

Open Letter to the UN Security Council on the Situation in Libya
Group
2011

International Crisis
16 March
(...) In

In light of the grave situation in Libya, we urge Security Council Members to take immediate effective action aimed at achieving a ceasefire in place and initiating negotiations to secure a transition to a legitimate and representative government. This action should be backed by the credible threat of appropriate military intervention, as a last resort, to prevent mass atrocities.

(...) The most urgent goal now must be to end the violence and halt further loss of life, while paving the way toward a political transition, objectives that require a different response.

Imposing a no-flight zone, which many have been advocating, would, in and of itself, achieve neither of these. It would not stop the violence or accelerate a peaceful resolution. Nor would it materially impede the regime from crushing resistance. Government forces appear to be gaining the advantage mainly on account of their superiority on the ground, not air power. In short, a no-flight zone under existing circumstances would not address the threat of mass atrocities it purports to tackle. The debate over this issue is inhibiting the necessary reflection on the best course of action.

If the objective is, as it should be, first and foremost to end the killing, there are only two genuine options. One is an international military intervention explicitly on the side of the revolt with the avowed goal of ensuring its victory or, at a minimum, preventing its defeat. (...)

(...) Although there are legitimate arguments for a swift and massive military intervention on the opposition's behalf, it presents considerable risks. Besides the obvious downsides entailed in what could well come to be viewed as another Western military engagement in a Muslim country and the Middle East and North Africa region, it could also lead to large-scale loss of life as well as precipitate a political vacuum in Libya in which various forces engage in a potentially prolonged and violent struggle for supremacy before anything resembling a state and stable government are reestablished. (...)

(...) The alternative option, which Crisis Group has advocated, is to engage in a vigorous political effort to achieve an immediate ceasefire in place to be followed by the prompt opening of a dialogue on the modalities of a transition to a new government that the Libyan people will accept as legitimate. To that end, we urge the Council to delegate a regional contact group composed of officials or respected personalities drawn from Arab and African countries, including Libya's neighbours, to initiate discussions with the regime and the opposition without delay. Their mandate would be to secure agreement on:

An immediate ceasefire in place, which respects international humanitarian law;

Dispatch of a peacekeeping force drawn primarily from the armed forces of regional states to act as a buffer, operating under a Security Council mandate and with the support of the Arab League and African Union;

Initiation of a dialogue between the regime and opposition aimed at definitively ending the bloodshed and beginning the necessary transition to representative, accountable and legitimate government; (...)

(...) The Security Council has a responsibility to live up to its commitments, even and especially if a member state does not. (...)

See
[full letter](#)