

# Materiel and personnel in place for military intervention in Libya

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The United States, Britain and the European powers are deepening their preparations for intervention in Libya, including military action. They hope to exploit the popular revolt against the regime of Muammar Gaddafi to take control of Libya's oil fields and establish a crucial base for further operations in the region under conditions where dictatorships on which they have relied for years are under siege.

In testimony before the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives on Monday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned, "The entire region is changing and a strong and strategic American response will be essential."

Her statement came as the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise and two amphibious assault vessels complete with helicopters, the USS Kearsarge and USS Ponce, were taking up positions in the southwestern Mediterranean. A US military official said the aim was to "provide for flexibility once decisions are made" as to what action will be taken against Libya.

Britain is reported to have put in position a naval destroyer and a frigate off the coast of Libya. Echoing the statement of Susan Rice, US ambassador to the United Nations, that Gaddafi was "unfit to lead," Prime Minister David Cameron stated that Gaddafi's removal was Britain's "highest priority."

Britain's chief of defence staff, Gen. Sir David Richards, is drawing up contingency plans for military operations, which sources state will include potential ground operations. The missions undertaken by various Western powers to rescue their nationals trapped in Libya will have also been used to drop reconnaissance forces into the country in advance of such a move.

As in the interventions in Iraq and the former Yugoslavia, "humanitarian" concerns are being advanced as a disguise for colonial invasion. Tens of

thousands of immigrant workers fleeing from Libya have passed into Tunisia and thousands are currently trapped in a no-man's land on the border. Without shelter and only meagre provisions, the workers—many from Bangladesh, Ghana and Egypt—have little support or means of returning home.

According to the *Guardian*, "Officials said that the support of US and British armed forces might also be required to protect corridors to channel humanitarian relief into Libya through Tunisia and Egypt, if further conflict brought about a mass displacement of the population and a collapse in the food supply."

Such "corridors" could potentially be used to position Western troops in three of the nations currently at the centre of mass uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East.

On Tuesday, the UN General Assembly voted to suspend Libya from its Human Rights Council. It followed moves by the US, Britain, Germany and Austria to freeze the assets of Gaddafi, his family and closest associates and the imposition of sanctions by the European Union—the recipient of 85 percent of Libya's oil exports.

Addressing the Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva, Clinton said she had discussed with European foreign ministers further measures flowing from the UN Security Council resolution passed at the weekend, which imposed an arms embargo and asset freeze on the Libyan leader and those close to him.

"Nothing is off the table," Clinton said, after she met with the foreign ministers of France, Germany, the UK and Italy to discuss setting up a no-fly zone over Libyan airspace, ostensibly in order to stop Gaddafi's forces from attacking civilians.

In recent days, Gaddafi has attempted to take back areas captured by opposition forces in Ajdabiya,

Misrata and the strategic port town of Zawiyah, to the west of Tripoli. All efforts were apparently repelled. Gaddafi has lost control of much of Libya's oil and gas fields to the opposition.

There are reports that Tripoli has sent an aid convoy as an olive branch to rebel-controlled Benghazi, including food and medical supplies. Gaddafi is also said to have appointed Bouzaid Dordah, the head of Libya's foreign intelligence service, to speak to opposition leaders—an offer that has been rejected. Within Tripoli, hundreds demonstrated Monday in Tajoura, a working class suburb, following the funeral of a protester killed by the regime over the weekend.

“A no-fly zone is an option we are actively considering. I discussed it today with allies and partners,” Clinton said.

Germany and France have indicated their support for no-fly zones, while Italy—the former colonial power in Libya—is said to have agreed the use of its bases for possible action against the country.

France said the zones must be approved by the United Nations, while German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said, “The impression that this is about military intervention must not emerge under any circumstances.” In reality, the no-fly zones are conceived of as the prelude to wider military intervention.

Addressing a Senate hearing Tuesday, General James Mattis, commander of US Central Command, said, “My military opinion is that it [no-fly zones] would be challenging. You would have to remove air defence capability in order to establish a no-fly zone, so no illusions here. It would be a military operation—it wouldn't be just telling people not to fly airplanes.”

In other words, it would mean bombing Libyan airbases and planes.

The no-fly zone option has been attacked by Russia and China. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that world powers needed to “avoid the superfluous” as regards the Libyan crisis, while the country's NATO ambassador, Dmitry Rogozin, said, “If someone in Washington is seeking a blitzkrieg in Libya it is a serious mistake because any use of military force outside the NATO responsibility zone will be considered a violation of international law.

“A ban on the national air force or civil aviation to fly over their own territory is still a serious interference

into the domestic affairs of another country, and, at any rate, it requires a resolution of the UN Security Council.”

Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, also denounced US and UK calls for military intervention as an “absurdity.” “The Middle East and Africa have been viewed by the West as sources of oil and used as pawns in oil wars for decades,” Erdogan said, warning that this was behind the mass uprisings.

But *Al Jazeera* stated, “It's worth noting that UN Security Council resolution 1970, passed on Saturday, did authorise member states to ‘adopt all measures necessary’ to secure the prompt and safe delivery of humanitarian assistance to those in need” in Libya.

In a further indication that the US and Britain are once again preparing to flout international law, the *Financial Times* said, “Erdogan's comments suggest it could be difficult for a Western military operation to be conducted under NATO auspices. NATO tends to take decisions on military action by consensus. If it is unable to reach this consensus, the US and UK may be forced to mount a no-fly zone using an informal coalition of willing states.”

The terminology is an echo of the run-up to the 2003 war against Iraq, which proceeded without UN authorisation.

The BBC reported former British Prime Minister John Major stating that “ideally, a UN resolution would be put in place for a no-fly zone, but this ‘isn't absolutely necessary’ in law and order, and a collection of nations could take the decision themselves.”



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