

Obama Must Act on Libya No-Fly Zone

Mar 8, 2011



Articles & Testimony

The Obama administration should move quickly to impose a no-fly zone and support Libyans seeking to drive the Qadhafi regime from power.

As government forces intensify their assault on cities across eastern and western Libya, the putative head of the Libya's caretaker opposition government in Benghazi, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, continues to plead for international assistance: "It is our desire that friendly nations and nations that have the power to decide should come forward and assist us...I also appeal to the international community to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya..." The Obama Administration should move quickly to respond to this request and support those seeking to drive Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi from power -- with or without UN Security Council authorization.

When tens of thousands of Libyans took to the streets just three weeks ago, bravely denouncing Gadhafi's 41-year rule, momentum appeared to be on their side. Their neighbors on both sides -- in Tunisia and Egypt -- had just succeeded in ousting their leaders through peaceful protests. Eastern Libya quickly fell to the opposition, and it seemed it would be just a matter of days before Gadhafi would be forced to flee. But the tide has since turned. Gadhafi's brutal and bloody crackdown has succeeded in suppressing the popular uprising in Tripoli. With government forces now bombarding cities across eastern Libya, it is becoming increasingly unlikely that the opposition will be able to force Gadhafi from power by themselves. Opposition leaders have now made clear their desire for outside military intervention.

A no-fly zone imposed by the United States and its allies would go a long way in providing this assistance. By preventing Gadhafi from dropping bombs on rebel forces and preventing reinforcements, a no-fly zone would help secure the opposition's hold over areas now under its control. It could also prove to be a pivotal turning point in the battle for Libya. An emboldened opposition, backed by Western air power, would be better positioned to challenge the government's hold on Tripoli and persuade those inside Gadhafi's ruling circle that it is no longer worth sticking by him.

Despite bipartisan support in the United States and mounting international pressure, the Obama Administration has remained non-committal on military intervention. Sens. John McCain, John Kerry and Joe Lieberman have been outspoken in support for a no-fly zone. The United Kingdom and France have announced their intent to circulate a UN Security Council authorizing military action. Even Saudi Arabia and several Gulf Arab states have now come forward in support of a no-fly zone. All eyes are now on President Obama, and it is high time that he step up and demonstrate that the United States, too, is willing to act in support of the Libyan people.

To impose a no-fly zone over Libya, it would be preferable to secure the blessing of the UN Security Council. But with Russia and China opposed, this may not be possible. The absence of UN authorization, however, should not serve as a bar to Western intervention. The United States could look instead to NATO, for example -- as President Clinton did

in 1999 to legitimate military air strikes against Serbia -- to lead a multilateral response to this crisis. Forging a willing coalition of nations -- potentially including supportive Arab states -- remains a viable alternative.

To be sure, enforcing a no-fly zone over Libya will require a significant commitment of military resources and will place American lives at risk. But the fall of Gadhafi's regime -- and a democratic government to replace it -- is in America's strategic interest. The man responsible for killing scores of innocent Americans and brutally repressing his own people over the course of four decades deserves to go.

With casualties mounting, President Obama was right to call for Gadhafi to "step down from power and leave." If the Libyan people can find a way to make this happen on their own, that would be welcome. If not, the Administration must be prepared to back up its words with concrete military actions to support the Libyan uprising and ensure Gadhafi's quick demise.

Ash Jain, a former member of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, is a visiting fellow at The Washington Institute. ❖

The Hill

RECOMMENDED



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[The UAE Formally Ceases to be a Tax-Free Haven](#)

Feb 14, 2022

◆
Sana Quadri,
Hamdullah Baycar

(/policy-analysis/uae-formally-ceases-be-tax-free-haven)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

[Iran Takes Next Steps on Rocket Technology](#)

Feb 11, 2022

◆
Farzin Nadimi

(/policy-analysis/iran-takes-next-steps-rocket-technology)



BRIEF ANALYSIS

Saudi Arabia Adjusts Its History, Diminishing the Role of Wahhabism

Feb 11, 2022



Simon Henderson

(/policy-analysis/saudi-arabia-adjusts-its-history-diminishing-role-wahhabism)

TOPICS

[Arab & Islamic Politics \(/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics\)](/policy-analysis/arab-islamic-politics)

[Democracy & Reform \(/policy-analysis/democracy-reform\)](/policy-analysis/democracy-reform)

[Military & Security \(/policy-analysis/military-security\)](/policy-analysis/military-security)

REGIONS & COUNTRIES

[North Africa \(/policy-analysis/north-africa\)](/policy-analysis/north-africa)