

Stop the UN intervention in Libya

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The UN decision to intervene in Libya was not a humanitarian measure to "protect civilians". It was, first of all, a carefully calculated policy to protect Western interests in the country. Secondly, however, it was a major step towards stabilising the entire region, stemming the tide of rebellion while ensuring the continued rule of Western allies such as the Kings of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Resolution 1970 has been presented as the minimum necessary to protect civilians from Gaddafi's counter-revolutionary advance. In reality, it gives the main imperialist powers a virtually free hand to act as they please. The resolution does not ban the use of ground troops, as widely reported. It does ban any foreign occupation force - but none of the powers involved have either the means or the need to mount an occupation. It does not ban the use of "special forces", like those Britain tried to infiltrate two weeks earlier, or the sending of any number of "military advisers" to assist any potential new allies in overthrowing Gaddafi.

War aims

Britain and France took the lead in organising the "no-fly zone" because they had the most to lose, and the most to gain, from stabilising Libya. Access to the oilfields was certainly a factor but so also was regaining greater European control over North Africa, now often referred to as "the EU's southern border".

The USA, the third Security Council member to support the resolution, has played a different role, because Washington has different priorities. Above all, they had to find a way to strengthen their overall position in the Arab world. The combination of the Iraq and Afghan wars, Obama's call for democracy in his Cairo speech, the ditching of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt and the obvious decline in US economic prowess, put in question US ability, even willingness, to protect the remaining Arab rulers, also threatened by democratic revolutions.

Obama's delay in "making up his mind" was a result of the time needed to agree the eventual deal with a whole range of other states. It appears that Saudi support and, reportedly, arms supplies for Benghazi, could only be bought at the cost of US acceptance of the invasion of Bahrain. So much for democracy and "humanitarian concerns". Closer to Libya, the "new" military rulers in Egypt had to be reassured while, at the same time, Israel's security was guaranteed.

Having secured all these preconditions, Obama was then able to step in and, apparently, strengthen the text of the resolution as originally tabled by Britain and France. Now, as well as "no-fly" provisions, the UN was to sanction "all necessary measures" to allow protection of the civilian population - and what was "necessary" was to be decided by the interventionist forces themselves! The idea that this was not all agreed in advance is simply incredible.

An important part of the deal, indeed a crucial part, was the role of Russia and China. As permanent members of the Security Council they have a veto over all decisions. They could have stopped all

intervention simply by raising a hand. They did not. And, of course, they did not decide on this in the course of the discussion. It was negotiated and agreed, in advance, with the US, France and Britain - all of whom well understood that the butchers of Chechnya and Tibet could not be expected to support intervention, at least not in public.

Germany, on the other hand, has no right of veto. Why did it abstain? Here, we have to take into account both domestic political pressure, already incensed by involvement in Afghanistan, and longer term policy considerations. By not taking responsibility for the military intervention, Berlin may hope to be able to play a key role in future when it comes to "negotiating a settlement". That would make sure that Europe continues to assert its influence in the region, even if Britain and France have to stand aside.

The whole procedure makes clear the real character and purpose of the United Nations. It is not a "world parliament" or a representative of the "community of nations" it is a framework within which the Great Powers and their various subordinate allies can try to resolve the inevitable frictions between them. UN support for the military intervention in Libya does not make it "legitimate", it remains an imperialist intervention to secure the imperialists' interests. That is why the workers and the oppressed of the world, but especially those in the leading powers, Britain, France and the US, should oppose the intervention "by all means necessary".

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