

Washington to escalate military moves against Gaddafi

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The United States and its allies continue to prepare more expansive and direct military actions to topple the regime of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. They have seized on the popular protests against Gaddafi's dictatorship that broke out in mid-February to promote an opposition leadership subservient to imperialism and largely comprised of individuals who only weeks ago were part of Gaddafi's government.

On the pretext of addressing a humanitarian emergency and protecting civilians from Gaddafi's forces, the Obama administration is pushing for some form of large-scale, coordinated military intervention aimed at gaining control of Libya's oil fields and installing a colonial-style client regime.

A series of meetings are set to take place to provide a legal fig leaf for imperialist intervention, obtain the imprimatur and collaboration of NATO, and line up bourgeois governments in the Arab world and Africa in support of such action.

A two-day meeting of NATO defense ministers begins today in Brussels at which the US, France and Britain are expected to push for a NATO-backed no-fly zone over Libya. Even if immediate approval of a no-fly zone is blocked by opposition from some NATO members, notably Turkey and Germany, the organization is expected to approve other military options.

The *Washington Post* reported Wednesday that "US military planners and those from other NATO governments have prepared a range of alternatives, including the establishment of an air and/or naval bridge to carry humanitarian supplies or escort civilian ships into Benghazi and other rebel-held areas, as well as close-in naval patrols along the Libyan coast to monitor an existing arms embargo."

The United Nations Security Council is set to meet

Thursday to consider a new sanctions resolution, including the imposition of a no-fly zone, which is being drafted by Britain and France in consultation with Washington. That resolution may fail to pass due to opposition from Russia or China, both of which have veto power as permanent members of the Security Council.

Such an outcome would not necessarily prevent the US and its allies from going ahead with a no-fly zone—an overt act of war that entails the bombing of Libyan air defenses and other installations. An unnamed NATO official told the *Washington Post*, "If you have [support from] the Arab League, the African Union, NATO and potentially the European Union, you have every country within 5,000 miles of Libya. That gives you a certain level of legitimacy."

The European Union is holding an emergency foreign ministers' meeting at the end of the week to consider the Libyan crisis, the Arab League is holding its own meeting of foreign ministers on Saturday, and the African Union is holding a similar meeting over the weekend. The secretary-general of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, has already said that the Arab League should support a no-fly zone.

The opposition Provisional Transitional National Council, based in Benghazi and headed by Gaddafi's former justice minister, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, continues to call for stronger imperialist intervention, including the imposition of a no-fly zone. At a press conference in Benghazi Tuesday, his deputy, Abdel-Hafidh Ghoga, said, "We do expect the international community to impose a no-fly zone over Libya."

President Obama's senior advisers met Wednesday to discuss possible military moves against Gaddafi, including a no-fly zone. The *Wall Street Journal* on Wednesday quoted unnamed US officials as saying

Obama's first step would likely be to authorize US forces, in cooperation with NATO, to speed the delivery of what it described as “humanitarian” supplies to eastern Libya, the opposition base. The *Times* wrote, “Planners are assessing a range of entry points for food and medical supplies by ship, by air and by land, across the Egyptian border.”

The *Journal* suggested that such actions could become the pretext for more overt military moves, noting that Gaddafi “could provoke a military response if he tries to interfere in the distribution of aid.”

In conjunction with the military preparations, the US and Europe are carrying out further economic sanctions against the Libyan regime. Following a meeting between US Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and leaders in Germany, the European Union announced plans to freeze billions of dollars of assets of the Libyan Investment Fund held in European institutions.

The US, which has already frozen \$32 billion in Libyan assets, announced it would additionally freeze the assets of some Libyan military, intelligence and government officials.

Meanwhile, the American and European governments have stepped up their contacts with opposition leaders, indicating they may be moving toward recognizing the council based in Benghazi as the legitimate government of Libya. The EU’s foreign policy head, Catherine Ashton, met with Libyan opposition representatives in Strasbourg on Tuesday. The opposition delegates held talks with EU foreign ministers on Wednesday.

An Italian delegation met with Provisional Transitional National Council members in Benghazi on Tuesday, becoming the first official government delegation to meet with the opposition leaders in their eastern Libyan stronghold. French President Nicolas Sarkozy is to meet today in Paris with two Council members, according to BBC News.

Another Council member, Jibril al-Wafarvi, met with Swiss President Micheline Calmy-Rey in Geneva on Wednesday. The US State Department said Tuesday it had held face-to-face meetings in Rome and Cairo with members of the Council.



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