

U.S. Attacks Libya for First Time Under Trump



Washington, September 26 (RHC)-- U.S. President Donald Trump has launched his first airstrike against Libya since taking office. The series of U.S. airstrikes on an Islamic State group camp in Libya allegedly killed 17 militants and destroyed three vehicles, the U.S. military said.

U.S. Africa Command said in a statement that strikes over the weekend targeted a camp 240 kilometers southeast of Sirte, a city that was once the Islamic State group's Libyan stronghold. The camp was allegedly used to move fighters in and out of Libya, plot attacks and store weapons, the AFRICOM statement said.

Trump previously said that the United States has “no role” in Libya after the Obama administration backed the 2011 revolt that toppled the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya led by former leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The military also said the recent strike was conducted in coordination with the beleaguered United Nations-backed Government of National Accord, the GNA, in Tripoli.

The Tripoli interim government has struggled to gain legitimacy amid charges of widespread corruption and comparisons to the “puppet” governments imposed by the United States in Afghanistan and Iraq during the so-called “War on Terror.” Last week, Tripoli agreed to a new United Nations roadmap backed by the U.S. that hopes to reconcile Libya's three rival governments and stabilize the North African country after six years of crisis.

The agreement came amid an increase in attacks by the Islamic State group, which has bounced back from its December defeat at the hands of U.S. and GNA forces in the coastal city of Sirte. The Islamic State group took over Sirte in early 2015 and made it its most important base outside the Middle East. The group imposed its hardline rule on residents and won control of about 250 kilometers of Libya's Mediterranean coastline, creating a base the group claims is on par with Raqqa in Syria and Mosul in Iraq.

Last year, AFRICOM launched Operation Odyssey Lightning alongside the U.N.-backed body in an effort to push the group from Sirte with nearly 500 airstrikes in support of local bands of militia on the ground. While the Pentagon initiative was a modest short-term success, it had the effect of dispersing the group throughout the country.

By December, the governor of Islamic State group's self-declared province, Sheikh Abu Hudhayfah al-Muhajir, said that "detachments of the mujahidin" are "spread today throughout the deserts of Libya." He added that the group will make their enemies "taste severe hardship" and promised that the militants would "reclaim the cities and areas once more, by Allah's power and strength." Since then, the self-proclaimed caliphate has successfully taken advantage of Libya's power vacuum.

The last known U.S. strike in Libya was on January 19, a day before Trump's inauguration. In this strike, more than 80 Islamic State militants, some of whom were believed to be plotting attacks in Europe, died in U.S. air strikes on camps outside Sirte.

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