

# Libya: NATO takes to the air, CIA takes to the ground

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This handout picture taken on March 29, 2011 and released by ECPAD (The French Defence Communication and Audiovisual Production Agency) shows Rafale jets of the French army during the military operations in Libya (AFP Photo / ECPAD / Cyril Amboise)

NATO has taken command of the war in Libya as the US deploys covert CIA operatives to the field to work the ground and coordinate with the rebels.

US intelligence sources confirmed to CNN that the CIA is working to foster “*military and political understanding*” with rebel fighter and Libyan civilians in an effort to fight and counter Muammar Gaddafi

*“We are gathering intel firsthand and we are in contact with some opposition entities,”* an unnamed source told CNN.

However, this seems contrary to past statements by US President Barack Obama who insisted Americans would not be operating on the ground in Libya. The CIA has allegedly been on the ground for week in an effort to infiltrate the Libyan military and court rebel fighters.

In addition to the CIA, British officials confirmed to the New York Times that members of the British Special Forces and MI6 intelligence officers are actively working within Libya to direct airstrikes, collect intelligence about the whereabouts of the Libyan army, their supplies and Libyan officials.

The goal of collecting such data is to be able to strike at the heart of Libyan military supply lines, hindering government forces and encouraging some Libyan military members to defect and eventually unseat the Libyan government – namely Gaddafi.

Reports indicated elite British Special Air Service and Special Boat Service groups are on the ground and are focused on finding the specific locations of Gaddafi Russian-made surface-to-air missiles.

Chairman of the NATO Military Committee Adm. Giampaolo Di Paola argued in a public statement that the presence of foreign intelligence personnel like the CIA did not violate the

UN resolution which called for the protection of civilians.

Di Paola noted that the resolution only explicitly forbid occupying forces and said nothing of intelligence operations. The resolution did not call for aid to rebel fighters or intervening in an ongoing civil war, however. In his view, the situation is quite clear.

*"The intelligence community is aggressively pursuing information on the ground,"* according to US intelligence officials, who said they had been operating in Libya for some time.

It has now become public that the CIA assisted in the rescue of one of the two American airmen whose fighter jet crashed in Libya on March 21. In addition to courting the opposition, intelligence officials are working to learn just who the rebels are. Little is known about them, what they think and what they want.

*"We didn't have great data,"* indicated US Gen. Carter F. Ham. *"Libya hasn't been a country we focused on a lot over past few years."*

The increased in CIA presence follows a report by Reuters that Obama signed a secret order authorizing the CIA to provide arms and additional support to Libyan rebel groups. The administration claims no weapons have yet to be transferred. The White House has yet to comment on whether shipments will be made in the future.

Republican leaders on the House Intelligence Committee have however expressed opposition to providing arms to rebel fighters.

*"We need to understand more about the opposition before I would support passing out guns and advanced weapons to them,"* said Republican Congressman Mike Rogers.

Initially all public statements called the war an act of humanitarian support, not one of regime change. In fact, western coalition forces actively promised the goals at hand were to aid civilians and protect them from Libyan forces, as the UN agreement on the matter indicated.

According to NATO, Operation Unified Protector, consists of a no-fly zone, an arms embargo and vaguely, all *"actions to protect civilians and civilian centers"* citing the authorizing UN's resolution allowing all means necessary to secure civilians in Libya.

However, arming rebels would clearly violate the resolution, as it requires coalition forces to become actively involved in the ongoing civil war above and beyond protecting civilians by preventing Libyan forces from killing the people. Especially since it appears possible covert operations and options to arm rebel groups may have begun before the UN resolution even passed.

Musician and activist LowKey said the interests of America and its European allies rely on sustaining a civil war in Libya in order to secure access to oil and ongoing military contracts.

*"It's about sustaining the period of civil war and thus destabilizing the revolutions which took place in Tunisia and Egypt,"* he said.

It's about imperialism and building up the military industrial complex. The history of imperialism in Africa is visible in the Libyan war, where European powers want to maintain strife in order to prevent a strong independent Libya, he argued.

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