UN ends operations in Libya despite pleas for support

By Issac Cook
STAFF WRITER

As of midnight, Oct. 31, NATO and its partners in the U.N. Security Council have ceased operations in Libya against Gaddafi-loyal forces. With the death of Gaddafi and the liberation of Libya on Oct. 23, the Security Council has deemed operations unnecessary.

According to BBC, the halt came despite a request from Libya's National Transitional Council for NATO to continue military action and give them time to assess the security needs of the nation.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has said that he did not expect NATO to have a major role in post-war Libya.

"The job was done, there was no longer any air threat, or even serious military threat, from Gaddafi's forces," said Visiting Assistant Professor of Political Science Robert Duncan in agreement with the NATO decision.

During the seven-month campaign, NATO carried out close to 10,000 strike missions and about 26,000 sorties against Gaddafi's military, BBC reports.

With the end of military operations, the U.N. has now turned its focus towards helping the new Libyan government stabilize and stopping the proliferation of arms left over from Gaddafi's military arsenal.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice is currently urging Libya's transitional government to "make the maximum effort to swiftly form an inclusive government that incorporates all aspects of Libyan society in which the rights of all Libyan people are fully and thoroughly respected," according to Reuters.

Unfortunately, Libya faces several obstacles to forming a strong unified nation. Much like in Iraq, the majority of the Libyan populace is divided among various tribal groups.

There already have been several small scuffles between various militia groups within the rebel forces. According to Duncan, there is the potential that the nation might break out into tribal infighting that could escalate to a full civil war.

"If the leaders have the sense of responsibility to their people and to the other people in Libya, then there's hope," said Duncan, laying out his hopes for the future of Libya.

Another problem Libya faces is the spread of the weapons that were left over from Gaddafi's military arsenal. Aside from guns and other standard weapons, there are also a number of unaccounted for Man-Portable Air Defense Systems, which are a major concern for the U.N., BBC reports.

Despite the suggestions from the U.N. to regather all the weapons, so far the transitional government has only made a small number of symbolic gestures. On top of that, their attempts to incorporate the rebels into the Libyan military have not progressed well.

According to the Washington Post, with the turbulent situation following Gaddafi's death and the supply of weapons, both from the rebellion and from Gaddafi's former arsenal, there is also a worry that the weakened borders could allow for groups like al-Qaeda to get a hold of the weapons and move them out of country.

All in all, even with the trouble that may be on the horizon for Libya, the end of U.N. operations marks, as U.K. Foreign Minister William Hague put it, "a milestone towards a peaceful, democratic future for Libya."

The future of xenotransplantation

By Sarah Welch
STAFF WRITER

An animal organ living inside a human body. No, this is not some Frankenstein spin-off; this is the future of medicine — sort of.

According to BBC, it is more likely that animal tissues and cells will be used instead of entire animal organs.

The biological term for using nonhuman animal cells, tissues or organs in human bodies is xenotransplantation. This is not new research, but until recently the use of stem cells and mechanical organ replacements caused animal organs to fall out of the media's limelight.

As BBC reports, stem cells cannot currently be used to grow more complex organs, and mechanical organs are only used as a temporary replacement. So, xenotransplantation may soon be leaving the research lab and become a reality in the surgical room.

"It is fascinating that we have the ability to do this (xenotransplantation)," Vance Ricks, associate professor of philosophy said.

It may come as a surprise that the animals chosen for transplants are not primates, but pigs. Pigs come in larger numbers than primates, are cheap to raise, are not an endangered species, and the organs of pigs are a similar size to the organs of adult humans. Lastly, while there is still risk of infection with using pigs' organs, researchers believe this risk is lower than using primates' organs.

"Xenogeneic infection is a transmissible disease introduced from animals into humans through xenotransplantation," said Stanford University's website.

Because primates' DNA is close to that of humans' DNA there is a higher risk of xenogeneic infection, according to BBC. Yet, the immune system of the human body still attacks the transplanted cells, tissues, and organs that come from pigs.

To solve this problem there are genetically modified pigs called "GTKO pigs," and these pigs do not produce a specific pig protein. Researchers, however, say that this protein is not the only aspect that leads to transplant rejection, and that there are other rejection issues that need to be addressed, BBC reports.

Besides the problems of introducing new diseases to the human population and organ rejection, there are the ethical concerns of using animals solely for transplant use. And like many other areas of medical research, xenotransplantation research has used animals to test the safety and effectiveness of transplantation.

"The use of animals for xenotransplantation is unethical. It's a financial dilemma, and it is a public health catastrophe," said Alan Berger, executive director of the animal protection institute and a member of the U.S. secretary's advisory committee on xenotransplantation in an interview with Frontline. "We're going to be using animals for spare parts for humans."

Michele Malotky, assistant professor of biology, said that contrary to what many people believe, animal lives will not always be sacrificed.

"It is more likely that tissues will be removed from the animals, which will not kill them," Malotky said.

Another concern is how researchers will effectively and thoroughly test the safety of xenotransplantation, said Ricks. And how will scientists assess the risks of the transplants?

"More importantly, how are scientists going to address consequences that don't initially show up?" said Ricks.

The transplantation field is researching different avenues to solve the shortage of transplantable organs that the world faces. Xenotransplantation is one of these avenues, but it is not the only one and it is likely not to be a permanent solution.