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AFP

## NATO 'sliding towards' land campaign in Libya: Russia

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Russia's top diplomat warned on Saturday that the NATO operation in Libya was "sliding towards" a land campaign, a prospect he said Moscow viewed as "deplorable," the RIA Novosti news agency reported.

"We know that France and Britain intend to use military helicopters. We have given our view of NATO's actions," Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, quoted by the RIA Novosti news agency.

"We consider that what is going on is either consciously or unconsciously sliding towards a land operation. That would be very deplorable," he added.

"We think our Western partners understand that the events in Libya are taking an undesirable turn, but the decisions that have been taken are continuing by momentum," Lavrov told journalists in Odessa, according to the news agency.

Lavrov's comments came after NATO acknowledged that it had deployed British and French attack helicopters against Moamer Kadhafi's forces for the first time on Saturday.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's special representative on Africa said earlier Saturday that he would travel to Libya on Monday evening to try to mediate the conflict, the Interfax news agency reported.

Mikhail Margelov said he plans to visit the rebel stronghold of Benghazi "to meet leaders of Libya's National Transitional Council," according to the Interfax report.

Russia abstained from the UN Security Council resolution on Libya and has called for a negotiated solution to the conflict, which has cost thousands of lives since it erupted in mid-February.