

U.S. general warns no-fly zone could lead to all-out war in Libya

British PM sounds retreat on military action

By [Global Research](#)

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Imposing a no-fly zone on Libya could lead to an all-out war, a senior U.S. military figure warned today.

America and Britain have been discussing closing the skies above the crisis-torn country to prevent Moammar Gaddafi carrying out air strikes on opposition forces.

But General James Mattis, commander of U.S. Central Command, said today: 'It would be a military operation – it wouldn't be just telling people not to fly airplanes.

'You would have to remove air defence capability in order to establish a no-fly zone, so no illusions here.'



Opposition forces receive training today in the fight against Colonel Gaddafi. It comes as the British government was forced into an embarrassing retreat over its military plans for Libya

It comes as the international plan to deal with the crisis in Libya was tonight mired in

confusion.

British Prime Minister David Cameron has been forced into an embarrassing retreat over military action against Libya after his government announced the biggest cull of the country's armed forces in a generation.

Within 24 hours of announcing that British warplanes might enforce a no-fly zone above the North African state, the UK Ministry of Defence revealed plans to axe two RAF Tornado squadrons and fire 170 trainee fighter pilots.

Britain's Defence Secretary Liam Fox's decision to axe 11,000 military personnel in four years cast doubt on Britain's ability to carry out such ambitious missions with the U.S.





Warning: General James Mattis, left, said a no-fly zone over Libya would first require a military operation to destroy the north African nation's air defence systems, while British Prime Minister David Cameron has been forced into an embarrassing retreat over plans for military action in the crisis-torn country



Desperate: Refugees fleeing the unrest queue up at the Libya-Tunisia border. The UN has warned that the situation 'is reaching crisis point'. Some 15,000 people are expected to cross the border today alone

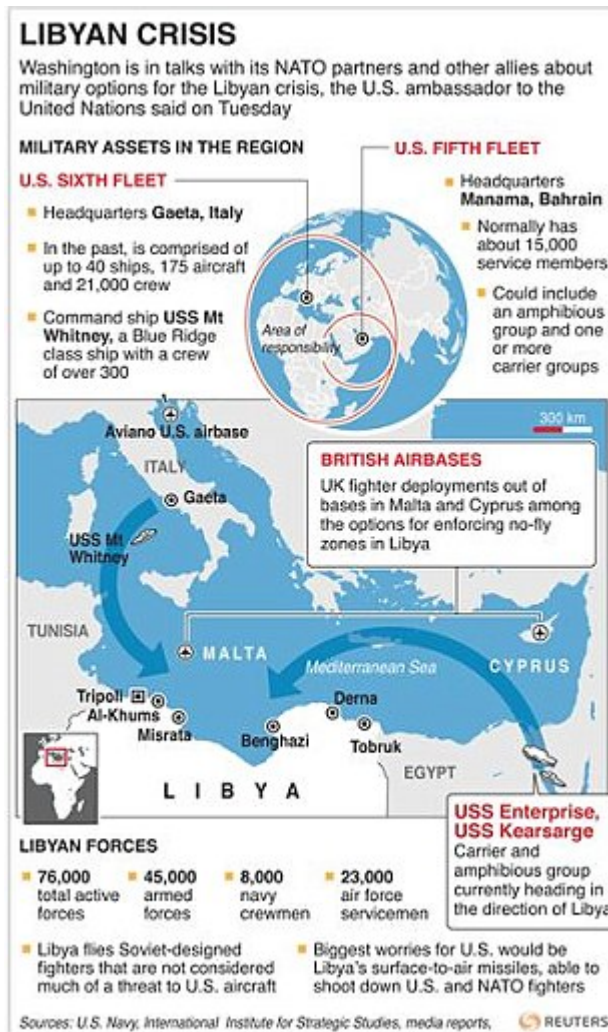
Earlier Hillary Clinton warned that Libya faces a drawn-out civil war.

The Secretary of State also revealed that the U.S. may seek the prosecution of the rogue dictator for the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, after defecting Libyan officials said he had personally ordered the airline attack that killed 270 people.

Back in Britain, Mr Cameron insisted he would not stand idly by and watch Gaddafi slaughter his own people as Saddam Hussein did after the first Gulf War.

'We mustn't let that happen in Libya,' he said.

But he also distanced himself from his own suggestions that the UK could arm anti-Gaddafi opposition groups.



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He said: 'We are trying to step up our contact with them so we can get to know them better and know what their intentions are.' But he added: 'I don't think we should go beyond that for now.'

There was widespread incredulity from other countries at Mr Cameron's gung-ho approach of Monday.

Russia and China, which could veto a resolution, dismissed his calls for a no-fly zone, with Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov calling the idea 'superfluous'.

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesman said: 'We hope Libya can return to stability as soon as possible and its problems can be resolved peacefully through dialogue.'

French foreign minister Alain Juppe said: 'Let me put it clearly here: No intervention will happen without a clear UN Security Council mandate.'

But last night Britain's Foreign Secretary William Hague said that while 'ideally' such action would be sanctioned by a resolution of the UN Security Council, it was not necessarily essential.

'There have been occasions in the past when such a no-fly zone has had clear, legal, international justification even without a Security Council resolution,' he said.

America earlier deployed hard-hitting naval and air force units around Libya in an effort to

hasten Gaddafi's downfall.

The aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, which had been on pirate-hunting duty off the coast of Somalia, was seen steaming to the mouth of the Suez Canal in the Red Sea.

The deadly strike force aboard the nuclear-powered carrier is already within flying distance of Libya but the Enterprise is said to be heading closer to the country and Gaddafi.

Mrs Clinton today urged U.S. lawmakers not to cut spending on diplomacy and foreign aid too deeply despite concern about the national debt, saying Libya was an example of how America needed funds to deal with crises abroad.

'In the years ahead, Libya could become a peaceful democracy or it could face protracted civil war,' she said.

Just hours before, U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice had warned of a 'humanitarian crisis' in the country.

More than 140,000 people have now fled Libya - half crossing over into Egypt and half into Tunisia, the UN high commission for refugees said.



Supplies: A convoy of 18 trucks loaded with humanitarian aid bound for Benghazi travels past a Libyan army tank and a mural adulating Gaddafi in the Tripoli suburb of Gaser Ben Ghisher today



Closing in: The nuclear-powered USS Enterprise, bristling with warplanes, has left pirate-hunting duty off Somalia and is now heading towards Libya

A UN refugee agency spokesman said today that the situation at the Libya-Tunisia border, where more than 75,000 have fled since February 20, is 'reaching crisis point'.

A further 15,000 were expected to cross the border today alone.

Many of the refugees have little or no money and have been camping out in freezing temperatures in makeshift camps on both sides of the border.

At least one young Egyptian boy was reported to have died from the cold overnight.

Other aid officials say humanitarian aid workers are being blocked from reaching western Libya and patients reportedly are being executed in hospitals and struck by hidden gunmen in ambulances.

Earlier the U.S. ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, told CBS: 'The preparations that are under way are for the possibility, we hope not the likelihood, that there could be a real humanitarian disaster in Libya as the situation unfolds.'

She called exile 'an option' for Gaddafi but said he'll also have to answer to the International Criminal Court. She also said it was time for Gaddafi to 'get off that stage', calling him an obstacle to the achievement of peace and stability in Libya.

'One has to question his grip on reality,' she said, echoing her earlier statement that he was 'delusional'.

Today it emerged that Gaddafi's forces had failed in a bid to retake the rebel-held city closest to the capital, Tripoli.

Witnesses said pro-Gaddafi troops, supported by tanks and anti-aircraft guns, tried to retake

Zawiya in six hours of fighting last night, attacking rebel positions from six directions.

They said the rebels managed to push back the attackers in Zawiya which is 30 miles west of Tripoli.

‘We will not give up Zawiya at any price,’ said one witness.

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