

Five air forces set to attack Libya. Qaddafi threatens reprisals in Europe and ME

Contributed by Debkafile
Friday, 18 March 2011

The resolution UN Security Council passed Thursday night, March 17 approved not only a no-fly zone for Libya but also "all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas under threat of attack" — a mandate for military steps short of invasion. It was carried by 10 votes with five nations abstaining: Russia, China, Brazil, India and Germany. Qaddafi's response: "If the world has gone crazy, we'll be crazy too."

As Qaddafi's forces advanced on the rebel stronghold of Benghazi, the US, British, French, UAE and Qatar air forces were on standby. If attacked, Libya threatens retaliation against civilian and military targets in Europe and the Middle East, according to a statement from the Defense Ministry in Tripoli.

In Tunis, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explained that a UN no-fly zone over Libya "would require the bombing of targets to take out the threat posed by Muammar Qaddafi's regime."

She spoke after Cairo rejected Washington's request for the use of Egyptian air bases to enforce the no fly zone against Libya and from which to launch US air attacks on Qaddafi's army. This too is disclosed by debkafile's exclusive sources.

Earlier Thursday, March 17, debkafile reported: Shortly before she left Egypt for Tunis Wednesday, March 16, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urgently asked the head of Egypt's military junta Field Marshal Mohammed Tantawi for permission to use Egyptian air bases for American military jets to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya. This is reported exclusively by debkafile's military and Washington sources.

Clinton told Tantawi she hoped for UN Security Council approval of the no-fly zone at its special session Thursday March 17. But this might not be enough to stop Muammar Qaddafi's advance and the US might have to resort to military action against his army. She did not elaborate on this. In Tunis, she said later that a UN no-fly zone over Libya would require the bombing of targets to take out the threat posed by Muammar Qaddafi's regime.

Debkafile's sources say the White House is weighing the option of US aerial strikes for halting Qaddafi's march on Benghazi, Libya's second largest city and the primary rebel stronghold. The point of this action would be less to preserve rebel control of the city and more to keep Qaddafi from proclaiming his victory over the opposition to his rule and its foreign champions.

Another part of the plan under consideration in Washington would entail strikes against Qaddafi's government and military centers in Tripoli, the capital.

Tantawi promised Clinton to convene the Supreme Military Council Thursday before the Security Council session and inform her of its decision before she flies out of the Middle East.

According to our Washington sources, the Pentagon proposes to use the big Egyptian air base at El Mansoura in the Nile Delta for enforcing the no-fly zone and launching air attacks on Libya.

The Obama administration's U-turn on direct military intervention in Libya was discernable early Thursday morning (Wednesday night Washington time) in the remarks of America's UN Ambassador Susan Rice:

She said: "The US view is that we need to be prepared to contemplate steps that include, but perhaps go beyond, a no-fly zone, at this point, as the situation on the ground has evolved and as a no-fly zone has inherent limitations in terms of protection of civilians at immediate risk."

By "the situation on the ground," she was referring to Qaddafi's three army columns, reinforced with thousands of fighters from the Warefla tribal federation, which are rapidly advancing on Benghazi.

Debkafile's military sources report that the Saadi and Khamis brigades, the latter being the 32nd Libyan Brigade most of whose troops move in APCs, are approaching the last rebel stronghold. They are backed by an artillery brigade and a tank brigade. From the west, Libyan missile ships have blockaded Benghazi.

Our sources add that Libyan army units based in Benghazi went into action ahead of the main body's arrival. Those

troops were caught by the onset of the Libyan uprising on Feb. 15 in rebel-held territory. They stood by and waited for Qaddafi's orders to go into battle.

Another sign of President Obama's strong inclination to undertake military action beyond a no-fly zone came from the deployment Monday, March 14 of the nuclear attack submarine USS Providence off the Libyan coast.

In the past decade, this submarine has often been called in to support US missile attacks, usually with Tomahawk, whether in 2003 in Iraq or in Afghanistan.

The US fleet present off the Libyan coast includes also the marine assault ship USS Kearsarge, which is a helicopter carrier; the Marine Amphibious Transport Docks vessel and the missile destroyers USS Barry, USS Ponce and USS Mason.

The American aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, now near the Red Sea, could also be called in for an American missile attack on Libya.