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<div align="center">R2P in Libya: When Countries Intervene</div>

Introduction

After the intervention of the U.S. government and NATO in 2011, Libya had been noted as the model for the 'right to protect' (R2P) principle.[1] Citing civilian protection, the UN Security Council authorized an "all necessary measures" intervention in Libya (UN 2011: 3-4). These measures were carried out through NATO and her individual states, the United States and France in particular. This paper argues two points concerning this intervention in Libya: (1) the international use of R2P was a cover for regime change and (2) the intervention expedited precisely what R2P was mandated to prevent—large-scale mortality rates and a division of Libyan people. This paper does not take a position on the morality nor principle of involved parties, only the underlying intents and the effects thereof.

Background

Emboldened by the overturning of regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, in February 2011 masses of Libyan people began a full-scale armed revolt against their government. However, the underlying tensions leading to the armed revolt can arguably be traced back to before the Italo-Turkish War in 1911-12, when there were two distinct political divisions: the tribes of Gharyan and Tripolitania.[2] Since then, a narrative of multiple and often opposing identities has pervaded the region; first, as an Italian colony then as a short-lived kingdom under King Idris, and, recently, a state characterized by the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

Colonel Muammar Gaddafi had been the *de facto* leader of the Jamahiriya since 1961, operating under both a symbolic head of state and legitimate head of the military. This fractured state identity undercut Colonel Gaddafi's authority and standing as a uniting figure for the region. Gaddafi's authoritarian measures to prevent opposing parties and state critics did little to

mend the century-old cleavages. Instead, Gaddafi's regime inspired many malcontents among Libyans amidst cries of political corruption, environmental issues, and repression of civil rights.[3] Initially, the conflict axis consisted of state security forces loyal to Colonel Gaddafi and dissidents of the regime. However, these age-old cleavages appeared over the period of foreign intervention and the oppositional forces would split along tribal and religious lines. The very broad term of dissidents also included innocent civilians protesting peacefully. The inclusion of peaceful protesters is essential to understanding how foreign intervention was ultimately justified.

Major Western news networks reported Libyan security forces using live ammunition against peaceful protesters to the outrage of many international actors. Western media coverage instilled a sense that genocide was forthcoming in Libya at the hands of Gaddafi forces. The outrage incited an international response from NATO spearheaded by France, the United Kingdom, and the United States ranging from political intercessions to military operations. Following NATO's response Western media outlets embraced the Libyan situation as a model of R2P.

The Set-up for Regime Change

The response of foreign states worldwide was to repeat and enable a narrative that would make outright intervention more palatable to the international community after the failures of Iraq and Afghanistan. The mainstream narrative comprised of two false premises: first, the violence was initiated by the Libyan Armed Forces and, second, NATO's primary aim was to protect civilians.[4] The incorrect major Western media reports concerning brutal repression against peaceful protestors were sustained even after the situation was clarified. Benghazi and other cities witnessed large-scale violence on the behalf of insurgents involving car bombs,

Molotov cocktails, and burning government buildings. As the situation escalated, state security forces responded proportionally to the threat.[5] However, many of the news networks who had reported this narrative failed to their correct factual inconsistencies—leading many in the Western hemisphere to believe Libya to be at the mercy of a genocidal dictator.

The second premise, the primary goal of NATO to protect civilians, was also key to generating support for intervention. This premise was also false. As I will show, there was a ceasefire option on the table. A cease-fire would have prevented civilian death far more effectively than engaging in further warfare. Instead, NATO employed tactics contradictory to keeping innocents safe. These include attacking retreating Libyan forces, bombing state troops in Gaddafi's hometown of Sirte despite their lack of threat to pro-Gaddafi citizens, and arming rebel forces intent on eliminating the former dictator.[6] These steps reflect a principal mission to remove Gaddafi as a state leader rather than establish peace and protection for Libyan citizens. Thus, NATO responded to the region's uprisings by framing intervention as a moral obligation of the international community as opposed to an invested interest in regime change. This narrative paved the way for immediate foreign interventions.

Exeunt Gaddafi, Enter TNC

Once a precedent for intervention was set, diplomatic initiatives officially began. One such example is the unofficial recognition of the National Transition Council. The National Transition Council, or Transitional National Council (TNC), was announced in Benghazi on 27 February 2011 with the intention to front the revolution—just two weeks after the initial protests. Eleven days later, 10 March 2011, France officially recognized the TNC as the sole seat of state authority in Libya. That same day, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met with TNC leaders effectively legitimizing the council as a Libyan entity of authority and power as opposed to

government insurgents. Though informal, this recognition of the oppositional forces so soon after its genesis set a dangerous precedent of rewarding perpetrators of violence. March 17 the Under Secretary of State, William Burns, affirmed US support of an upcoming UN vote on a no-fly zone while announcing an investigation to transfer Gaddafi's frozen assets in the US to the oppositional forces.

International support of a no-fly zone was critical at this point because it *stalled* the de-escalation of regional fighting. On 28 February Mustafa Abdul-Jalil, a TNC representative, called upon international powers for a no-fly zone to prevent the state from using their superior military resources.[7] By recognizing and then capitulating to the needs of the rebels, international powers reversed the tide of the rebellion. Rather than government forces overpowering the weakening resistance by the end of March, the UN empowered the insurgency allowing the conflict to build to civil war. Burns also announced the potential of opening an embassy in Washington for the TNC. The embassy was opened on 24 May 2011 and $30 billion worth of frozen Gaddafi regime assets were transferred to the TNC as soon as 15 July 2011—the day Secretary Clinton formally recognized the authority of the TNC.

The formal recognition of insurgents based on political power also represented the same identity cleavage Gaddafi failed to mend. Accordingly, when tribal and religious groups realized their interests were not going to be reflected in the next government under the TNC then division further fractured between oppositional groups. However, perhaps the most impactful non-military intervention was the $30 billion dollars transferred to the TNC. The timing of the release of funds paralleled the course of the civil war in 2011. If the funds had been transferred once peace had been established, then perhaps measures could have been taken to cement the regional authority. Instead, the funds were released during the apex of violence. Although the United

States expressed hope that the TNC would use to money for public services, the country still released the money at a time when the most pressing priority in Libya was not state infrastructure-building but state security. Thus, the TNC's immediate concern was to arm their fighters to eliminate those forces still loyal to Gaddafi. The timing of the funds transfer lends itself to the growing list of evidence that regime change, not peacekeeping, was the United State's ultimate goal. Even discounting the direct military interventions of NATO, the political interventions used had a large effect on the rate and type of growth of insurgent forces.

On 17 March 2011, the UN Security Council passed a resolution for a no-fly zone over Libya in what resolution supporters called a move to protect civilians from air attacks. Less than a day later, Gaddafi's government announced a ceasefire in response to the UN's decision. This is in part due to Libya recognizing the foreign power behind the resolution and that Gaddafi's forces had recovered most of Libya. At this point in the conflict, Gaddafi had little need to attack unarmed civilians on land or air rendering a no-fly zone redundant. Two days later, on 19 March, eight French Rafale fighters conducted attacks on advancing Libyan ground forces in southern Benghazi. That same day 110 Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from US and UK ships targeting Gaddafi's shoreline air defenses.

Results of Foreign Intervention

By attacking during a time of de-escalation, the coalition of nations reversed the descent into non-violence. Through passing a no-fly zone and then maintaining military intervention during a period of de-escalation, NATO effectively prolonged the war in Libya. Prolonging the duration of state instability and chaotic destruction ensured the collapse of state infrastructure.

Alan Kuperman, associate professor at the University of Austin, appraised that about 1,000 Libyans on all sides died between the start of the protests in February and the foreign

interventions in March.[8] However, at the end of foreign military intervention the Transitional

National Council stated that over 25,000 had died. Should this number prove true then nearly

24,000 lives were lost since the interventions started. Thus, not only did NATO's campaign

defeat its own stated purpose, but confidence in what infrastructure remained corroded as the

rebels fractured into multiple groups.

Among the casualties of the 2011 Libyan civil war is Muammar Gaddafi. Gaddafi was

killed shortly by rebels on 20 October 2011 after being found hiding in a drain during the battle

of Sirte. The power vacuum left by Gaddafi's absence is not limited to state authority but also

includes issues of state identity. What makes Libya, Libya is now uncertain. Such an opportunity

to fill a vacant identity is not lost on tribal and religious groups. However, due to tribal

disinclination to operate within large monolithic blocks of people, it would be difficult to define

a state by small areas tribal lines. This opened the door for a new identity to act as a cohesive

bond between fractured peoples: radical Islam. The chaos left by the physical gouging of Libya

by coalition forces through airstrikes and other forces is the perfect fuel for religious extremism.

Now that nearly 40% of youth in Libya are unemployed, their options for the future remain

slim.[9] Part of the attraction to radical Islam is its common approach to modern Western

imperialism: to thwart it. Many young Libyans may see Islamic militant groups as a way out of

poverty and could cling to the opportunity to strike back at those they feel are responsible for

their current state of chaos.

After the suppression of Gaddafi's state, radical Islamist groups surfaced as some of the

most determined and vehement rebels. The arming and training of such groups in the interest of

the revolution eventually became the country's undoing as the TNC tried to establish a

government in 2012. The killing of US Ambassador Christopher Stevens and his colleagues

during September 2012 at the hands of militant Islamic group Ansar al-Sharia in Benghazi

further highlights NATO's proliferation of arms into extremist hands. Understanding that a

chaotic state is a vulnerable state, the Islamic State quickly found a foothold in the region.

Eventually, the Islamic State expanded its operations from Sirte to Misrata in an attempt to more

efficiently attack the oil port of Sidra. Though ISIL's hold in Libya has recently decreased, it still

remains an aggressive force in parts of Libya.

However, religious extremism was only one side of the identity cleavage within Libya. In

a time of instability and uncertainty, tribal rivalries remained key in determining loyalty. By

fracturing the potential of state incentives and enforcement for tribal groups to tolerate one

another, foreign interventional led Libyans to find security among deep ancestral ties within

tribal and religious communities. With rebel interests split in so many directions, a centralized

government became difficult to hold. The TNC made futile attempts to unify Libya under their

banner, but eventually succumbed to other religious and tribal ambitions.[10]

When the TNC officially handed over power to the newly-elected General National

Congress (GNC) in early August 2012, there was little power to hand over. Unable to exert

authority or military presence in Libya, the GNC fled to a Tobruk ferry in August 2014. Since

then power has been split between two main, competing governments: the GNC and the House

of Representatives. The GNC, based in Tripoli, draws its support from the Islamist group

Muslim Brotherhood, Misrata armed forced, and Amazigh (Berber) communities. The House of

Representatives, based in Tobruk, is comprised of a significant federal, anti-Islamist and

tribal—namely the Werfalla—bloc. Even within these two main governments there are extremist

interests that inhibit cohesion between so many groups. Due to the governments' incapacity for

mediating conflicting interests within their blocs, Libya now not only has to deal with costly civil

war but a basic Libyan identity.[11] Thus, extremist groups with clear alliances and identities were able to prevail amidst the conflict.

Despite NATO's effort to establish a foothold in the MENA region during the Arab Spring, their very interventions were the means by which extremist groups seized territory. This is far from the first time that foreign countries have intervened resulting in a tremendous human cost. In fact, the case of 2011 Libya illustrates the third time since 2001 that the United States has chosen the route of regime change without instituting a stable, internally-sustainable infrastructure. The imminent consequences of foreign military disruption and then departure were the recovery of Taliban in Afghanistan post-2001, the rise of the Islamic state in Iraq post-2003, and, most recently, various extremists groups—including ISIL—laying claim to parts of Libya. Though early administration leaders never maintained their key goal was to nation-build the very purpose of the interventions were emphasized as a duty to the vulnerable people of Libya. The failure to provide a sustainable center of regional authority produced a power vacuum wherein ambitious and fierce radicals could vie for control. Though impossible to prove the counterfactual, even if foreign intervention may have prevented an enormous loss of life during the struggle for power while Gaddafi lived, the subsequent civil war has more than made up for the lives that might have been taken since January 2011.

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