

# Coalition shows first cracks as Qaddafi digs in for guerrilla war

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Sunday, March 20, the day after coalition powers pounded Libyan targets by air and sea at the outset of their operation to enforce a no-fly zone, Muammer Qaddafi announced he was arming a million Libyans to defend the country. He spoke after Libyan air defense batteries and command centers were blasted by French bombers and by 112 Tomahawk cruise missiles fired from US and British vessels and three US B-2 stealth bombers droppepd 40 bombs on two Libyan airfields.

At the same time, debkafile's military sources term the British reports that Libya's integrated air defense systems were knocked out then as overstated. In the third week of February, Qaddafi had removed his more sophisticated weaponry from those installations and tucked them away at secret facilities on the Sahara Desert fringes of southern Libya, out of range of the British and French warplanes.

Qaddafi therefore retains intact, according our sources, his store of Russian-made SA-5 missiles which can hit medium or high-flying aircraft and his shoulder-launched K38 Igla9 (SA-18) missiles, which are launched from Italian Ivaco trucks.

The K38 Igla is a precision weapon which is undetectable by radar and has much improved resistance to flares and jamming. Although not new, when installed in batches of 6-8 on a truck, it is highly mobile and dangerous. This advanced work was carried out secretly in Croatia and Montenegro, from which for the past two years Qaddafi has commissioned this sort of weapon adaptation in case of an attack by a Western or any other power.

Qaddafi has also purchased another type of air defense weapon in Belarus, but intelligence about it remains scrappy until it shows up on the battlefield.

After completing the first phase of the US-European-Arab offensive charted in Paris by 22 national leaders Saturday, its members have still to agree on an endgame.

Sunday, Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint US Chiefs of Staff, commented that the military side of the operation was not designed to remove Qaddafi from power. He said the no-fly zone was effectively in place - in other words, Washington does not regard the no-fly zone as a stage on the road to Qaddafi's removal. The British and French governments think otherwise: they are bent on regime change in Tripoli, although the US and Arab participants in the coalition have strong reservations on this point.

Then, too, the head of the US Africa command Gen. Carter Ham contradicted Mullen when he said: We can't enforce a no-fly zone over all Libya, only over Benghazi. In all, the American position in military intervention in Libya remains ambivalent.

There are other gaps in the coalition consensus:

1. The Arabs are far from united in the wish to knock Qaddafi over. The Anglo-French presentation of their operation as backed from wall to wall by the Arab world and therefore a huge diplomatic feat is misleading. Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt object to outside military intervention in Libya, although they are keeping quiet for now. Most other Arab rulers are furious with Arab League Secretary Amr Moussa for claiming he spoke for them all when he voiced support for the Arab Revolt.

Feeling the heat, Moussa Sunday criticized the coalition air strikes against Libya as unacceptable. They should be stopped because instead of protecting civilians as mandated by the UN they were killing civilians. This comment pulled the rug embarrassingly from under the UK-French boast of a broad European-Arab consensus for the military operation.

2. The anti-Qaddafi alliance is short of an African partner which makes it hard to portray the offensive as a broad regional effort. Indeed the governments of Africa are against the Libyan ruler's forcible ouster.

But the inherent weakness of all air and missile campaigns is that they are unsustainable for very long unless followed by a large-scale ground operation. If not, they tend to unite the enemy they are attacking and strengthen its resolve to stand fast, especially when conducted by foreign forces. Because none of the participants is able or willing to send troops to Libya, and they are aware that Qaddafi is ready to trap them in a prolonged guerrilla war, the air-missile offensive launched Saturday may start running out of steam after a few bombing waves.

The American, British and French strategists who planned the offensive appear to have counted on Libya's tribal population breaking ranks with Qaddafi under sustained pounding and proliferating casualties. This tactic was tried in Afghanistan where the allies tried to detach whole tribes away from their support of Taliban and al Qaeda by impressing them with Western firepower and high technology.

It did not work there and is unlikely to work much better in Libya. Qaddafi had his answer ready Sunday when he said he would arm a million Libyans to take up arms for him. This sort of resistance will be hard to break by air or missile bombardment.

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