
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION | PART 2- ESCALATION & INTERVENTION | ANTHONY BELL & DAVID WITTER | SEPTEMBER 2011

This report is the second installment of a four-part series on the revolution in Libya. *Part Two: Escalation and Intervention* details the international reaction to the war and the process that led to the U.S. and allied military intervention in March 2011. The paper begins with the initial international reaction to the uprising in Libya in the early spring of 2011 and the international debate over a no-fly zone. This section documents efforts by the United States and its European allies to garner broader support for intervention in Libya, especially from Arab states. During this time, France, Great Britain, and the United States led international efforts to intervene in Libya. The third part of the paper explains the efforts to implement a no-fly zone under the U.S.-led Operation Odyssey Dawn in March 2011. This report concludes with a discussion of the NATO-led Operation Unified Protector and emerging tensions amongst NATO allies over the way forward in Libya.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY REACTS

- The international intervention in Libya led by the United States, Britain and France that began on March 19, 2011 dramatically altered the course of the Libyan revolution.
- Anti-regime protests surged across the Middle East and North Africa after the revolutions in Egypt and Tunisia in late January and early February. The astonishing speed at which Libya had descended into conflict was matched only by the speed the United States and its allies became involved in it.
- In a matter of four weeks, from February 17 to March 19, the United States and Europe reversed a decade of efforts aimed at normalizing political, commercial, and military ties with Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Qaddafi and launched a military campaign against him.
- The international community was quick to condemn Qaddafi's security forces' use of violence shortly after major demonstrations started on February 17. President Barack Obama condemned the violence against the protesters on February 18. British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy made similar calls for restraint and immediately suspended their countries' military exports to Libya.
- In France, Sarkozy appeared eager from the start of the rebellion to demonstrate his foreign policy leadership and he became an early champion of the rebels and of military intervention.
- As the fighting escalated, leaders in the United States, Britain, France, and elsewhere began coming under domestic political pressure to cut their ties to Qaddafi and take measures to punish his regime and support the protesters.
- Obama took his first concrete action against Qaddafi less than an hour after the last American citizens had safely departed Tripoli on February 25, signing an executive order imposing targeted financial sanctions on Qaddafi and regime figures and freezing certain Libyan funds. Obama also cancelled all military contacts with Libya and ordered U.S. intelligence agencies to shift assets towards the spiraling violence and to begin monitoring loyalist troop and armor movements.
- Frequent discussions soon began between Obama, Cameron, Sarkozy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, and Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan in an attempt to coordinate their policies towards Libya.
- With support from the United States and Germany, Britain and France introduced a resolution in the UN Security Council pushing for multilateral sanctions against Qaddafi. Russia and China signaled they were willing to back limited sanctions against Qaddafi.
- The few obstructions led to a rapid and unanimous adoption of Resolution 1970 (UNSCR 1970) on February 26.

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THE NO-FLY ZONE DEBATE

- The debate to take military action against Qaddafi intensified following the passage of UNSCR 1970. Over the next month, the rebel's position on the ground deteriorated as Qaddafi launched offensives against the rebels at Zawiyah, Misrata, and Cyrenaica (see Part I of this series).
- Britain and France led the charge for military action against Qaddafi, joined somewhat reluctantly, by the United States. Domestic politics strongly influenced leaders' willingness or lack of enthusiasm to take action, and political obstacles would later tangle the participation of the United States and several other countries.
- A heated debate was emerging within the Obama administration over whether to use military force in Libya.
 - Within the administration, the advocates for a strong U.S. response, including the possibility of military force, included Clinton, Vice President Joseph Biden, UN Ambassador Susan Rice, and Samantha Power, Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs and Human Rights on the NSC.
 - The skeptics of using military force included Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon, and Deputy National Security Advisor for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John Brennan.
 - While advocates in the Obama administration pondered taking action, skeptics, including military officers, defense and intelligence officials, lawmakers, diplomats, and others were skeptical of the effectiveness of a no-fly zone to end the violence, and they cautioned about the hard military realities and level of commitment it would entail.
- The United States and European allies had predicated any military intervention on the basis of having international and regional support. The first sign of regional support came from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional alliance made up of the six Gulf monarchies of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates.
 - After a meeting of GCC ministers in Abu Dubai on March 7, leaders of the Gulf States announced their unanimous support for UNSCR 1970 and demanded the Security Council take all necessary measures to protect Libyan civilians, including the creation of a no-fly zone over Libya.
 - The GCC pushed the Arab League to take responsibility for the Arab response to the fighting in Libya and requested an emergency meeting of the body held on March 12.
 - During the meeting, the League expressed its intent to communicate with the National Transitional Council and requested that the UN Security Council to impose a no-fly zone over Libya and establish safe havens for civilians. Support for the no-fly zone was hardly unanimous but the strongest support for the measure came from the six members of the GCC.
- By March 15, the U.S. position on military action in Libya remained unsettled, but time was running short to intervene. Loyalist forces were driving the rebels back towards Benghazi, and if Qaddafi reclaimed the city, there would hardly be an opposition for the United States and Europe to throw their support behind.
 - The GCC pushed the Arab League to take responsibility for the Arab response to the fighting in Libya and requested an emergency meeting of the body held on March 12.

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- Obama met on March 15 with his senior national security advisors, including Gates, Clinton, Rice, Donilon, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen, Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough, and NSC adviser Ben Rhodes, to decide the U.S. course of action.
 - After deliberating, a consensus emerged that a no-fly zone was insufficient to stop Qaddafi but that political and diplomatic avenues were exhausted.
 - Obama instructed Rice to pursue a more muscular UN resolution that would authorize “all necessary measures” to protect Libyan civilians at the Security Council, broad diplomatic language that permitted a bombing campaign against Qaddafi’s ground forces in addition to the no-fly zone.
- After extensive diplomatic efforts to avert a Russian veto of the resolution, Russia decided to abstain from the vote along with China.
- On March 17, the UN Security Council voted to authorize Resolution 1973 (UNSCR 1973).
 - It granted member states, acting independently or through regional organizations or arrangements, the authority to use “all necessary measures” to protect Libyan civilians under threat of attack from Libyan military forces.
 - UNSCR 1973 also allowed the imposition of a no-fly zone, a strict arms embargo, freezing of the regime’s assets, and a travel ban on Libyan officials, but it prohibited ground forces from occupying Libyan territory.
- Following the UN resolution, a Paris Summit was convened on March 19 to craft the coalition’s political and military agenda. Participants included leaders and senior diplomats from the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, Canada, Norway, Qatar, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates, along with representatives from the UN, the European Union, and the Arab League.
- At the conclusion of the summit, the participants made a joint declaration to enforce UNSCR 1973 with all necessary actions, including military force. That day, the United States and its allies launched Operation Odyssey Dawn.

OPERATION ODYSSEY DAWN (MARCH 19 TO MARCH 31, 2011)

- The United States began Operation Odyssey Dawn on March 19 several hours after France opened the campaign with airstrikes against loyalist troops outside of Benghazi.
- The opening waves of U.S. attacks were designed to cripple Qaddafi’s air defenses and air force, which would pave the way for manned-flights over Libya to enforce the no-fly zone and strike Qaddafi’s ground forces.
- The United States took the lead role in the international coalition. General Carter F. Ham, the head of U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) led the operation from AFRICOM’s headquarters in Stuttgart, Germany.
- After a no-fly zone was established over Cyrenaica and gradually expanded over the rest of the country, U.S. and coalition combat aircraft began conducting airstrikes on loyalist ground forces on the eastern front.

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NATO'S OPERATION UNIFIED PROTECTOR

- As the fight in Libya continued on the ground and in the air, the administration moved to swiftly transition command to NATO in order to minimize the U.S. role and allow Britain and France to take the lead. Shortly after the airstrikes commenced, Obama, Sarkozy, and Cameron reached a tentative agreement that NATO would take over the operation.
- Political obstacles surfaced within NATO, as many in the alliance were reluctant to shoulder the mission. While NATO members came to an agreement on March 22 that the alliance would take command of the maritime arms embargo, this did not include the no-fly zone mission. On March 23, NATO began Operation Unified Protector with a mandate limited to enforcing an arms embargo on Libya.
- The holdups in the transition from U.S. to NATO command led to a flurry of negotiations and eventually, the military campaign was placed under NATO command. A separate coordinating group was created for the coalition at large to orchestrate their policies towards supporting the rebels and dealing with Qaddafi, which was created as the Libyan Contact Group on March 29.
- Operation Unified Protector began in earnest on March 31 after NATO assumed command of all coalition military actions in Libya from the United States, with the transition fully completed by April 4.
- The United States, despite withholding its combat aircraft, continued to play a key role in Operation Unified Protector by providing approximately forty aircraft.
 - U.S. participation was largely limited to a support role, providing electronic warfare, aerial refueling, search and rescue, and other logistical capabilities. U.S. warplanes continued to conduct occasional airstrikes to suppress regime air defenses as part of the no-fly zone, conducting about sixty strikes between April and June.
- While the international intervention in Libya succeeded in preventing the rebels from falling to Qaddafi's forces in the spring of 2011, it by no means brought about a quick end to the conflict. The conflict continued for months as fighting in Cyrenaica stalemated and the rebel-held enclave of Misrata in western Libya faced a weeks-long siege by Qaddafi's forces. The alliance continued to be plagued by internal divisions that heightened as the conflict dragged on into the late summer and the outcome of the intervention remained uncertain.