

By Nehad Ismail

The aim of the UN Security Council Resolution 1973 is to protect civilians in Libya by all necessary means. All necessary means can be interpreted broadly to mean a very wide range of options including boots on the ground.

Let's start by asking some questions:

Who is harming the civilians? If the answer is Muammar el-Gaddafi's forces, then this implies defeating and destroying the forces that are harming civilians. Who gives orders to these forces that are harming civilians? And who controls and directs these forces that are harming civilians?

If these forces act on the order of Gaddafi and sons, then they have to be dealt with in such a way as to incapacitate them, rendering them incapable of giving orders to harm civilians. Bluntly this means that they must be taken out of the equation.

NATO's weak performance:

NATO's intervention from the air has been woefully inadequate. Two months down the line NATO has been unable to make a dent in the forces available at Gaddafi's disposal. This organization is supposed to withstand, deter and defeat an onslaught by Russia and its allies. If the shambolic performance in Libya is any guide, then NATO has no chance in hell stopping a determined Russian assault against Western Europe.

The Obama administration recently announced deployment of Predator drones might help but will not protect civilians in the urban areas of Misrata and Tripoli. I am not a military expert, but this is my gut feeling based on armchair observations.

What are the scenarios?

Given NATO's impotence and the rebels' disarray, what options are available now?

1-The UN and the Arab States agree to divide Libya into two small states, an Eastern State (Cyrenaica) and a Western State (Tripolitania). This option allows Gaddafi and his sons to rule Western Libya for ever or until the Eastern State is able to overrun the Western State at some point in the distant future. Most observers agree this is not a satisfactory option.

2- Whilst the skirmishes continue and the stalemate prevails, strong sanctions must be used against Tripoli and areas under government control to allow for gradual strangulation of the regime and weakening the grip of Gaddafi. People will eventually turn against the regime and join the rebels.

3- Beefing up support for the rebels in terms of logistic, training and weapons to make them more effective. The arrival of British military advisers in Benghazi is a good sign. The ultimate aim is to defeat Gaddafi's forces and topple the regime.

4- The Arab League must be pressed by the UN and the superpowers to take more responsibility in providing protection for the civilians. Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States can make a tangible contribution. They have the resources and they are not friends of Gaddafi.

5- A diplomatic solution which enables Gaddafi and his entourage to leave Libya and seek refuge elsewhere. They can stay temporarily in a ship in international waters until a country agrees to have them as refugees or political asylum seekers. This option is not acceptable to many Libyans who would like to see Qaddafi and his corrupt sons brought before a Libyan court and the ICC (International Criminal Court).

My hope is that NATO agrees to undertake a swift military solution, disregarding the objections of Russia and China, both of whom are not champions of democracy or freedom, both of whom don't give a toss if Gaddafi kills hundreds of thousands of Libyans. This will require the deployment of an effective force of ground troops to help the rebels topple the regime. I don't buy the Vietnam or Iraq scenarios, nor do I buy the scare-mongering rumours that Al-Qaeda is in Libya. Al-Qaeda is everywhere. Sleeping cells and sympathisers are in universities in the UK and in other countries.

The Libyan Army which consists mainly of reluctant conscripts will disintegrate quickly if faced with a professional and heavily equipped force. The Libyan people are fed up to the teeth with the Gaddafi's odious regime and they will not die defending him or his sons. Once he is close to collapse they will abandon him. The higher ranking people will do a Musa Kusa and escape.

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