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France fails to get G8 accord on Libya no-fly zone

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By [John Irish](#) and [Tim Hether](#)

PARIS (Reuters) - France failed on Tuesday to persuade its G8 partners to support its push for a no-fly zone over Libya, a setback to any chances of swift action to halt Muammar Gaddafi's advance against rebel forces.

In a blow too to France's efforts to use the crisis in Libya to reassert its leadership in international diplomacy, the Group of Eight powers made no mention of a no-fly zone over the North African nation in a communique wrapping up their talks.

The Libyan crisis dominated the first meeting of France's G8 presidency, but Germany and Russia blocked flight restrictions sought by France and Britain, leaving the group with a position that contained strong words but little substance.

"The Americans are moving toward the security council, the Russians want more detail on the no-fly zone and are cautious, but the Germans blocked it completely," a G8 diplomatic source told Reuters after the talks. "We are in a race against time between building a politically legitimate operation and taking action," he added.

The stalemate echoed a lack of consensus over the issue at the U.N. Security Council, of which Russia is a permanent veto-holding member and Germany a temporary member.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said a call by the Arab League for a no-fly zone over Libya was short on detail and more information was needed on how it could work, given the Arab League's opposition to foreign military intervention.

"We are waiting for the Arab League to make specific proposals regarding that issue," Lavrov told a news conference at the end of the meeting.

"We need to have more specific information to see how our friends in the Arab League see that and once we have that we will consider all options," he said.

The G8 communique stated that Libyans had the right to democracy and that Gaddafi faced "dire consequences" if he ignored citizens' rights. It urged the U.N. Security Council to increase pressure on him, including via economic measures.

It stressed the importance of the Arab League's involvement in any action taken in the OPEC oil exporting nation.

GERMANY WARY OF MILITARY OPTION

France and Britain have led calls for an internationally enforced no-fly zone to slow the advance of Gaddafi's troops, who are using airpower and tanks to crush a revolt.

The counter-offensive against poorly armed rebels fighting to end 41 years of authoritarian rule has pushed insurgents 100 miles eastwards in a week [ID:nLDE72E0YO] and analysts worry that the slowness to respond will mean more bloodshed.

French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe admitted early in the talks he had been unable to win G8 backing for a no-fly zone.

Delegate sources said opposition was strongest from Germany.

"Military intervention is not the solution. From our point of view it is very difficult and dangerous," German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told reporters. "We do not want to get sucked into a war in North Africa and we would not like to step on a slippery slope where we all are at the end in a war."

The United States has also called for more clarity on what the no-fly zone sought by the Arab League would entail.

France's failure to secure a stronger G8 agreement will irk President Nicolas Sarkozy, who is intent on showing leadership on Libya to repair the damage to France's image from its foreign policy blunders during the revolt in Tunisia.

Juppe -- appointed last month when Michele Alliot-Marie quit over her clumsy handling of Tunisia -- said that while the outside world dragged its feet, Gaddafi's forces were advancing.

"If we had used military force last week ... maybe the reversal that went against the opposition (forces) would not have happened," he said.

British Foreign Secretary William Hague said the G8 agreed on the need for further measures but not on what they might be.

Ministers discussed ideas like establishing "safety zones" in Libya and ramping up sanctions, but Hague stressed that any action would be agreed via the U.N. Security Council.

"There is common ground here in the G8 and while not every nation sees eye to eye on issues such as the no-fly zone, there is a common appetite to increase the pressure on Gaddafi," he told reporters, mentioning tighter sanctions as one idea.

"We are clear here at the G8 that there is a need for further measures, a need to respond urgently," he said.

British Prime Minister David Cameron "thinks we need to bring more pressure to bear on the regime," his spokesman told reporters in London. "He thinks we need to be considering very seriously the option of a no-fly zone," though this would be a "difficult" discussion, the spokesman said.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met privately in Paris late on Monday with Mahmoud Jebril, a member of the Libyan National Council, the opposition group seeking international support for its fight against Gaddafi's forces, to discuss how the United States can support the Libyan people.

Clinton left Paris for Cairo early on Tuesday and did not take part in the main session of the G8 talks.

(Additional reporting by [Vicky Buffery](#) and Laure Bretton; Writing by [Catherine Bremer](#); editing by Tim Pearce)

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