

# Analysis: Don't expect a quick ending for Gadhafi

 AP Associated Press

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WASHINGTON – Don't expect a quick ending in Libya.

There's a real possibility that Moammar Gadhafi could stave off the U.S. and its international partners, clinging to power in a drawn-out and increasingly dangerous standoff.

Confusion among allies over their goals and who's leading the mission is complicating the matter.

Gadhafi has a long history of digging in and enduring, after all. He's held power in the north African country for 42 years and survived U.S. air strikes in 1986 against his compound in Tripoli.

This time, narrowly limited objectives for the allied mission, including assertions by President Barack Obama that Gadhafi himself isn't being targeted militarily, may encourage him to hunker down in the capital city, surrounded by his followers and militiamen, and try to outwait and outmaneuver the West.

"We are preparing for a long and glorious war," Gadhafi declared in a radio address on Sunday.

In the first war that he didn't inherit from predecessor George W. Bush, Obama has made a strong point of insisting that regime change is not his military goal — and that the U.S. is just one of many international partners.

Obama still reiterates that Gadhafi must go, but he stops short of saying just how that might happen, talking in broad terms of tools besides military action that the international community has to achieve the goal, including sanctions and the freezing of overseas assets.

The dangers of the military effort were driven home on Tuesday with the crash of an American fighter jet, although it was due to mechanical failure and was in territory held by friendly rebels. Both crew members were rescued.

Also on Tuesday, the on-scene commander of the international coalition said civilians were under attack by Gadhafi's forces in Misrata, Libya's third-largest city and one Obama has insisted Gadhafi must vacate. U.S. Navy Adm. Samuel J. Locklear told Pentagon reporters the coalition was "considering all options" in light of the attacks, but he didn't elaborate. The air strikes and other military actions have cut off Gadhafi from the oil-rich eastern parts of his country that have been under rebel control. But Gadhafi, controlling much of the western part of the country including its capital of

Tripoli, clearly isn't about to throw in the towel.

Obama's policy — put into effect after Defense Secretary Robert Gates publicly cautioned that bombing to establish a no-fly zone was basically an act of war — is generating growing worries and criticism on Capitol Hill from members of both parties.

Even some Democrats and GOP moderates who generally support Obama on military issues are raising concerns that Libya — whose terrain resembles that of Iraq but which is four times as large — could become a military quagmire.

Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind., senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, warned of becoming ensnared "in a situation in which war lingers on, in country after country" across the region.

Sen. James Webb, D-Va., a former Navy secretary, said Obama and his administration have "a very clear obligation now to come forward to the American people and to the Congress and state clearly what they believe the end point of this should be."

The beginning phase is murky enough, as allies argue among themselves over who should lead the mission and what the ultimate goals are.

The Arab League, whose support was pivotal in winning U.N. Security Council support for the protective no-fly zone, has expressed some misgivings over the force of the initial U.S. air strikes.

And while Obama, traveling in South America, said Monday that Arab nations would "absolutely" be part of the coalition, only tiny Qatar has offered its planes to enforce the no-fly zone. And they won't be in place until this weekend at the earliest.

The United Arab Emirates has offered humanitarian assistance.

"We continue to talk to our partners" in terms of who will contribute what, State Department spokesman Mark Toner said Tuesday.

Talk, yes; agreement, not yet.

Italy has suggested NATO take the lead. But Turkey was adamantly against that.

In turn, Italy suggested that it might stop allowing the use of its airfields if NATO was not given the leadership.

France, which seems the most eager among European allies to attack Libyan targets, on Tuesday proposed that a new political steering committee outside NATO be responsible for overseeing military operations over Libya.

Germany and Russia, too, have criticized the way the mission is being carried out.

"The fact is, day by day, we're going to confront the reality that a no-fly zone is probably a misnomer," said Anthony Cordesman, a national security analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "If this structure can't stop Gadhafi's ground forces, then it fails."

"If we want to basically get rid of the regime, then we have to go much further and attack Gadhafi's centers of power and land targets," Cordesman said.

The narrowly defined military mission in Libya is to carry out Security Council Resolution 1973, which demands that Gadhafi's forces withdraw from rebel-held towns, establishes a no-fly zone to protect Libyan citizens, and insists on more access by civilians to water, food and other humanitarian supplies.

Obama said it would be "days, not weeks" until the U.S. turns over effective military leadership of the coalition. But Army Gen. Carter Ham, the lead U.S. commander, has said he "would not put a date certain on this."

Furthermore, Ham says he could envision a situation in which Gadhafi retains power. "I don't think anyone would say that is ideal," he said.

Obama on Tuesday called French Prime Minister Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron from Air Force One. All agreed that "NATO should play a key role in command structure," Obama's deputy national security adviser, Ben Rhodes, told reporters.

Rhodes stressed that there was still no deal. While the U.S. offers "unique capabilities," especially in air power, once a command structure is set up, "we expect our allies and partners to be in the lead," Rhodes said.

Still, Benjamin Friedman, a research fellow with the libertarian CATO Institute, suggested that "rhetoric about ousting Gadhafi notwithstanding, our policy serves to stalemate the civil war, effectively severing Libya. That seems a recipe for a long stay."

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EDITOR'S NOTE — Tom Raum has covered national and international affairs for The Associated Press since 1973.