

Harper to put Libya mission extension before Parliament for approval

STEVEN CHASE AND JOHN IBBITSON

The Globe and Mail
May 27, 2011

Stephen Harper is planning to extend Canada's controversial military intervention in Libya and will ask the Commons, which he controls, for approval.

The Prime Minister announced his intention to put the mission extension before the Commons during the Group of Eight leaders' meetings in France on Friday.

The Conservatives control more than half the seats in the Commons and can pass any motion or bill they wish. The result would be less certain if the Tories allow their MPs to vote freely on the matter.

It's not yet clear how long Mr. Harper will propose extending Canada's involvement in Libya. Sources say a period of between three to six months has been discussed.

Canadian jet fighters left Bagotville, Que., on March 18 to support a United Nations no-fly zone over Libya, where besieged leader Moammar Gadhafi is killing his own people in a civil war. Canada's total contribution is much bigger now, including refuelling and transport planes as well as patrol aircraft and a frigate.

The Associated Press reported that the G8 meeting wrapped up Friday in Deauville, France, with Russia abandoning Colonel Gadhafi, a one-time ally, and offering to mediate a deal for the Libyan leader to leave the country he's ruled for more than 40 years.

The striking proposal by a leading critic of the NATO bombing campaign reflected growing international frustration with the Libyan crisis and a desire by the Kremlin for influence in the rapidly changing Arab landscape.

With Col. Gadhafi increasingly isolated and NATO jets intensifying their attacks, Russia may also be eyeing Libya's oil and gas and preparing for the prospect that the lucrative Libyan market will fall under full rebel control.

"He should leave," Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said of Col. Gadhafi. "I proposed our mediation services to my partners. Everyone thinks that would be useful."

Leaders from all G8 countries called in their final statement for Col. Gadhafi to step down, with British Prime Minister David Cameron saying the NATO mission against the Libyan leader is entering a new phase with the deployment of helicopter gunships.

"We are joined in our resolve to finish the job," U.S. President Barack Obama said after talks with French President Nicolas Sarkozy at the summit.

The G8 as a whole called on Col. Gadhafi to leave Libya – but because Russia has criticized NATO for going too far in its bombing campaign, it did not explicitly endorse the military mission.

In Ottawa, NDP foreign affairs critic Paul Dewar pointed out that all parties have unanimously supported a March 21 parliamentary resolution authorizing the intervention in Libya, but that the NDP insisted the issue be revisited after three months as a condition of that support.

Mr. Dewar said it is too early to say whether the NDP will endorse an extension of the mission, noting that the G8 leaders' declaration that Col. Ghaddafi must leave office appears to go beyond the original United Nations resolution that authorized intervention to protect civilians.

"We'll have to examine this closely before we decide whether to support" an extension, he said.

Canadian warplanes have dropped 240 laser-guided bombs on Libyan targets, and the CF-18 fighter jets have flown 324 attack missions so far, the Department of National Defence announced this week.

Canada's military foray in Libya has come under scrutiny at home with a former Canadian ambassador to the United States questioning the strategy behind military intervention.

"We have jumped into Libya with our eyes wide open but does anyone know where it will lead or why Canada is so directly engaged," Derek Burney wrote in a March, 2011, paper for the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute. "The emotions and humanitarian instincts to do 'something' are understandable but so, too, are arguments advocating prudence."

Back in March, Mr. Burney argued it would have made more sense for regional alliances, such as the Arab League or Organization of African Unity, or both, to have taken the lead on military action.

"As history eloquently illustrates, getting in is just the easy part," he said. "We are now at war and no one really knows for how long."

Excerpts from the Deauville communiqué:

In light of the recent developments in the Middle East and North Africa, and in sub-Saharan Africa, we renewed our commitment to support democratic reform around the world and to respond to the aspirations for freedom, including freedom of religion, and empowerment, particularly for women and youth. Democracy lays the best path to peace, stability, prosperity, shared growth and development. We met with the Prime Ministers of Egypt and Tunisia, and decided to launch an enduring partnership with those countries engaging in a transition to democracy and tolerant societies. Our common goal is to develop the rule of law and citizen engagement as well as foster economic and social reforms to meet the aspirations of the people. We have adopted a declaration on the Arab spring.

Peace and Security

We demand the immediate cessation of the use of force against civilians by the Libyan regime forces as well as the cessation of all incitement to hostility and violence against the civilian population. In that regard, we take note of actions undertaken by UN Member States to implement fully UNSCRs 1970 and 1973. ...We stress the need to hold to account those responsible for attacks on civilians. These criminal actions will not go unpunished. We welcome the work of the International Criminal Court in investigating crimes in Libya and note the Chief Prosecutor's request on 16 May for three arrest warrants. Gadhafi and the Libyan government have failed to fulfill their responsibility to protect the Libyan population and have lost all legitimacy. He has no future in a free, democratic Libya. He must go.

Global economy

The global recovery is gaining strength and is becoming more self-sustained. However, downside risks remain, and internal and external imbalances are still a concern. The sharp increase in commodity prices and their excessive volatility pose a significant headwind to the recovery. In this context, we agreed to remain focused on the action required to enhance the sustainability of public finances, to strengthen the recovery and foster employment, to reduce risks and ensure strong, sustainable and balanced growth, including through structural reforms.

The Internet

The global digital economy has served as a powerful economic driver and engine of growth and innovation. Broadband Internet access is an essential infrastructure for participation in today's economy. In order for our countries to benefit fully from the digital economy, we need to seize emerging opportunities, such as cloud computing, social networking and citizen publications, which are driving innovation and enabling growth in our societies. As we adopt more innovative Internet-based services, we face challenges in promoting interoperability and convergence among our public policies on issues such as the protection of personal data, net neutrality, trans-border data flow, ICT security and intellectual property.

With reports from The Associated Press and Agence France-Presse.