

US expert questions real intent of military actions against Libya

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WASHINGTON, (Xinhua): Despite U.S. insistence that military actions against Libya will stick to protecting civilians as mandated by the United Nations, a U.S. expert questioned the real intent behind the intense air strikes on the North African country.

"The reality is that the protection of civilians may be a secondary goal of the intervention, but the real goal is to unseat Muammar Gaddafi," Ted Carpenter, vice president for defense and foreign policy at the Washington-based Cato Institute, told Xinhua in an interview on Monday.

After the UN Security Council adopted a resolution Thursday that authorized a no-fly zone over Libya, the United States, France, Britain launched air strikes on targets in Libya starting on Saturday, firing hundreds of cruise missiles. At least 64 people have been killed so far in the air strikes, with more than 150 injured.

U.S. President Barack Obama said Monday from Chile that it is U.S. policy that Gaddafi needs to go, but he stressed that the United States would stick to the mandate of civilian protection.

Carpenter said President Obama continued to send mixed messages about the nature of the U.S. and the coalition's goals in Libya.

"For a variety of reasons," Obama felt that he cannot openly admit that toppling Gaddafi is the "primary objective," he said.

Carpenter said he believed that the current military actions by the United States and its NATO allies have already gone beyond the UN resolution and what the Arab League had approved.

"If the coalition comes out openly about overthrowing Gaddafi, then the coalition is well-beyond these mandates," he said.

As military operations continue, the NATO members are also having trouble reaching consensus on who would take a lead on the no-fly zone.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe said Tuesday that a new political body, not NATO, will take over the responsibility of enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya.

The new body, to be set up as proposed by France, will consist of foreign ministers from countries that are currently participating in the military intervention in Libya, and some Arab states, he said, adding that it could meet soon in London or Paris.

He said the military action will stop only as "the Tripoli regime acts with accurate and

complete compliance with resolutions of the UN Security Council, as it accepts an authentic cease-fire, and withdraws its troops from where they entered."

But Carpenter believed that the ultimate objective is to get rid of the Gaddafi government.

"Whether that is Washington's intent at the moment or not, the very dynamics of warfare will drive the mission in that direction," he said.

He said that the coalition is hoping Libya's rebel forces, with the assistance provided by the air strikes and missile strikes, will be able to "go back to the offensive, eventually move to Tripoli, and overthrow Gaddafi."

But he believed it is a "very optimistic" scenario, questioning the rebels' ability to defeat Gaddafi.

With scars and pains caused by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan being still fresh, Carpenter, along with many other U.S. experts and media commentators, expressed deep concerns that U.S. might get entangled in yet another mire of war.

No matter whether Gaddafi is toppled or Libya is split into two countries, there is a "real possibility" that the U.S. can get involved in a "prolonged civil war, as well as a murky national building mission," he said.

"I really believe that U.S. leaders have not thought this intervention through well at all," he added.