

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF U.S. MILITARY ACTION IN LIBYA

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Biography

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Abstract

On 19 March 2011 President Barack Obama ordered the U.S. military to reinforce the Libyan opposition in the civil war against the 42 year old regime of Muammar al Qadhafi. Seven months later, the Qadhafi regime was a thing of the past. The President launched a successful unconventional war with NATO allies and Arab partners in support of an insurgency in an Arab country without the loss of a single U.S. life. It was a vindication of Obama's approach to the application of military power and a nice gain in political capital on the eve of election season. However, this war produced consequences that do not work in favor of U.S. interests. This paper analyzes the positive and negative implications of U.S. participation in the war in Libya, and measures them against the four pillars of the 2010 National Security Strategy. The author concludes that the long term negative aspects outweigh the short term positive results. In the end, the war in Libya brought greater harm than good to U.S. national security.

Introduction

On 15 February 2011, a civil war began to oust Muammar al Qadhafi from his 42 year old military dictatorship in Libya. By 19 March the U.S. had joined the war, fighting in support of the Libyan uprising against the Qadhafi government. In the 30 days prior to this war in Libya, the differences of opinion from members of the administration, the media, and the public was quite mixed. Some said the U.S. should not intervene, believing there was no real national interest there.¹ Others charged the president with not moving fast enough to intervene in the purported humanitarian crisis.² Some suggested a multi-lateral approach that shared the burden of military action.³ Others bemoaned the loss of American exceptionalism in the way the President "led from behind."⁴ What is certain is that President Obama made the controversial decision to launch the United States into a third war in a Muslim country in ten years.⁵

Thesis

The purpose of this paper is to analyze positive and negative aspects of President Obama's decision to participate in the war in Libya and to evaluate how it served U.S. strategic interests. The first part focuses on positive implications, the second highlights negative aspects, and the final section provides analysis using the 2010 National Security Strategy (NSS) as a framework to measure the strategic implications.

The Positive

To begin with, the manner in which President Obama went to war in Libya was a welcome change to the unilateral manner in which President Bush entered war in Iraq. Fueled by the events of 9/11 and the potential threat to U.S. national security, President Bush acted decisively and in a manner that at first seemed reasonable, but then began to alarm the international community. As many have pointed out, when President Bush went to war in Iraq, he did so without a single Muslim ally and with very few international partners, which led to international criticism and isolation when things started to go wrong.⁶

In contrast, when President Obama went to war in Libya, he was following the lead of European allies and other Arab partners. To the international community, this was a major change from the Bush administration's approach to war in Iraq. It reduced global concerns about the application of U.S. military power, and was a political win with U.S. allies. President Sarkozy of France and Prime Minister Cameron of England were the most vocal proponents for supporting the rebels in Libya, and put significant pressure on President Obama to support their interests.⁷ The Secretary of Defense, National Security Advisor, and Counter-Terrorism Chief

¹ Richard N. Haass. "The U.S. Should Keep Out of Libya." *The Wall Street Journal*. March 8, 2011. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703386704576186371889744638.html?KEYWORDS=haass> (accessed August 20, 2011).

² Niall Ferguson. "The Big Dither." *Newsweek* 157, no. 13/14 (March 2011): 9.

³ David Cortright. "Room for Debate: A Multilateral No-Flight Zone." *NYTimes.com*. March 2, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/03/01/should-the-us-move-against-qaddafi/a-multilateral-no-flight-zone> (accessed August 18, 2011)

⁴ Josef Joffe. "Room for Debate: Ending American Exceptionalism." *NYTimes.com*. June 14, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2011/03/29/is-there-really-an-obama-doctrine/ending-american-exceptionalism-6> (accessed August 18, 2011).

⁵ Joint Publication 1 defines war as "socially sanctioned violence to achieve a political purpose. In its essence, war is a violent clash of wills." There are many phrases used as euphemisms for the term war - kinetic action, military operation, air campaign, or peacekeeping to name a few. However, in order to provide consistency, the author uses the term war to describe U.S. action in Libya.

⁶ Fareed Zakaria. "Why Are We In Libya?" *Time International (South Pacific Edition)*, April 4, 2011: 16-19.

⁷ Jeremiah Gertler. *Operation Odyssey Dawn (Libya): Background and Issues for Congress*. CRS Report for Congress, Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, March 30, 2011, and Luiza Ch. Savage. "End of the Empire?"

urged caution since Libya was not a national security interest and the Libyan opposition was an unknown entity.⁸ Initially, the President was reluctant to use force.⁹ However, as opinion in Europe and the Arab world began to coalesce against Qadhafi, Secretary Clinton joined forces with other key staff members in pressing the President to support European and Arab calls for action.¹⁰ Consequently, President Obama elected to back European allies and Arab partners against the Qadhafi regime. Secretary Clinton admitted in a televised interview that a significant factor in the decision to go to war in Libya was that it was in the vital interests of France and England and other Arab partners. It was also a quid pro quo for key allies having supported the U.S. in Afghanistan for the previous 10 years.¹¹ Though controversial, Obama showed that the U.S. is a team player and would let others lead the way.

In addition to letting others lead, President Obama ensured that he had the complete endorsement of the international community prior to taking action in Libya. When the civil war began, the Qadhafi regime came under international condemnation for its retaliation against civilian population centers. On 25 February 2011 Secretary of State Clinton released a press statement which welcomed actions by the UN Human Rights Council condemning human rights violations and called for an immediate end to Libyan government violence against the Libyan people.¹² The next day, the United Nations Security Council joined the Arab League and African Union in the condemnation of the Qadhafi regime and adopted Resolution 1970. This resolution condemned Qadhafi's use of force against civilians and human rights violations, demanded immediate cessation of violence, imposed a travel ban on Libyan officials, established an arms embargo, and enacted an asset freeze of Libyan financial and economic resources.¹³ Secretary Clinton released a press statement openly questioning Qadhafi's right to rule and urging him to leave the country.¹⁴

Events picked up momentum from this point on. On 3 March, the International Criminal Court announced its intent to investigate alleged crimes against humanity committed by the Qadhafi regime.¹⁵ Two days later, the rebel National Transitional Council (NTC) declared itself the true representative of Libya.¹⁶ Immediately following, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) expressed their support for the establishment of a no-fly zone.¹⁷ The Arab League dispatched a request to the UN Security Council to impose a no-fly zone over Libya in order to protect the civilian population.¹⁸ This was significant considering these organizations contain member states that could face this same kind of

Maclean's 124, no. 29 (August 2011): 32, and Yochi J. Dreazen "On Libya, Europeans Are the Hawks." National Journal, March 2011: 17.

⁸ Helene Cooper and Steven Lee Myers. "Obama Takes Hard Line With Libya After Shift by Clinton." New York Times. March 18, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/19/world/africa/19policy.html?_r=2 (accessed December 10, 2011) and Yochi J. Dreazen "On Libya, Europeans Are the Hawks." National Journal, March 2011: 17.

⁹ Christopher Dickey and Daniel Stone. "Why Sarkozy Went to War." Newsweek 157, no. 15 (April 2011): 44-48.

¹⁰ Jacob Heilbrunn. "Samantha and Her Subjects." National Interest 113 (May 2011): 6-15.

¹¹ Hillary Clinton and Robert Gates, interview by David Gregory. Meet the Press (March 27, 2011).

¹² Hillary Rodham Clinton. "Special Session of the Human Rights council on the Situation in Libya." www.state.gov. February 25, 2011. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/02/157177.htm> (accessed August 25, 2011).

¹³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1970. February 26, 2011. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/245/58/PDF/N1124558.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed August 12, 2011).

¹⁴ Hillary Rodham Clinton. "Holding the Qadhafi Government Accountable." www.state.gov. February 26, 2011. <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2011/02/157187.htm> (accessed August 25, 2011).

¹⁵ Seqeb Mueen and Grant Turnbull, . "www.rusi.org." Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and the Libya Operation - RUSI Interim Libya Campaign Report. September 23, 2011.

<http://www.rusi.org/news/ref:N4E7B610E8D672/> (accessed 10 November, 2011).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jeremiah Gertler. Operation Odyssey Dawn (Libya): Background and Issues for Congress.

uprising, and yet they called for action against Qadhafi anyway.¹⁹ On 16 March, the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations indicated publicly that the Obama administration supported the establishment of a no-fly zone.²⁰ The next day, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1973, which authorized the establishment of a no-fly zone, enforcement of an arms embargo, ban on all flights and travel for Libyan officials, and the freeze of all Libyan financial assets.²¹

Immediately following, President Obama spoke from the White House and explained his guidance to the Secretaries of Defense and State to enforce this resolution. Among other things, he stated that the U.S. would not deploy ground forces and that the U.S. would not use force to go beyond the well-defined goal of protecting Libyan civilians.²² On 19 March, U.S. participation in the war in Libya commenced.

Though the decision happened quickly, U.S. military force in Libya was employed only after a request for assistance from European allies, a request for action from the Arab League, a condemnation of Qadhafi's oppressive actions by the African Union, OIC, and GCC, a commitment from Arab allies to partner with the United States, and a mandate in the form of a United Nations Security Council Resolution authorizing the use of force for a very narrow purpose. President Obama's multilateral preconditions to go to war in Libya were in keeping with his 2010 National Security Strategy to work through international institutions and prevent atrocities.²³ The President signaled to the world that the U.S. could refrain from using its overwhelming military power in a unilateral manner outside the bounds of international norms and share the authority and responsibility with its allies. This approach was an important step in arresting U.S. unpopularity and regaining international credibility around the world through participation in a morally compelling and internationally endorsed operation that demonstrated the U.S. had learned its lesson from the unpopular decision to invade Iraq.

A further benefit from the war in Libya was that it reinforced the momentum of the Arab Spring movement and undermined the long-standing strategic narrative against the United States in the Arab world. It presented a powerful opportunity for the U.S. to counter a long standing Arab accusation against the motives of Washington. One commentator observed, "For decades, Arabs have regarded Washington as the enemy because it has been the principal supporter of the old order... Al-Qaeda's first argument against the U.S. is that it supports the tyrannies of the Arab world as they oppress their people. Now the U.S. has the opportunity to break the dysfunctional dynamic that produces anti-American hatred and violence."²⁴ U.S. support for freedom fighters in Libya encouraged Arabs desperate for political change in their leadership.²⁵ Additionally, it demonstrated to autocratic regimes that the U.S. still has the will to oppose them and it assured those who long for the right to self-determine that the U.S. is on their side. As the President stated, "Wherever people long to be free, they will find a friend in the United States."²⁶

U.S. participation against Qadhafi not only reinforced the Arab Spring, but it reinforced the legitimacy and military capability of NATO as well. One NATO Defense College author noted that the operation was a success for two reasons: NATO demonstrated its capacity to act quickly and efficiently, and proved its ability to end the engagement when the reason for the

¹⁹ Council on Foreign Relations. *The New Arab Revolt: What Happened, What It Means, What Comes Next*. New York, NY: Council on Foreign Relations, 2011.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Barack Obama. "Remarks by the President on the Situation in Libya." [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/18/remarks-president-situation-libya). Office of the Press Secretary. March 18, 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/18/remarks-president-situation-libya> (accessed August 25, 2011).

²³ Barack Obama. National Security Strategy. Washington DC: The White House, 2010.

²⁴ Fareed Zakaria. "The Libyan Conundrum." *Time*, March 21, 2011: 23-33.

²⁵ Marc Lynch. "Libya inspires the Arabs." [ForeignPolicy.com](http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/22/libya_inspires_the_arabs). August 22, 2011. http://lynch.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/22/libya_inspires_the_arabs (accessed December 7, 2011).

²⁶ Barack Obama. Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya 2011.

intervention had ended.²⁷ NATO took the lead from the U.S. just 10 days after the Security Council approved the use of force, which is significant considering how many countries had to agree in order to make that happen.²⁸ It not only acted quickly, it executed the campaign successfully. In 214 days, NATO flew 26,530 sorties, hailed 3,175 vessels, and performed a total of 2,547 humanitarian movements.²⁹ NATO action saved the lives of many Libyans and enabled the demise of the Qadhafi regime. Furthermore, when news of Qadhafi's death emerged from Libya, NATO operations ceased within days. Ultimately, it was a successful military campaign for NATO and a boost to the credibility of the alliance.³⁰

The short-term result of this war in Libya was the downfall of an internationally unpopular dictator that threatened to kill masses of his own people. The U.S. participated in the successful prosecution of an unconventional war in support of an insurgency in an Arab country without the loss of a single U.S. life. In short, it was a vindication of Obama's approach to the application of military power and a nice gain in political capital coming into the campaign season.

The Negative

There are, however, several problems raised by the Libyan intervention that present challenges for US strategic interests. To begin with, this war spawned other strategic narratives that are harmful to U.S. interests. U.S. military action in Libya begs the question of why not Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, Iran or other countries facing oppressive regimes? As one commentator wrote, "We all want to protect civilians from Gaddafi's murderous wrath. But is there a contradiction in ordering air strikes on Libya while ignoring conflicts elsewhere?"³¹ U.S. military involvement in Libya thus creates suspicion for many in the Arab world that U.S. motives are not as pure as the President claims. After all, Libya has oil reserves that the U.S. and Europe can exploit while other countries that the U.S. has not taken military action in do not. One author noted, "For months, many Arabs labeled [President Obama] an opportunist who used uprisings to his advantage in some corners of the Middle East, and ignored them when they threatened to interfere with oil markets or upend America's strategy to contain Iran."³² Inconsistent support for democratic movements makes the U.S. vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy. It undermines the political reform the U.S. claims to support by refusing to come to the aid of those who look to the U.S. for help and then do not get it. For example, in Bahrain, Shiite protests against the minority Sunni ruling class started in February 2011. They were forcefully contained with the help of 1,200 Saudi troops and 30 Saudi tanks. According to a human rights group, 34 people were killed, more than 1,400 have been imprisoned, and as many as 3,600 people were fired from their jobs. Since then, Bahrain has taken on the likeness of a police state.³³ U.S. tolerance toward Bahraini repression could offend a variety of Shiites

²⁷ Karl-Heinz Kamp. NATO's Chicago Summit: A Thorny Agenda. Research Paper, Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2011, 8.

²⁸ Leon E. Panetta. "Carnegie Europe (NATO) As Delivered by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta, Brussels, Belgium." Defense.gov. October 5, 2011. <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1618> (accessed October 5, 2011).

²⁹ "NATO and Libya Operational Media Update." Allied Joint Force Command Naples. NATO HQ Press Desk. October 31, 2011. http://www.jfcnaples.nato.int/Unified_Protector/page191573217.aspx (accessed December 6, 2011).

³⁰ Leon E. Panetta. "Carnegie Europe (NATO) As Delivered by Secretary of Defense Leon E. Panetta, Brussels, Belgium." Defense.gov. October 5, 2011. <http://www.defense.gov/speeches/speech.aspx?speechid=1618> (accessed October 5, 2011).

³¹ Mehdi Hasan. "O, What a Liberal War." New Statesman, March 28, 2011: 20-22.

³² David E. Sanger. "Half a Doctrine Will Have to Do." www.nytimes.com. May 21, 2011. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/22/weekinreview/22sanger.html?_r=1&sq=half%20a%20doctrine%20will%20have%20to%20do&st=cse&scp=1&pagewanted=all (accessed December 10, 2011).

³³ "Bahrain News - The Protests (2011)." NYTimes.com. January 25, 2012. <http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/bahrain/index.html> (accessed January 31, 2012).

outside of Bahrain and cause them to view Iran as a potential savior.³⁴ Inconsistent application of U.S. military support for oppressed people who desire greater freedom undermines U.S. values. It makes the U.S. vulnerable to new anti-western narratives.

Likewise, this inconsistency undermines the credibility of the UN doctrine of responsibility to protect (R2P). A debate about the international community's mishandlings of the human tragedies in Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo arose during the 1990s. It culminated in the acceptance of the R2P concept by the Security Council in 2005.³⁵ The 69 member nations (including the U.S. and European allies)³⁶ agreed to:

Clear and unambiguous acceptance by all governments of the collective international responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Willingness to take timely and decisive collective action for this purpose, through the Security Council, when peaceful means prove inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to do it.³⁷

Responsibility implies an obligation. To take action in one country to prevent war crimes, ethnic cleansing, or crimes against humanity and to neglect another where conditions may be more severe implies a double standard. When countries and the international community use a double standard to apply R2P, then in the eyes of many, that doctrine seems to become an excuse for military intervention in order for Western countries to pursue their own interests. Although R2P may be a noble concept, it carries with it a counter-narrative that may have negative consequences for the rescuer when unevenly applied.

Another more serious implication that the war against Qadhafi's regime created is the narrative that works against U.S. strategic interests with respect to nuclear non-proliferation. Qadhafi had a long history of support for anti-Western, anti-colonial, separatist, Islamic movements and terrorist groups. He opposed Arab negotiation with Israel and promoted armed resistance to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine.³⁸ During the 80s and 90s, Libya was subjected to UN sanctions and international isolation due to sponsorship of two high-profile airliner bombings. He also pursued nuclear technology.

In 1999, Qadhafi initiated an apparent transformation when he agreed to compensate victims' families for the UTA Flight 772 bombing and let two Libyans stand trial for the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103. Following 9/11, Qadhafi cooperated with U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism efforts. In 2003, he abandoned Libya's weapons of mass destruction and long range missile development programs and renounced state sponsorship of violent political movements. He participated in peacekeeping efforts in Africa and subsidized UN World Food Program aid flights. In 2006, the Bush Administration announced its intention to restore diplomatic relations with Libya and upgraded its Liaison Office in Tripoli to an embassy. The country was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council in October 2007 and even served as council president in 2008.³⁹

Qadhafi responded to international pressure when he abandoned his nuclear program aspirations, denounced state sponsored terrorism, behaved more responsibly within the

³⁴ W. Andrew Terrill. "The Arab Spring and the Future of U.S. Interests and Cooperative Security in the Arab World." [strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil](http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil). August 2, 2011.

<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/The-Arab-Spring-and-the-Future-of-US-Interests/2011/8/2> (accessed August 29, 2011).

³⁵ "Responsibility to Protect." International Crisis Group. 2011. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/key-issues/responsibility-to-protect.aspx#primer> (accessed January 31, 2012).

³⁶ International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect. September 14, 2009. http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/index.php/component/content/article/35-r2pcs-topics/2626-un-resolution-on-the-responsibility-to-protect#1.Member_states_adopt_resolution_after_GA_debate (accessed January 31, 2012).

³⁷ "2005 World Summit Outcome." www.un.org. September 2005.

³⁸ Christopher M. Blanchard. *Libya: Background and U.S. Relations*. CRS Report for Congress, Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, September 17, 2008.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

international system, and pursued normalized relations with the global community. It now seems all for naught. When the bombing started over Libya, Qaddafi and his sons felt betrayed because they had complied with international demands.⁴⁰ This scenario is not lost on states that may be pursuing a nuclear weapons program. Some believe that if Qadhafi had acquired a credible deterrent, things may have turned out different for him.⁴¹ An insightful author stated, "Qaddafi's forceful downfall will make acquiring nuclear weapons all the more justifiable to states that feel threatened by outsiders. In turn, that will erode the vision of nonproliferation that held such promise in the post-cold-war era."⁴² One should not think that this observation has escaped the leadership of Iran, North Korea or other nations waiting in line for the opportunity to acquire nuclear technology. For its part, Iran likely has no intention of terminating its nuclear power pursuits, but it now has a reason to pursue it with a renewed sense of urgency.

Another negative aspect that developed from this conflict is NATO leadership took liberty with the language of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973 and pursued regime change in Libya when that was not the purpose of the resolution. Paragraph 4 of UNSCR 1973 authorized member states "to take all necessary measures...to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory...."⁴³ There is an intent here to limit attacks for the protection of civilians. But NATO used it to justify a seven-month bombing campaign in Libya. Just one week after requesting the no-fly zone over Libya, the Arab League questioned the tactics of western forces. Their spokesman stated that approval of a no-fly zone was based on a desire to prevent Qadhafi's air force from attacking civilians and was not designed to endorse the intense bombing and missile attacks on ground forces.⁴⁴ In a joint op-ed by Presidents Obama, Sarkozy, and PM Cameron, they wrote that their duty under UNSCR 1973 was to protect civilians, not to remove Qadhafi by force.⁴⁵ But in President Obama's address to the nation, he stated that the world and Libya would be better off without Qadhafi. He affirmed that removing Qadhafi from power was the goal, but through non-military means. He claimed that if the mission expanded to regime change, the coalition would splinter.⁴⁶

But regime change is exactly what NATO enabled. One British commentator observed that once the resolution passed, Western powers interpreted it as they wanted. Officially, the intervention was to protect civilians, but after Benghazi was secured the mission expanded and regime change became the main objective.⁴⁷ When questioned about this apparent

⁴⁰ Michael Hastings. "Inside Obama's War Room." *RollingStone.com*. October 13, 2011. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/inside-obamas-war-room-20111013?print=true> (accessed November 14, 2011).

⁴¹ Donald Kirk. "North Korea Laments Gaddafi's Nuke Folly." *Asia Times Online*. March 29, 2011. <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/MC29Dg01.html>, (accessed January 31, 2012)

⁴² Reza Sanati. "A troubling lesson from Libya: Don't give up nukes." *CSMonitor.com*. August 30, 2011. <http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2011/0830/A-troubling-lesson-from-Libya-Don-t-give-up-nukes> (accessed December 7, 2011).

⁴³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973. March 17, 2011. <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N11/268/39/PDF/N1126839.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed August 12, 2011).

⁴⁴ Edward Cody. "Arab League condemns broad Western bombing campaign in Libya." *washingtonpost.com*. March 20, 2011. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/arab-league-condemns-broad-bombing-campaign-in-libya/2011/03/20/AB1pSg1_story.html (accessed December 7, 2011).

⁴⁵ Obama, Sarkozy, and Cameron. Joint Op-ed by President Obama, Prime Minister Cameron and President Sarkozy: Libya's Pathway to Peace. The White House, Washington DC: Office of the Press Secretary, 2011.

⁴⁶ Barack Obama. "Remarks by the President in Address to the Nation on Libya." *Whitehouse.gov*. March 28, 2011. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/photos-and-video/video/2011/03/28/president-obama-s-speech-libya#transcript> (accessed August 20, 2011).

⁴⁷ Seqeb Mueen and Grant Turnbull, . "www.rusi.org." *Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and the Libya Operation - RUSI Interim Libya Campaign Report*. September 23, 2011. <http://www.rusi.org/news/ref:N4E7B610E8D672/> (accessed 10 November, 2011).

contradiction in a press conference during the war, Obama explained that the U.S. policy was for Qadhafi to leave power but military actions were directed toward humanitarian efforts.⁴⁸ When the President offered this explanation, U.S. aircraft were bombing targets in support of opposition forces. His response revealed the political tight rope he seemed to be walking.

Speaking of a tight rope, the U.S. faces significant economic challenges and is financially overextended. The President's decision to intercede in Libya added to the enormous price tag of U.S. wars over the past eleven years and contributed over a billion dollars to the national debt for which there is no repayment plan.⁴⁹ Furthermore, this war in Libya underscored the fact that the U.S. continues to finance a disproportionate share of NATO defense requirements. Those countries whose interests were served most and whose leaders were so adamant about military action did not possess the capability to successfully execute this campaign without U.S. participation.⁵⁰ The result would likely have been different had the U.S. not come along side to ensure its success.⁵¹ In a recent speech in Brussels, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates delivered a stinging criticism noting that every member of NATO voted in favor of the Libya mission, but less than half participated and less than a third flew strike missions.⁵² Gates warned European members that they need to be responsible for their fair share of defense and indicated that American policy makers may no longer be willing to underwrite the defense of European nations that seem satisfied with the American tax payer bearing the burden.⁵³ NATO members have become comfortable in the shade of the U.S. military umbrella. Some European NATO officials acknowledge the mismatch between European participation and financial contributions as compared to those of the U.S. and agree that it must be addressed.⁵⁴ But their defense spending indicates that they are in no hurry to do so.⁵⁵ For the sake of the U.S. economy, law makers should reevaluate the investment that the U.S. makes in NATO, and the President ought to resist the temptation to participate in wars that are of only peripheral interest to the U.S.

Not only did this war put the economy at further risk, U.S. participation in this war put the credibility of U.S. foreign policy at risk. Michael Doyle describes three traps liberators fall into when they attempt to free those who cannot free themselves. One trap is the formation of a new tyranny with another ideological label attached. Another trap is the creation of another civil war. The final trap is the establishment of a colony.⁵⁶ To explain, if the leadership that arises from the aftermath of this rebellion turns out to be antagonistic toward U.S. interests, the administration will be to blame for removing an actor that was behaving somewhat responsibly in the international arena and replacing it with something worse. Or, if the new Libyan

⁴⁸ Jesse Lee. President Obama Answers Questions on Libya: A Testament to the Men and Women in Uniform. Joint Press Conference, Washington DC: The White House Blog, 2011.

⁴⁹ Micah Zenko "What Does Libya Cost the United States?" Council on Foreign Relations. August 11, 2011. <http://blogs.cfr.org/zenko/2011/08/11/what-does-libya-cost-the-united-states/> (accessed January 31, 2012).

⁵⁰ David Brunnstrom. "NATO says must address weaknesses exposed by Libya." Reuters. September 5, 2011. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2011/09/05/uk-libya-nato-rasmussen-idUKTRE7842RP20110905> (accessed January 31, 2012).

⁵¹ Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt. "Seeing Limits to 'New' Kind of War in Libya." NYTimes.com. October 21, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/22/world/africa/nato-war-in-libya-shows-united-states-was-vital-to-toppling-qaddafi.html> (accessed January 31, 2012).

⁵² Robert Gates. "Transcript of Defense Secretary Gates's Speech on NATO's Future." blogs.wsj.com. June 10, 2011. <http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2011/06/10/transcript-of-defense-secretary-gatess-speech-on-natos-future/> (accessed December 7, 2011).

⁵³ Robert Gates. "Transcript of Defense Secretary Gates's Speech on NATO's Future."

⁵⁴ Karl-Heinz Kamp. NATO's Chicago Summit: A Thorny Agenda.

⁵⁵ Howard LaFranchi. "What NATO Looks Like in the Age of European Austerity." *The Christian Science Monitor*, December 3, 2010:16 and Ben Quinn. "What Britain's Cuts Mean For Its Place In The World." *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 28, 2010:14.

⁵⁶ Michael W. Doyle. "The Folly of Protection: Is Intervention Against Qaddafi's Regime Legal and Legitimate?" *The New Arab Revolt*, May 2011: 263-268.

government develops into an administration that cannot gain the support of the people, then a civil war could develop again. In order for it to retain power, it will have to use force. It would then be open to the same narrative used against the Arab ruling class today. The new government of Libya could be labeled a client state of Western imperialism. This could lead to further acrimony toward the U.S. and western allies. For this reason, it may be wise for the administration to detach itself from Libya altogether and make a clean hand-off to our European friends to assist with Libyan post-revolutionary development. Regime change is not an end state. It is only the beginning of unpredictable consequences, as we learned in Iraq.

Finally, speaking of unpredictable, by elevating the authority of the UN Security Council over that of the U.S. Congress, the President reinforced the expansion of the Imperial Presidency. One observer noted, "In his effort to forge a new, more multilateral model for intervention, Obama had succeeded in securing the backing of NATO, the United Nations and the Arab League. But the White House had done little to line up the one U.S. body that is actually vested with the constitutional authority to authorize a war: Congress."⁵⁷ President Obama is not the first one to do this. It has become a presidential trend since WWII.

This is a constitutional issue with strategic consequences that must be readdressed in this country. The President should not be handed the latitude to launch the United States into war in a unilateral manner without approval from Congress. It places the U.S. at great risk. The U.S. Congress must reassert its constitutional power to be the declarative body for U.S. war-making.

The Framers recognized the President has the authority to defend the United States against invasion or attack or imminent threat. However, the Framers never intended for a U.S. President to make a unilateral decision to initiate war. The President knows this. During his presidential campaign, he affirmed, "The President does not have power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation."⁵⁸ Yet, as President, he has followed suit with his predecessors and stepped beyond his Constitutional authority.

Military action in Libya was not in response to an imminent threat to this nation nor was it self-defense. U.S. actions in Libya are at best a peripheral interest. Administration officials argued that U.S. military action in Libya was not really at war because Libyan forces could not exchange meaningful fire. They imply that the President can employ drones and missiles without having to bother with Congress.⁵⁹ This decision further entrenched the precedent that the President can take the country to war without prior approval from the U.S. Congress and this has strategic consequences. It is a trend in presidential decision making that undermines the national decision making process as framed by the U.S. Constitution. Unless this flaw is corrected, future presidents could take the nation into war where no war is required and the consequences could be catastrophic.

Implications for National Security Strategy

Having examined several positive and negative aspects of U.S. participation in the war in Libya, it is important to consider what it all means for U.S. strategic interests. In the 2010 NSS, President Obama identified four enduring national interests: Security, Prosperity, Values,

⁵⁷ Michael Hastings. "Inside Obama's War Room." RollingStone.com. October 13, 2011. <http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/news/inside-obamas-war-room-20111013?print=true> (accessed November 14, 2011).

⁵⁸ "Campaign '08 Candidates' answers by question." Boston.com. 2008. <http://www.boston.com/news/politics/2008/specials/CandidateQA/question2/> (accessed December 10, 2011)

⁵⁹ Mark Landler and Charlie Savage. "White House Defends Continuing U.S. Role in Libya Operation." www.nytimes.com. June 15, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/16/us/politics/16powers.html> (accessed December 10, 2011).

and International Order.⁶⁰ Considering these four categories, did the war in Libya strengthen U.S. strategic interests or put them at further risk?

First, consider security. The war in Iraq alarmed U.S. allies and adversaries because of the manner in which it was pursued. It created a reaction against the U.S. that if left unchecked could have further isolated the nation. The manner in which President Obama went to war in Libya was an important part of checking that isolation. The U.S. took a less threatening posture, supported the interests of allies only after unanimous international approval, and gave the lead to NATO. Also, by supporting the Libyan rebellion, President Obama undermined a popular narrative against the U.S. with respect to supporting oppressive regimes.

However, U.S. involvement in this war created counter-narratives against the U.S. The first is one of hypocrisy. The U.S. took military action in Libya, but nowhere else. U.S. values and interests seem to be the same only when it is convenient. Secondly, and much more seriously, is the narrative that works against nuclear non-proliferation. This is a vital interest for the U.S. and its allies. This war very likely could encourage those seeking nuclear weapons to pursue them with renewed urgency. Third, there is no guarantee that Libya will become a democratic, pro-western nation. It may become an adversary yet again. It remains to be seen. Finally, the President committed the U.S. to another war without the consent of Congress. This further solidifies the precedent that the decision to go to war rests in the hands of one individual. That is a big risk for national security.

Next is prosperity. It will take time for reconstruction and development, but this war opened up new opportunities for U.S. and European markets in Libya. Oil is the biggest prize and European companies will reap the greatest gain.⁶¹ The war in Iraq cost the U.S. significantly in terms of blood and treasure, but the 7-month war in Libya cost less than one month in Iraq and not a single U.S. life was lost.

However, Libya is not a large economy and any new opportunity is unlikely to make a substantial impact on U.S. markets.⁶² Furthermore, even though the cost of this war was a fraction of other conflicts, it only added to the snowballing national debt and did nothing to arrest the economic uncertainties facing the U.S. The return on investment is not there. Additionally, this war highlighted the unbalanced investment the U.S. has made in NATO as compared to European partners. The NSS states that the foundation for U.S. strength and national security is a thriving economy. It is difficult to see how this war reinforced this important strategic interest.

What about U.S. values? This war prevented Qadhafi from killing many of his own people. It brought an end to the Qadhafi dictatorship and created the possibility for a free Libya. Furthermore, it reinforced the Arab Spring and encouraged those who seek self-determination that the U.S. may support them.

On the other hand, the U.S. failure to lend military support to movements similar to the one in Libya makes the U.S. vulnerable to the charge of hypocrisy and undermines U.S. values. Furthermore, the U.S. leaders emphasize that they supported a democratic movement, but that movement could turn out to be something much different. The chance that Libya will turn out to be a pro-western democracy that supports U.S. interests is yet to be seen.

Finally, consider international order. The manner in which the President prosecuted this war in Libya reinforced the credibility of several international organizations to include the UN, Arab League, African Union, GCC, OIC, and NATO. By supporting the NATO lead in this war, the U.S. lent credibility to NATO as a war fighting and political alliance.

⁶⁰ Barack Obama, 2010 National Security Strategy:17.

⁶¹ David Anderson. "The Fight for Libya's Oil." University of Cambridge Politics in Spire. September 15, 2011. <http://politicsinspires.org/2011/09/the-fight-for-libyas-oil/> (accessed January 31, 2012).

⁶² Ibid.

However, without the U.S. support, NATO could not have succeeded in this war effort. Without a greater investment from European allies, the U.S. is just propping up a weak institution. Additionally, to assert that the world had a responsibility to protect the Libyan people, but not others that face the same threat, undermines the R2P doctrine. It is considered by some to be nothing more than a façade for western nations to create proxy states that serve their interests. Finally, by taking license with UNSCR 1973, NATO members took advantage of the intent of the resolution and undermined their own credibility. This gives Russia and China a convenient excuse to veto future efforts to use force. And since the President has shown that the authority of the Security Council overrides the U.S. Congress, this in turn weakened the U.S. within the international system by granting other nations leverage over U.S. actions.

Conclusion

The war in Libya created very positive short term effects. A dictator is gone. The people of Libya have an opportunity to improve their country. It cost much less than Iraq or Afghanistan. There was not a single U.S. casualty. And the manner in which it was fought arrested U.S. unpopularity and curbed global concern over its use of force.

However, it created long term consequences that outweigh the immediate benefits. It did not improve U.S. security. Rather it put the future of U.S. security at further risk. It did not improve U.S. prosperity. It revealed an over investment in NATO and increased the national debt. It did support U.S. values, but only in a limited way. Finally, this war demonstrated a U.S. commitment to and reinforcement of international organizations. But in applying the R2P doctrine to Libya and taking license with UNSCR 1973, the U.S. weakened its credibility and gave Russia and China leverage over future U.S. military action.

Overall, the negative aspects outweigh the positive ones and only time will tell how it works out for Libya.

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