

This weekly paper is for Government departments and statutory organisations dealing with counter-terrorism. It is intended to inform you about CT issues that have been covered in the media and to help you to respond to any concerns generated as a result. It is not intended to provide detailed briefing about Government policies, and explaining these issues to the media is the role of relevant departmental press offices.

Criticism of NATO Intervention in Libya

NATO has agreed to take full control of the operation and on March 31st took sole command of international air operations over Libya. This week the media has reported on comments made by the head of Libya's rebel army General Abdul Fattah Younnis accusing NATO of slow decision making which is "letting the people in Misrata die every day." There has also been widespread criticism of the decision to withdraw US fighter planes from the region.

Can NATO succeed in Libya now the US has withdrawn fighter planes?

The British Government is confident that NATO has the means required to maintain the momentum of the campaign.

A NATO Spokesman said; "NATO has maintained a very high rate of operations. The ambition of our operations and the precision of our strikes have not changed. In the first six days of NATO-led operations, we flew over 850 sorties and 334 strike sorties."

Is enough being done to help the Libyan people?

NATO will continue to implement UN Resolution 1973, which allows all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian populated areas for as long as is required.

The UK Government's clear focus is the protection of the civilian population of Libya. In addition to taking part in NATO operations, the UK Government has a clear strategy to help fund the humanitarian organisations that are able to help the UN play its co-ordinating role, and to provide humanitarian assistance at Libya's borders. The UK Government was one of the first to provide vital support to those affected by the conflict in Libya. This includes funding the International Committee of the Red Cross, which is providing support for up to 100,000 people for basic necessities, and medical supplies and treatment to 3,000 people affected by the ongoing fighting.

The UK Government has taken the decision not to arm or train the opposition forces at this point, although as the Prime Minister has said assistance could be provided if circumstances change and this would help to protect civilians.

Is the UK now involved in a prolonged conflict in Libya?

There will be a continued presence in Libya while the threat to civilians remains. It is difficult to predict how long this will be but, while the NATO presence does continue, military commanders will be developing planning assumptions across a broad range of timelines, as they would in any military operation.

Libya is not Iraq, there is a clear UN mandate including support from across the Middle East. An occupying force has been explicitly ruled out; no ground forces will be supplied. NATO's political strategy is clear, to let Libya decide its own future.

NATO airstrike hits rebel fighters

On April 7th media reports emerged of an alleged strike carried out by NATO forces on a column of tanks outside of Brega which left 13 rebels dead and many more injured. According to media coverage the confusion that led to the strikes arose because UN forces were not aware that rebel forces were using tanks captured from Qadhafi's troops.

Why did NATO carry out a strike that hit rebel fighters?

NATO is looking into the specific details. The fighting between Brega and Ajdabiyah, where the strike occurred, has been fierce for several days. The situation is unclear and fluid with mechanised weapons travelling in all directions. What remains clear is that NATO will continue to do its utmost to protect the civilian population of Libya.

Should NATO apologise for what happened?

As the Foreign Secretary, William Hague said "It's deeply regrettable...I think we should apologise where there is error. If people are killed who are not attacking civilians then obviously that is a mistake and mistakes do happen and I think it's very important to point that out in such a confusing situation, but certainly we should have no problem in saying that we very much regret it."

Qur'an burning/Afghanistan protests

Several days of protests took place in Afghanistan this week in response to burning of a copy of the Qur'an by Pastor Terry Jones in the US the March 20th. On March 31st seven UN workers were murdered during a violent protest in the Afghan town of Mazar-e-Shanif.

What is the UK's stance on the Quran burning?

This act was fundamentally wrong and disrespectful to the Muslim people. The views and actions of Pastor Terry Jones do not in any way represent the views of Christians or the UK Government, any more than the words or actions of AQ represent the views of Muslims or Islam. The UK Government has excluded Pastor Terry Jones from visiting the UK.

Does the Qur'an burning legitimise the violent reaction seen in Afghanistan?

No. Speaking in Parliament this week, Foreign Secretary William Hague said "I absolutely condemn the burning of the Koran in that incident or any other incident, that is fundamentally wrong and disrespectful. Equally that does not excuse what then happened in Afghanistan we should be very clear that we condemn both."

Other News

Please also see the following interesting news items from the past week, commenting more generally on the nature of terrorism and terrorist organisations, which you may want to circulate more widely:

PM visit to Pakistan

During a visit to Pakistan on April 5th the Prime Minister, David Cameron discussed security issues and the situation in neighbouring Afghanistan with his counterpart Yousa Raza Gilani. The Prime Minister said there was "no higher shared priority" than the question of security and that the UK and Pakistan should work together to tackle extremist ideology, increase operational cooperation and support the political process in Afghanistan.