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Moscow Steps Up Criticism of NATO's Libya Campaign

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The Foreign Ministry stepped up its criticism of the NATO-led air operation in Libya on Friday, calling for increased United Nations and African Union peace-making efforts to stem the violence.

NATO is bombing Libya under a UN mandate to protect civilians and says it strikes only military targets. Rebels seeking the end of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's four-decade rule have been fighting his forces since February.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said in a statement that Russia believed coalition air strikes were killing civilians and destroying infrastructure.

"It is completely clear that the actions undertaken by the coalition are going far beyond the aims" of a UN Security Council resolution that authorized military intervention to enforce a no-fly zone and protect civilians, he said.

Veto-wielding permanent Security Council member Russia abstained from the vote on the

resolution, allowing it to pass, but has strongly criticized the Western air campaign and called for a diplomatic resolution of the conflict.

"We think it important to fully activate political, diplomatic efforts aimed at resolving the crisis with the help of the peacekeeping potential of the UN and African Union," Lukashevich said separately at a weekly briefing.

Lukashevich also said Russia is not seeking to be a mediator in Libyan affairs.

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