Propongo ai lettori di questo sito l'analisi di George Friedman sulla *no fly zone in Libia* pubblicata dalla nota società di intelligence
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**Libyan rebels on March 7 load an anti-aircraft gun near oil facilities in Ras Lanuf**

**By George Friedman**

Calls are growing for a no-fly zone over Libya, but a power or coalition of powers willing to enforce one remains elusive.

In evaluating such calls, it is useful to remember that in war, Murphy's Law always lurks. What can go wrong will go wrong, in Libya as in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Complications to Airstrikes

It has been pointed out that a no-fly zone is not an antiseptic act. In order to protect the aircraft enforcing the no-fly zone, one must begin by suppressing enemy air defenses. This in turn poses an intelligence problem. Precisely what are Libyan air defenses and where are they located? It is possible to assert that Libya has no effective air defenses and that an SEAD (suppression of enemy air defenses) attack is therefore unnecessary. But that makes assumptions that cannot be demonstrated without testing, and the test is dangerous. At the same time, collecting definitive intelligence on air defenses is not as easy as it might appear — particularly as the opposition and thieves alike have managed to capture heavy weapons and armored vehicles, meaning that air defense assets are on the move and under uncertain control.

Therefore, a no-fly zone would begin with airstrikes on known air defense sites. But it would likely continue with sustained patrols by SEAD aircraft armed with anti-radiation missiles poised

to rapidly confront any subsequent threat that pops up. Keeping those aircraft on station for an extended period of time would be necessary, along with an unknown number of strikes. It is uncertain where the radars and missiles are located, and those airstrikes would not be without error. When search radars and especially targeting radars are turned on, the response must be instantaneous, while the radar is radiating (and therefore vulnerable) and before it can engage. That means there will be no opportunity to determine whether the sites are located in residential areas or close to public facilities such as schools or hospitals.

Previous regimes, hoping to garner international support, have deliberately placed their systems near such facilities to force what the international media would consider an atrocity. Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi does not seem like someone who would hesitate to cause civilian casualties for political advantage. Thus, the imposition of a no-fly zone could rapidly deteriorate into condemnations for killing civilians of those enforcing the zone ostensibly for humanitarian purposes. Indeed, attacks on air defenses could cause substantial casualties, turning a humanitarian action into one of considerable consequence in both humanitarian and political terms.

## Airstrikes vs. Ground Operations

The more important question is what exactly a no-fly zone would achieve. Certainly, it would ground Gadhafi's air force, but it would not come close to ending the fighting nor erode Gadhafi's other substantial advantages. His forces appear to be better organized and trained than his opponents, who are politically divided and far less organized. Not long ago, Gadhafi largely was written off, but he has more than held his own — and he has held his own through the employment of ground combat forces. What remains of his air force has been used for limited harassment, so the imposition of a no-fly zone would not change the military situation on the ground. Even with a no-fly zone, Gadhafi would still be difficult for the rebels to defeat, and Gadhafi might still defeat the rebels.

The attractiveness of the no-fly zone in Iraq was that it provided the political illusion that steps were being taken, without creating substantial risks, or for that matter, actually doing substantial damage to Saddam Hussein's control over Iraq. The no-fly zone remained in place for about 12 years without forcing change in Saddam's policies, let alone regime change. The same is likely to be true in Libya. The no-fly zone is a low-risk action with little ability to change the military reality that creates an impression of decisive action. It does, as we argue, have a substantial downside, in that it entails costs and risks — including a high likelihood of at least some civilian casualties — without clear benefit or meaningful impact. The magnitude of the potential civilian

toll is unknown, but its likelihood, oddly, is not in the hands of those imposing the no-fly zone, but in the hands of Gadhafi. Add to this human error and other failures inherent in war, and the outcome becomes unclear.

A more significant action would be intervention on the ground, an invasion of Libya designed to destroy Gadhafi's military and force regime change. This would require a substantial force — and it should be remembered from Iraq that it would require a substantial occupation force to stabilize and build a new regime to govern Libya. Unlike in Egypt, Gadhafi is the regime, and sectarian elements that have been kept in check under his regime already are coming to the fore. The ability of the country to provide and administer basic government functions is also unknown. And it must also be borne in mind that Gadhafi clearly has substantial support as well as opposition. His supporters will not go without a fight and could choose to wage some form of post-invasion resistance, as in Iraq. Thus, while the initial costs in terms of casualties might be low, the long-term costs might be much higher.

It should also be remembered that the same international community that condemned Saddam Hussein as a brutal dictator quite easily turned to condemn the United States both for deposing him and for the steps its military took in trying to deal with the subsequent insurgency. It is not difficult to imagine a situation where there is extended Libyan resistance to the occupying force followed by international condemnation of the counterinsurgency effort.

Having toppled a regime, it is difficult to simply leave. The idea that this would be a quick, surgical and short-term invasion is certainly one scenario, but it is neither certain nor even the most likely scenario. In the same sense, the casualties caused by the no-fly zone would be unknown. The difference is that while a no-fly zone could be terminated easily, it is unlikely that it would have any impact on ground operations. An invasion would certainly have a substantial impact but would not be terminable.

Stopping a civil war is viable if it can be done without increasing casualties beyond what they might be if the war ran its course. The no-fly zone likely does that, without ending the civil war. If properly resourced, the invasion option could end the civil war, but it opens the door to extended low-intensity conflict.

## The National Interest

It is difficult to perceive the U.S. national interest in Libya. The interests of some European

countries, like Italy , are more substantial, but it is not clear that they are prepared to undertake the burden without the United States.

We would argue that war as a humanitarian action should be undertaken only with the clear understanding that in the end it might cause more suffering than the civil war. It should also be undertaken with the clear understanding that the inhabitants might prove less than grateful, and the rest of the world would not applaud nearly as much as might be liked — and would be faster to condemn the occupier when things went wrong. Indeed, the recently formed opposition council based out of Benghazi — the same group that is leading the calls from eastern Libya for foreign airstrikes against Gadhafi's air force — has explicitly warned against any military intervention involving troops on the ground.

In the end, the use of force must have the national interest in mind. And the historical record of armed humanitarian interventions is mixed at best.