi, Instability, and a New Government: Successes and Failures of U.S. Intervention in Libya

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It is with a sense of duty as a retired General officer that I respectfully submit these thoughts and perspectives. There are lessons learned over 33 (+) years in uniform that I hope are translated below into useful information to take into consideration on this serious subject.

U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM)

The newest of the United States' Combatant Commands (COCOM), AFRICOM was designed and implemented to be different from other COCOMs. It achieved this difference. That difference is a mixed blessing.

It can be asserted that AFRICOM was formed and operates with an organizational expectation of interagency cooperation and influence. The most influential of the interagency partners in the Command is the Department of State. This deference to the State Department was a learned and cultivated trait in AFRICOM. In addition to the uniformed military positions, the structure of the Command includes interagency senior leadership and staff positions. As an example, the Deputy Commander for Military Operations (3-Star) and Deputy for Civil-Military Activities (Senior Foreign Service) alternated in sharing the Chair at the daily AFRICOM J-staff meeting. This reinforced the command's and staff's predisposition to leadership from senior DOS level executives. It is significant to note that not until March 2011 did AFRICOM adopt traditional J-codes. The first significant Command Plans were adopted just prior to this time as well. Many of the plans were for military action short of war and could be characterized as humanitarian- or evacuation-focused.

Given the nature of U.S. policy in Africa and the relative recent activation of AFRICOM, much of the focus of the Command went into building relationships, not only on the continent, but within our own government. Especially significant were the relationships with the U.S. Ambassadors, the Department of State and with in the DOS the Pol-Mil Bureau. Given the nature of the mission of the Command, Exercises and Training stressed these relationships.

Given the dynamistic nature of policy making with regard to Africa and the need to craft strategy to support the unfolding policies, it is time to take the next step in the creation of capability and capacity within AFRICOM. It is clear the approach to the continent is an interagency one. As the former CJCS described, the U.S. policy is affected by "expeditionary government." Therefore, more is needed to support this approach in AFRICOM. Specifically,

now is the time to move toward establishing a task force type of capability stationed at perhaps 4-6 locations that would afford AFRICOM the needed dedicated assets to perform across the spectrum of military operations in support of U.S. policies.

Military Operations with regard to Libya

The Arab Spring was tumultuous. The revolution in Libya ended a 40 year reign of power by Moammar Qaddafi.

Strategy supports Policy, and when Policy is highly dynamic and limiting, Strategy is challenged to achieve “desired” results. U.S. policy to intercede militarily with Operation Odyssey Dawn and subsequently along side a number of allies in Operation Unified Protector (UN Resolution 1973) posed unique challenges for the creation of an effective Strategy. Not the least of which was a Libyan Order of Battle that was in desperate need of update. There was no ready plan on the shelf to execute a military strategy given the nature of the environment and the limitations on capabilities. In short, the Strategy to approach the military operations from a NATO (+) perspective allowed the Joint Task Force for Operation Unified Protector (OUP) to build upon an adopted and adapted framework across the J-codes for Combined operations. The ability to mobilize and employ the combat power with limited “boots on ground” and in the implied timeframe was commendable.

Post OUP, the U.S. military strategy for Libyan operations was facilitated through AFRICOM by activation of Joint Task Force Odyssey Guard headquartered in Longare, Italy. The mission of JTF-OG was essentially to assist the Department of State in reestablishment of the Embassy in Tripoli, Libya. This JTF was activated from the conclusion of UOP until JTF-OG deactivation in January 2012. At that time, January 2012, the J-Codes in AFRICOM and SOCAF assumed the full duties of the new-normal in Libya.

Simply put, perhaps overly so, the new-normal in Libya was a former intact country now fractured and divided along many lines of diplomatic, economic and military power in desperate need of organization toward self rule in the post-Qaddafi environment. This was and is a tall order. The Department of State was the U.S.-lead for this effort and the military was in the support role.

Benghazi 2012

This is the most serious of the themes.

There are many sayings in the military.

One saying that rings most true is.....You Fight the way you Train. And in Benghazi, we did.

Many with firsthand knowledge have recounted the heroism displayed by the brave Americans in Benghazi that night. They fought the way they trained. That is in the record.

Outside of Libya there were discussions that churned on about what we should do. These elements also fought the way they were trained. Specifically, the predisposition to interagency influence had the military structure—in the spirit of expeditionary government support—waiting for a request for assistance from the State Department.

There are accounts of time, space and capability discussions of the question, could we have gotten there in time to make a difference. Well, the discussion is not in the “could or could not” in relation to time, space and capability—the point is we should have tried. As another saying goes: “Always move to the sound of the guns.”

We didn’t know how long this would last when we became aware of the distress nor did we completely understand what we had in front of us, be it a kidnapping, rescue, recovery, protracted hostile engagement or any or all of the above.

But what we did know quite early on was that this was a hostile action. This was no demonstration gone terribly awry.

To the point of what happened, the facts led to the conclusion of a terrorist attack. The AFRICOM J-2 was focused on attribution. That attacks became attributable very soon after the event.



BRIGADIER GENERAL ROBERT W. LOVELL (Retired)

Brigadier General Robert W. Lovell retired (active duty retirement) in October 2013. His last assignment was as the Special Assistant to the Chief of Staff, New York Air National Guard.

General Lovell was commissioned in 1985 through the Air National Guard Academy of Military Science, Knoxville, Tennessee. His career includes various assignments at the interagency, combined, joint, combatant command, and headquarters level. General Lovell has served a number of activated tours including Department of Defense Liaison to the National Science Foundation in Washington District of Columbia; Military Assistant to the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, Intelligence, Technical Collection & Analysis, Pentagon, Washington, District of Columbia; National Reconnaissance Office Senior Representative to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization International Security Assistance Force Headquarters - Afghanistan, Kabul, Afghanistan; Operations Briefer, National Systems Operations Division J-35, Pentagon, Washington, District of Columbia and the first National Reconnaissance Office Senior Representative to United States Africa Command. Additionally, as Air National Guard Assistant to the Director, National Reconnaissance Office, he led an effort across various organizations to create the 222 Command and Control Squadron in support of the National Reconnaissance Operations Center. He also served as the Deputy Director for Intelligence and Knowledge Development Directorate J-2, United States Africa Command, Stuttgart, Germany. General Lovell also served as the Deputy Commanding General of Joint Task Force ODYSSEY GUARD with the mission to plan for any potential United States military missions in Libya following the fall of the regime of Moammar Gadhafi. Joint Task Force ODYSSEY GUARD was instrumental in providing support to the Department of State as it reopened the United States Embassy in Tripoli.