

DEPUTY SECRETARY OF STATE JAMES STEINBERG
REMARKS ON LIBYA TO
SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
WASHINGTON, DC
MARCH 31, 2010

Good afternoon. I want to thank Chairman Kerry and Ranking Member Lugar for inviting me today. I am grateful for this opportunity to update you and answer your questions.

In his speech on Monday night, President Obama laid out our goals and our strategy in Libya and the wider Middle East. On Tuesday, Secretary Clinton met with our allies and partners in London, as well as with representatives of the Libyan Transitional National Council, and yesterday she and Secretary Gates briefed members of the both the House and Senate. I am pleased to be here to underline their comments and to continue the valuable and important exchange between the Administration and the Congress that has been ongoing since shortly after Colonel Qadhafi's regime began to resort to violence against its own people.

Let me begin by reviewing why we are a part of this broad international effort. As the President said, "the United States has played a unique role as an anchor of global security and advocate for human freedom. When our interests and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act."

This crisis began when the Libyan people took to the streets in peaceful protest to demand their universal human rights. Colonel Qadhafi's security forces responded with extreme violence. Military jets and helicopter gunships attacked people who had no means to defend themselves against assaults from the air. There were reports of government agents raiding homes and even hospitals to round up or kill wounded protestors, of indiscriminate killings, arbitrary arrests, and torture as Qadhafi's forces began a full-scale assault on cities that were standing up against his dictatorial rule.

The UN Security Council responded by unanimously approving Resolution 1970 on February 26, which demands an end to the violence and refers the situation to the International Criminal Court while imposing a travel ban and assets freeze on the family of Muammar Al-Qadhafi, and certain

Government officials. Rather than respond to the international community's demand for an end to the violence, Qadhafi's forces continued their brutal assault.

With this imminent threat bearing down on them, the people of Libya appealed to the world for help. The GCC and the Arab League called for the establishment of a No-Fly Zone. Acting with partners in NATO, the Arab World and the African members of the Security Council, we passed Resolution 1973 on March 17. It demanded an immediate ceasefire in Libya, including an end to the current attacks against civilians, which it said might constitute "crimes against humanity," imposed a ban on all flights in the country's airspace, authorized the use of all necessary measures to protect civilians, and tightened sanctions on the Qadhafi regime and entities it owns or controls, including the National Oil Corporation and its subsidiaries. As his troops pushed toward Benghazi, a city of nearly 700,000 people, Qadhafi again defied the international community, declaring, "We will have no mercy and no pity." Based on his decades-long history of brutality, we had little choice but to take him at his word. Stopping a potential humanitarian disaster of massive proportions became a question of hours, not days.

And so we acted decisively to prevent a potential massacre. We established a no-fly zone, stopped Qadhafi's army from their advance on Benghazi, expanded the coalition, responded to the humanitarian crisis in Libya and in its neighboring countries, and now have transferred command of the military effort to NATO.

All this has been accomplished consistent with President Obama's pledge to the American people that our military role would be limited, that we would not put ground troops into Libya, that we would focus our unique capabilities on the front end of the operation and then transfer responsibility to our allies and partners. The President defined the military mission succinctly at the outset, "The international community made clear that all attacks against civilians had to stop; Qadhafi had to stop his forces from advancing on Benghazi; pull them back from Ajdabiya, Misrata, and Zawiya; and establish water, electricity, and gas supplies to all areas. Finally, humanitarian assistance had to be allowed to reach the people of Libya."

As we meet, the North Atlantic Council with coalition partners fully at the

table, has taken on full responsibility for all United Nations-mandated action against Libya, that includes enforcing a no-fly zone, policing an arms embargo in the Mediterranean, and carrying out targeted airstrikes, as part of the UN mandate to 'take all necessary action' to protect civilians.

As NATO assumes command and control of military operations, we are confident this coalition will keep the pressure on Qadhafi's remaining forces until he fully complies with the terms of Resolution 1973. The United States will continue supporting our allies and partners in this effort.

We became involved in this effort because America has an important strategic interest in achieving this objective. A massacre could drive tens of thousands of additional refugees across Libya's borders, putting enormous strains on the peaceful -- yet fragile -- transitions in Egypt and Tunisia. It would undercut democratic aspirations across the region and embolden repressive leaders to believe that violence is the best strategy to cling to power. It would undermine the credibility of the United Nations Security Council and its ability to uphold global peace and security. That is why this administration concluded that failure to act in Libya would have carried too great a price for America and why we will remain vigilant and focused on the mission at hand.

I would like to focus on three non-military tracks that are crucial to the President's strategy: delivering desperately needed humanitarian assistance; pressuring and isolating the Qadhafi regime through robust sanctions and other measures; and supporting the Libyan people as they work to achieve their legitimate democratic aspirations.

First, on the humanitarian front, we are working with NATO, the EU, the UN, and other international organizations and regional partners -- especially Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey and the Gulf states -- to ensure aid gets to the people who need it, including victims of Qadhafi's violence and the many refugees who have fled from their homes and jobs. The U.S. Government is providing \$47 million to meet humanitarian needs and support the work of NGOs on the ground. We're supporting relief centers on the borders, repatriating third country nationals back to their homes, and providing food, non-food and medical items to those in need. The coalition military campaign is making it possible for more help to get through to people in Libya itself. For example, a convoy organized by the World Food Program was able to reach Benghazi this weekend with 18 tons of supplies, including

food and blankets.

The second track is to continue ratcheting up pressure and further isolating Colonel Qadhafi and his associates. The Contact Group sent a strong, international message that we must move forward with a representative, democratic transition and that Qadhafi has lost the legitimacy to lead, and must go.

But President Obama has been equally firm that our military operation has a narrowly-defined mission that does not include regime change. If we tried to overthrow Qadhafi by force, our coalition could splinter. It might require deploying U.S. troops on the ground and could significantly increase the chances of civilian casualties. As the President said, we have been down this road before and we know the potential for unexpected costs and unforeseen dangers.

The approach we are pursuing has succeeded before, in the Balkans. Our military intervention in Kosovo was also carefully focused on civilian protection and not regime change. The military operation ended with Milosevic withdrawing his forces from Kosovo. But an effort to support democracy and human rights in Serbia did not end there. We kept up the political and economic pressure and one year after the military operation ended, the people of Serbia ousted Milosevic and then turned him over to The Hague.

So we are moving ahead aggressively with non-military measures aimed at isolating Qadhafi and those who continue to enable him, such as escalating financial pressure through the vigorous enforcement of an international sanctions regime authorized under Security Council Resolutions 1970 and 1973. At the same time, we are continuing to implement our own domestic sanctions and are working with our international counterparts on sanctions implementation, monitoring, and enforcement. In London, we saw growing international consensus and political and diplomatic pressure toward this end.

And that brings me to the third track: supporting the legitimate aspirations of the Libyan people. As in Egypt and Tunisia, we hope to see a democratic transition in Libya through a broadly inclusive process that reflects the will and protects the rights of the Libyan people. This won't be easy. Four decades of Qadhafi's rule have left Libya fractured and without strong

institutions or civil society – crucial building blocks of successful democracy. The Qadhafi regime has exploited assets that rightfully belong the Libyan people, diminishing their opportunities for economic opportunity and growth. In London, Secretary Clinton met with a senior representative of the Transitional National Council to discuss how we can support this process. The Secretary also stressed that the United States will join the international community in our commitment to the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national unity of Libya. For its part, the Council has publicly stated its commitment to democratic ideals and its rejection of terrorism and extremist organizations, including Al-Qaeda.

Now we are moving forward on all three of these tracks with a growing coalition of allies and partners. In London, the international community agreed to establish a Contact Group that will coordinate activity and provide broad political guidance on the full range of efforts under Resolutions 1970 and 1973. We are pleased that Qatar will host the first meeting.

So there is considerable progress to report. But we are under no illusions about the dangers and challenges that remain. Qadhafi is unlikely to give up power quickly or easily. The regime still has substantial military capacity and continues offensive operations in Misrata and elsewhere.

This is a critical moment – for Libya, the international community and the United States. We are eager to continue our close consultations with you about the way forward and hope to have your support. I look forward to your questions.