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Barack Obama

Address on Libya

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Good afternoon, everybody.

I want to take this opportunity to update the American people about the situation in Libya. Over the last several weeks, the world has watched events unfold in Libya with hope and alarm. Last month, protesters took to the streets across the country to demand their universal rights, and a government that is accountable to them and responsive to their aspirations. But they were met with an iron fist.

Within days, whole parts of the country declared their independence from a brutal regime, and members of the government serving in Libya and abroad chose to align themselves with the forces of change. Moammar Qaddafi clearly lost the confidence of his own people and the legitimacy to lead.

Instead of respecting the rights of his own people, Qaddafi chose the path of brutal suppression. Innocent civilians were beaten, imprisoned, and in some cases killed. Peaceful protests were forcefully put down. Hospitals were attacked and patients disappeared. A campaign of intimidation and repression began.

In the face of this injustice, the United States and the international community moved swiftly. Sanctions were put in place by the United States and our allies and partners. The U.N. Security Council imposed further sanctions, an arms embargo, and the specter of international accountability for Qaddafi and those around him. Humanitarian assistance was positioned on Libya's borders, and those displaced by the violence received our help. Ample warning was given that Qaddafi needed to stop his campaign of repression, or be held accountable. The Arab League and the European Union joined us in calling for an end to violence.



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Once again, Qaddafi chose to ignore the will of his people and the international community. Instead, he launched a military campaign against his own people. And there should be no doubt about his intentions, because he himself has made them clear.

For decades, he has demonstrated a willingness to use brute force through his sponsorship of terrorism against the American people as well as others, and through the killings that he has carried out within his own borders. And just yesterday, speaking of the city of Benghazi -- a city of roughly 700,000 people -- he threatened, and I quote: "We will have no mercy and no pity" -- no mercy on his own citizens.

Now, here is why this matters to us. Left unchecked, we have every reason to believe that Qaddafi would commit atrocities against his people. Many thousands could die. A humanitarian crisis would ensue. The entire region could be destabilized, endangering many of our allies and partners. The calls of the Libyan people for help would go unanswered. The democratic values that we stand for would be overrun. Moreover, the words of the international community would be rendered hollow.

And that's why the United States has worked with our allies and partners to shape a strong international response at the United Nations. Our focus has been clear: protecting innocent civilians within Libya, and holding the Qaddafi regime accountable.

Yesterday, in response to a call for action by the Libyan people and the Arab League, the U.N. Security Council passed a strong resolution that demands an end to the violence against citizens. It authorizes the use of force with an explicit commitment to pursue all necessary measures to stop the killing, to include the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya. It also strengthens our sanctions and the enforcement of an arms embargo against the Qaddafi regime.

Now, once more, Moammar Qaddafi has a choice. The resolution that passed lays out very clear conditions that must be met. The United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Arab states agree that a cease-fire must be implemented immediately. That means all attacks against civilians must stop. Qaddafi must stop his troops from advancing on Benghazi, pull them back from Ajdabiya, Misrata, and Zawiya, and establish water, electricity and gas supplies to all areas. Humanitarian assistance must be allowed to reach the people of Libya.

Let me be clear, these terms are not negotiable. These terms are not subject to negotiation. If Qaddafi does not comply with the resolution, the international community will impose consequences, and the resolution will be enforced through military action.

In this effort, the United States is prepared to act as part of an international coalition. American leadership is essential, but that does not mean acting alone -- it means shaping the conditions for the international community to act together.

That's why I have directed Secretary Gates and our military to coordinate their planning, and tomorrow Secretary Clinton will travel to Paris for a meeting with our European allies and Arab partners about the enforcement of Resolution 1973. We will provide the unique capabilities that we can bring to bear to stop the violence against civilians, including enabling our European allies and Arab partners to effectively enforce a no fly zone. I have no doubt that the men and women of our military are capable of carrying out this mission. Once more, they have the thanks of a grateful nation and the admiration of the world.



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I also want to be clear about what we will not be doing. The United States is not going to deploy ground troops into Libya. And we are not going to use force to go beyond a well-defined goal --- specifically, the protection of civilians in Libya. In the coming weeks, we will continue to help the Libyan people with humanitarian and economic assistance so that they can fulfill their aspirations peacefully.

Now, the United States did not seek this outcome. Our decisions have been driven by Qaddafi's refusal to respect the rights of his people, and the potential for mass murder of innocent civilians. It is not an action that we will pursue alone. Indeed, our British and French allies, and members of the Arab League, have already committed to take a leadership role in the enforcement of this resolution, just as they were instrumental in pursuing it. We are coordinating closely with them. And this is precisely how the international community should work, as more nations bear both the responsibility and the cost of enforcing international law.

This is just one more chapter in the change that is unfolding across the Middle East and North Africa. From the beginning of these protests, we have made it clear that we are opposed to violence. We have made clear our support for a set of universal values, and our support for the political and economic change that the people of the region deserve. But I want to be clear: the change in the region will not and cannot be imposed by the United States or any foreign power; ultimately, it will be driven by the people of the Arab World. It is their right and their responsibility to determine their own destiny.

Let me close by saying that there is no decision I face as your Commander in Chief that I consider as carefully as the decision to ask our men and women to use military force. Particularly at a time when our military is fighting in Afghanistan and winding down our activities in Iraq, that decision is only made more difficult. But the United States of America will not stand idly by in the face of actions that undermine global peace and security. So I have taken this decision with the confidence that action is necessary, and that we will not be acting alone. Our goal is focused, our cause is just, and our coalition is strong. Thank you very much.