

Lavrov Knocks Down No-Fly Zone for Libya

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GENEVA — Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov ruled out the idea of creating a no-fly zone over Libya on Tuesday as embattled leader Moammar Gadhafi unleashed bombing raids, special forces and army troops in a desperate bid to retain power.

Lavrov described the idea of imposing limits on Libyan air space as "superfluous" and said world powers must instead focus on fully using the sanctions the UN Security Council approved over the weekend.

Leaders in the United States, Europe and Australia have suggested the military tactic — used successfully in northern Iraq and Bosnia — to prevent Gadhafi from bombing his own people. But Russia's consent is required as a veto-wielding member of the Security Council.

Interfax quoted a Kremlin source on Tuesday saying Gadhafi must step down, since by using force against civilians he has become a "political corpse." Still, Russia's NATO ambassador, Dmitry Rogozin, also cautioned against moving militarily against Gadhafi without UN authorization.

"If someone in Washington is seeking a blitzkrieg in Libya, it is a serious mistake because any use of military force outside the NATO responsibility zone will be considered a violation of international law," Rogozin told Interfax in Brussels.

"A ban on the national air force or civil aviation to fly over their own territory is still a serious interference into the domestic affairs of another country, and at any rate it requires a resolution of the UN Security Council," he said.

Italy voiced support for a no-fly zone over Libya, which is critical given that Italian bases would likely be used to enforce it. Foreign Minister Franco Frattini says a no-fly zone would be useful to prevent Gadhafi from attacking his own people, but insisted that it would have to be enforced.

"In the Balkans, it had important results. It prevented Milosevic's planes from bombing unarmed populations," Frattini told the Il Messaggero newspaper in Rome. "I believe it could be successful also in Libya, because it would prevent bombing in Cirenaica and the areas taken from Gadhafi's control."

The Libyan uprising that began Feb. 15 has swept over nearly the entire eastern half of the country, putting entire cities there out of Gadhafi's grasp. But he and his backers hold the capital of Tripoli and have threatened to put down protests aggressively.

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