

Security Council Calls for War Crimes Inquiry in Libya

By EDWARD WYATT, 26 February 2011



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The U.N. Security Council called for an international war crimes investigation into “widespread and systemic attacks” against Libyan citizens.

The United Nations Security Council voted unanimously on Saturday night to impose sanctions on Libya’s leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, and his inner circle of advisers, and called for an international war crimes investigation into “widespread and systemic attacks” against Libyan citizens who have protested against his government over the last two weeks.

The vote, thought to be the first time the Security Council has voted unanimously to refer a member state to the International Criminal Court, came on the same day that President Obama said that Colonel Qaddafi had lost the legitimacy to rule and should step down.

Mr. Obama’s statement, which the White House said was made during a telephone call with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, was the strongest statement yet from any American official against Colonel Qaddafi.

The Security Council resolution also imposes an arms embargo against Libya, an international travel ban on 16 Libyan leaders and freezes the assets of Colonel Qaddafi and members of his family, including seven of his sons and a daughter. Also included in the sanctions were measures against defense and intelligence officials who are believed to have played a role in the violence against civilians in Libya.

Security forces in Libya have opened fire on protesters several times in recent days, drawing international condemnation and leading the United States to close its embassy in Tripoli on Friday and impose unilateral sanctions against Libya. It froze billions of dollars of Libyan government assets and announced that it would do the same with the assets of high-ranking Libyan officials who took part in the violent crackdown.

Turkey’s prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, warned Saturday that sanctions would do more harm to Libya’s people than to Colonel Qaddafi.

Britain and France closed their embassies in Tripoli on Saturday as well, and a pair of British military transport planes swooped into the desert south of Benghazi and picked up more than 150 civilians, the British Defense Ministry said.

At the United Nations, Security Council members disagreed during deliberations Saturday whether to approve the resolution, circulated by France, Germany, Britain and the United States, that would refer Colonel Qaddafi and his top aides to the International Criminal Court for prosecution.

Libya's own delegation to the United Nations, which renounced Colonel Qaddafi on Monday, sent a letter to the Security Council president, Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti of Brazil, saying that it backed such a referral.

A White House account of the telephone call Saturday between Mr. Obama and Chancellor Merkel of Germany said that the two leaders reviewed options for dealing with the situation in Libya, and that the president told Mrs. Merkel that "when a leader's only means of staying in power is to use mass violence against his own people, he has lost the legitimacy to rule and needs to do what is right for his country by leaving now."