Foreign & Commonwealth Office (UK)

Foreign Office Minister on latest situation in Libya and Syria

2011-05-01

Speaking on BBC Radio 5Live, the Foreign Office Minister for the Middle East reiterated that NATO targets were military in nature.

The Minister was speaking after unconfirmed reports of air strikes on Qadhafi's compound in Tripoli.

He said that NATO targets were clearly in line with UNSC Resolution 1973 which aims to stop the regime's systematic attack on the Libyan population

"That's what the UN resolution allows NATO forces to do and that is what it's done. All the targets are military in nature, they have to be linked to the way in which the regime mounts its attack on the civilian population in Libya. It is because of those attacks on the civilian population that the international community came together and the UN resolution was there."

Mr Burt said individuals were not individually targeted.

"But clearly if people are inside the command and control structures and other places when attacks take place. That is when you get casualties but that does not mean individuals are being personally or deliberately attacked. What is being attacked are the military installations and the parts of their regime that are directing the attacks against the civilians."

He said there was no reason for the international community to fear that the UN resolution was being breached or that NATO was going beyond its terms.

"Targeting policy is not changed. This can all come to a stop the moment Qadhafi's forces stop attacking their own civilians. That has been what has been missing in this whole equation. There have been repeated calls for the Qadhafi's regime to do what it needs to do; that is to stop inflicting misery on its people. Until that time is reached then the resolution is very clear; it allows the international community to come together in unprecedented numbers with support from the Arab League and others to take action necessary to protect civilians. There is nothing that has happened over the past few weeks that is in any way moved or changed from that determination or that resolution. It is not being interpreted differently, it has always been interpreted the same and that remains the case this morning."

On Syria, the Minister said the Government had made it very clear there was concerted international action being taken against Syria.

“European Union and other world figures have continued to make representations to Syria to say you’ve always got an opportunity to turn back. We’ve seen the Syrian President make speeches about reform, we’ve seen other figures say the same and then there has been a crackdown and repression. It is still possible for the Syrian regime to turn back from where it is and we’ve called upon it to do so, we condemn absolutely the bloodshed and violence that’s taken place.

There is still an opportunity in Syria to turn back from the action that’s been taken and we would urge that. And the international community is working repeatedly and effectively together now to continue to put pressure on the Syrian regime to put in place a sanctions regime, to isolate the regime, to make sure that everything is done to try and ensure that it does turn away from its path of violence and comes back to reform. That is what’s needed and an end to the violence immediately.”

Source: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/foreign-office-minister-on-latest-situation-in-libya-and-syria