

Obama administration signals backing for “military options” in Libya

Patrick Martin
12 March 2011

At a Friday press conference, President Barack Obama confirmed that the US government was prepared to back a no-fly zone and other military options against Libya, and was seeking the support of NATO and US-backed Arab regimes like Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

NATO is to review these military options on Tuesday, Obama said, after which he repeated the threat of military action, declaring, “I have not taken any options off the table.”

The White House press corps asked a series of questions on Libya, all sharing the premise that US military intervention in the Libyan civil war is necessary and desirable and that Obama should be faulted for his seeming reluctance to take action to overthrow the regime of Muammar Gaddafi.

One reporter pointed to Obama’s calls for the removal of Gaddafi, and asked, “Are you prepared to use any means necessary in the United States government to make that happen? And if not, why not?” He concluded, “What’s the red line here?”

Another observed, “You say you’re concerned, but is Qaddafi staying—is that an acceptable option for you, ever?”

A third cited claims of mass killings by Gaddafi’s forces and asked, “Can the United States simply stand by and do nothing? And I say that in light of the fact that in the past you have said there are times when a brutal government is massacring its own citizens that the United States has a moral obligation to intervene militarily.”

Obama embraced the “humanitarian” pretext for military intervention, declaring, “I continue to believe that not only the United States but the international community has an obligation to do what it can to prevent a repeat of something like what occurred in the

Balkans in the ‘90s, what occurred in Rwanda.”

However, he went on to admit that there was no evidence of atrocities on that scale in the Libyan civil war, adding, “obviously we’re going to have to look at what develops on the ground on a case-by-case basis. I don’t want to generalize right now and say that’s what’s happening and we’re prepared to step in.”

Obama elaborated on the efforts of his administration to mobilize support for the Libyan rebel leaders, most of them former Gaddafi loyalists who changed sides after the popular revolt in Benghazi and other eastern cities. He noted that Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would be meeting with representatives of the rebel command during her visit to Egypt and Tunisia next week.

While not yet following the French example and providing full diplomatic recognition, Obama said, “We have determined that it’s appropriate for us to assign a representative whose specific job is to interact with the opposition and determine ways that we can further help them. And so we’re going to be in close consultation with them.”

In response to several of the questions suggesting that he was delaying military action unnecessarily, Obama pointed to efforts to influence elements in the Gaddafi regime, and particularly in the Libyan military. He said, “Part of what we’re going to be wanting to do is to change the balance not just militarily inside of Libya, but also to change the balance in terms of those who are around Gaddafi and are thinking about what their future prospects are if they continue down the course that they’re on.”

This suggests that the US government is combining aid to the rebels with efforts to instigate a military coup or assassination attempt against Gaddafi from within his own ruling circle.

There was also a critical question about the statement Thursday by US Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, who declared, while testifying before a Senate committee, that Gaddafi had greater military assets than the Libyan rebels and was likely to prevail in a straight-out military conflict.

This judgment was actually consonant with the events of the last several days, as forces loyal to Gaddafi drove the rebels out of the oil port of Ras Lanuf in the east and completed their conquest of Zawiyah, the only major city west of Tripoli under rebel control.

Obama described Clapper's comments as "a hardheaded assessment about military capability. And I don't think anybody disputes that Gaddafi has more firepower than the opposition. He wasn't stating policy."

Echoing George W. Bush's notorious description of himself as "the decider," Obama continued, "So let me be clear, again, about what our policy as determined by me, the president of the United States, is towards the situation there." He then said he was determined that Gaddafi be removed from power in Libya.

Obama warned about "some of the rhetoric" from Gaddafi, including a statement "that they'd be going door-to-door hunting for people who are participating in protests—that implied a sort of lack of restraint and ruthlessness that I think raises our antenna."

This comment is an instructive example of the double standard regularly employed by US imperialism. Obama condemns Gaddafi for what US military forces do every day in Afghanistan. In recent weeks, American military commanders have boasted of greatly intensifying their own "door-to-door hunting for people"—the searches through countless Afghan villages, usually in the early morning hours, to find those suspected of opposition to the stooge regime of Hamid Karzai.

Obama was silent on the mass repression of opposition demonstrators in a half dozen other countries in North Africa and the Middle East, where US-backed sheiks and kings and military dictators have ordered mass arrests, beatings and outright massacres.

This subject came up at the end of the press conference, when a reporter for a US-financed Arabic-language television network asked him about his attitude to the protest movements.

Obama replied, "I'm in constant contact with leaders

throughout the Middle East, and I've had a fairly consistent message to all of them: Number one, the United States believes in the right of peaceful protests and the ability of ordinary people to express their grievances to their government. And we oppose the use of violence in response to peaceful protestors. So that's one clear message that we've tried to send."

The declaration that he is in "constant contact" with the monarchs and military dictators who are gunning down peaceful demonstrators in Bahrain, Oman, Yemen and other countries in the Middle East and North Africa verges on an admission that he is a collaborator in their crimes. None of these regimes orders their American-trained soldiers and police thugs to pull the trigger on their American-made weapons without the green light from Washington.

A case in point is the Persian Gulf sheikdom of Bahrain, home to the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet, where mass protests have come to the brink of overthrowing King Hamad. Robert Gates, the US defense secretary, flew into Manama, capital of the island country, on Friday in a previously unannounced visit to hold talks with the king and the crown prince. Press reports cited US concern that if the monarchy fails to put an end to the protests, "Iran could take advantage."



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact