
Pressure mounts on Obama to enforce no-fly zone over Libya

by Matthew Rusling

WASHINGTON, March 10 (Xinhua) -- Pressure is mounting on U.S. President Barack Obama to enforce a no-fly zone over the violence-torn Libya

Calls have come from a number of directions: 2008 presidential candidate Sen. John McCain continued his push for U.S. intervention. From within Obama's own party, Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry on Sunday called for the bombing of Libya's airstrips. And the Organization of the Islamic Conference called on the United Nations Tuesday to enforce a no-fly zone over the restive North African country, according to the group's official website.

In response, the White House has reiterated several times that the option remains on the table, although the administration has emphasized that it is not ready to jump headlong into any military commitments without careful consideration.

The administration has also vowed that it would not act alone -- Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Tuesday told Sky News that any U.S. military involvement would have to be multilateral.

Obama on Wednesday held a principals committee meeting in which the issue was discussed, but White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said that no decision would be made during the talks.

"This is not a decision meeting," Carney said Wednesday at a press briefing. "It's obviously one in which the events that are evolving in Libya will be reviewed and discussed and the variety of options that we have already taken and are implementing will be discussed, as well as the options that remain on the table."

George Friedman, CEO of global intelligence company Stratfor, noted in a recent article that enforcing a no-fly zone would present a number of hurdles, including problems locating the air defenses that would have to be bombarded before the zone could be established.

"Collecting intelligence on air defenses is not as easy as it might appear," he said. "The opposition and thieves have managed to capture heavy weapons and armored vehicles, meaning that air defense assets are on the move and under uncertain control."

U.S. intervention could also re-enforce the already negative opinions that many in the region harbor for the United States. Since his election, Obama has made an effort to reach out to the Arab world in a bid to heal wounds caused by the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those wounds would remain open, and even more U.S. military involvement could send the wrong message, some experts said.

At present, Obama is trying to strike a balance between two sides: On one side, neoconservatives

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and liberal hawks are calling for intervention because they say it will benefit rebels in the short term. On the other side, those against intervention harbor concerns that it might in the long run undermine the legitimacy of protesters, said Malou Innocent, a foreign policy analyst at the Cato Institute.

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