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Commentary on Libya

As debate mounts over the imposition of no fly zones in Libya, Independent Diplomat's Executive Director Carne Ross published a comment in today's [Financial Times](#) proposing alternatives for consideration before military action is taken.

Let's boycott, isolate and sabotage Gaddafi, *The Financial Times*

by Carne Ross

The Libyan regime of Muammer Gaddafi must be stopped from killing its own people. No-fly zones are one option, but carry considerable risks. They imply a major attack on Libyan air defences, causing casualties. Colonel Gaddafi would depict this as an act of war, with highly uncertain political consequences. But even without removing the military option, there are non-violent measures that can and should be implemented now.

As a British diplomat I worked on sanctions and no-fly zones in Iraq and Libya. Both episodes offer lessons about what works, and stress the crucial importance of avoiding harm to civilians. A push on non-violent measures, therefore, could make real progress in Libya, and set a positive precedent to assist those fighting dictatorship elsewhere.

First: boycott. The assets freeze and travel ban imposed by the recent UN Security Council resolution are welcome, but they are clearly not doing enough to stop Col Gaddafi. International Criminal Court investigations will also take time, given that the court has not won a conviction in a decade of operation. Instead, governments should now prohibit all payments to the Libyan government, and its many quasi-state entities. This would mean formal economic sanctions, if hopefully only as a short-term measure.

The boycott should target, in particular, the oil organisations on whose revenue the Libyan regime is now almost completely dependent. Given worries in the US and elsewhere about a spike in oil prices, the Saudis and others should be asked to cover any shortfall in production. Oil supplies from rebel-held areas should be exempted, while payments for Libyan oil should be placed into a UN escrow account, and distributed for humanitarian purposes.

Second: isolate. All but humanitarian and evacuation transport to and from Libya should be banned. A similar ban (covering only flights) was successfully imposed against Libya after the Lockerbie bombing. To ensure compliance, border monitoring should be established at main entry points into Libya under UN or Arab League auspices. This would stop the influx of arms supplies and mercenaries, and ensure that those responsible for attacks on civilians cannot escape.

The recent UN resolution also encourages states to nominate for sanctions those involved in internal repression. Security Council members should take this chance and nominate all senior officers in the Libyan military, security forces and diplomatic service. This would send the clearest possible message that support for the regime comes with considerable personal cost. Libyans on the ground should be invited to propose names too.

Support must then be built against the regime internationally. The African Union, Arab League and European Union should state publicly that, given Col Gaddafi's record in attacking the Libyan people, their members will never again deal with his regime. Companies should be urged to do the same. If this public pressure does not work, the EU and US could make such commitments obligatory.

Finally: sabotage. The US and others should seek to disrupt Libya's military communications and IT infrastructure. The Stuxnet worm attack on Iran's nuclear capacity shows that non-violent methods can have powerful effects. Similar measures should be applied here: for example, Libya's military air traffic control radar should be jammed.

Further covert moves could be made to help the opposition. In spite of recent criticism, the UK was right to seek contact with the transitional council in Benghazi. Other nations should now do the same. This would help to co-ordinate strategy and aid, and to demonstrate that outside governments will co-operate only with those committed to democracy.

But more practical help could also be provided. Secure communications equipment should be supplied covertly to opposition forces. The US could provide the rebels and others in the international community with access to real-time data on the location and vulnerabilities of Libyan forces. State television and radio broadcasts should be disrupted, and ideally messages from the transitional council broadcast in their place. Messages should be carried on all channels offering cash rewards to defectors.

None of this is likely to work in isolation. But taken together this three-pronged approach would amount to a considerable ratcheting up of international pressure. It could be achieved with international legitimacy and without significant civilian casualties. Military action is unlikely to do the same.

The writer is director of Independent Diplomat, a non-profit diplomatic advisory group.

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Although we're not even three months into 2011, this year has proven to be an eventful one - from Southern Sudan's successful referendum to WikiLeaks disclosures and the recent revolutions in the Middle East. Carne Ross monitors these and other events and regularly comments on Twitter while Independent Diplomat posts news about our projects and other current events on our Facebook page.

