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Abstract
Operation Unified Protector (Libya, 2011) is the latest example of how a limited-means military intervention in a humanitarian crisis can stop the murder of innocent civilians. Proponents of intervention in the name of "responsibility to protect" (R2P) have stated that the air campaign strategy used in Libya could be the model for future U.S. military engagement overseas. This begs the question of when the United States should insert itself militarily into a humanitarian crisis. For instance, Syria is a potential candidate for military intervention. The following article takes the reasons for military intervention in Libya, as explained by President Obama in his address to the nation in March 2011, and creates criteria for future humanitarian military intervention. By defining and applying these criteria to a humanitarian crisis such as Syria, it is revealed that the Libya campaign model does not fit Syria now, nor does the model provide a panacea for all future humanitarian crises. While the tenets of the Libya strategy could apply to other humanitarian crises, proponents for military intervention must meet the criteria laid out in this article, or the United States may find itself committed to a futile air campaign unable to achieve the nation's strategic objectives.

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The Libyan Model and Strategy: Why it Won't Work in Syria

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Abstract

Operation Unified Protector (Libya, 2011) is the latest example of how a limited-means military intervention in a humanitarian crisis can stop the murder of innocent civilians. Proponents of intervention in the name of "responsibility to protect" (R2P) have stated that the air campaign strategy used in Libya could be the model for future U.S. military engagement overseas. This begs the question of when the United States should insert itself militarily into a humanitarian crisis. For instance, Syria is a potential candidate for military intervention. The following article takes the reasons for military intervention in Libya, as explained by President Obama in his address to the nation in March 2011, and creates criteria for future humanitarian military intervention. By defining and applying these criteria to a humanitarian crisis such as Syria, it is revealed that the Libya campaign model does not fit Syria now, nor does the model provide a panacea for all future humanitarian crises. While the tenets of the Libya strategy could apply to other humanitarian crises, proponents for military intervention must meet the criteria laid out in this article, or the United States may find itself committed to a futile air campaign unable to achieve the nation's strategic objectives.

Introduction

Officials from the Obama administration have stated that the strategy used in Libya is the model for future U.S. military engagements overseas.[2] Taking a limited means approach, the administration mobilized a military coalition, which executed a successful air campaign using coordinated

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missile and air attacks to help opposition ground forces overthrow General Muammar Gadhafi. The success in Libya, however, has created a policy and strategy dilemma for the United States as political and military leaders try to determine when military intervention in a future humanitarian crisis is the best option. While military force worked in Libya, this limited means approach may not be effective in every "responsibility to protect" (R2P) scenario, such as in Syria, which is going through similar civil strife issues. Proponents for military intervention in the name of R2P must first apply the criteria developed for Libya and meet each one before endorsing military force in the next humanitarian crisis. Definition of the Libya strategy, and application of its criteria to the predicament in Syria, reveals that the Libyan campaign model does not provide a panacea for all humanitarian crises.

The Libya Criteria

In President Obama's March 28, 2011 speech to the American people, the President laid out the reasons he chose to take military action in Libya and stop the violence against innocent civilians. President Obama said, "We had a unique ability to stop that violence: an international mandate for action, a broad coalition prepared to join us, the support of Arab countries, and a plea for help from the Libyan people themselves. We also had the ability to stop Qaddafi's forces in their tracks without putting American troops on the ground." The President further stated that he "authorized military action to stop the killing and enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1973."[3]

From the President's speech, his stated reasons for intervention in Libya can be interpreted into a set of criteria for U.S. military intervention in future humanitarian crises. Based on the reasons noted in his speech, the following criteria were developed, by the author, and should be used by U.S. leadership before committing U.S. forces to intervene militarily in future humanitarian crises. The developed criteria are: 1) an international mandate; 2) a broad coalition to protect civilians; 3) Arab/Regional support; and, 4) a request for help from a credible Libyan opposition force. Additionally, this request for help did not require U.S. ground forces to intervene.

Meeting these criteria were the foundation for the success of military intervention and the Libyan model. President Obama's decision to intervene also aligned with principles of the 2010 National Security Strategy's (NSS) R2P objectives that state "the United States will work both multilaterally and bilaterally to mobilize diplomatic, humanitarian, financial,

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and—in certain instances—military means to prevent and respond to genocide and mass atrocities."[4] He further justified the use of military force by stating, "When our interests and values are at stake, we have a responsibility to act."[5] In meeting these criteria, the President ensured that the United States did not act alone nor intervene in a region that did not ask for help. If the United States uses these criteria as a baseline for future R2P scenarios, political and military leadership can avoid becoming trapped militarily in a conflict that is not in the country's best interest.

Libyan Conflict

The Arab Spring swept across Libya in late February 2010. The uprising in Libya had a similar tenacity that the rebellions in Tunisia and Egypt had, both of which caused a regime change. However, in Libya, General Muammar Gadhafi was in his forty-second year of power and the Libyan ruler was not going to give up without a fight.[6] Gadhafi's use of force to quell the Libyan uprising brought forth an international mandate, in the form of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973 that authorized military intervention in Libya. Scenes of violence aired on international news channels depicting protesters clashing with regime forces in Benghazi. This was the first show of defiance by the people of Libya, and in less than a month President Barack Obama would support military intervention eventually leading to a 222-day North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) air campaign.[7]

With the approval of President Obama, an initial multinational coalition led by U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) entered Libyan airspace on March 19, 2011 aimed at enforcing UNSCR 1973. Officially named Operation Odyssey Dawn, the mission's operational objectives in Libya focused on stopping Gadhafi's forces from attacking civilians, forcing regime military troops back to their home bases and ensuring unrestricted humanitarian support was available for the people of Libya.[8] On March 31, after successfully suppressing the most capable strategic air defense systems in Libya and establishing a no-fly zone, the mission transitioned command and control to NATO under the name Operation Unified Protector.[9]

Despite Gadhafi's stubborn defiance, NATO aircraft continued to attack regime forces in support of the Libyan rebels. On August 22, opposition forces liberated the capital city of Tripoli. Opposition forces would eventually capture and kill Gadhafi on October 20. NATO ceased military operations Operation Unified Protector on October 31, 2011.[10] For President Obama, justification for military intervention hinged on the 2010 NSS R2P principles embedded in his vision for U.S. strategy. The Presi-

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dent, however, first ensured he met favorable criteria for U.S. intervention and did not respond with military force based solely on the tenets of R2P.

Libyan Strategy/Model Defined

The Libyan model was a multilateral effort combining diplomatic and military power to achieve its objectives—intervention in the name of R2P. Furthermore, the strategy taken by the United States and its allies used limited means to accomplish an unlimited objective, the removal of General Muammar Gadhafi from power. Notably, the strategy was successful by using only a limited portion of the United States' military capabilities, air and sea power in order to aid NATO operations and an indigenous opposition ground force. These limited means included the use of fighter and bomber aircraft to target Libyan military facilities, command and control centers, air defense sites, as well as Gadhafi's fielded military forces.[11] No foreign ground forces were committed in Libya, and NATO took on a robust leadership role with European and Canadian allies leading Unified Protector.[12] The U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategic Communications, Ben Rhodes, praised the Libyan model as the key to future intervention operations for the Obama administration.[13]

Strengths of the Libyan model included an international mandate to protect civilians supported by a broad coalition that included Arab countries. Furthermore, no foreign ground forces were used in the fight. The international mandate included UNSCR 1970, which encompassed global economic sanctions supported by the European Union, Russia, China, Japan and South Korea. Final international approval and support for military action came when the UNSC approved Resolution 1973, the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya, authorizing UN member states to take any measures short of occupation to protect civilians under attack in Libya.[14]

The model's broad coalition included France, Italy, Britain and surrounding Arab nations, giving credibility to intervention and reinforcing a multilateral strategy to use military force against Gadhafi. Britain, Italy and France publically advocated for intervention and led the NATO force after the UNSC voted to authorize a no-fly zone.[15] French President Sarkozy, eager to prove France was still a force both politically and militarily in the European Union, also supported intervention.[16] Jordan, Qatar, and Kuwait each lent support to the no-fly zone with military aircraft, providing additional regional legitimacy to the coalition's mission.[17] The use of NATO as the operational lead for Unified Protector also helped temper the possible negative responses that a U.S.-unilateral military effort might

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cause. By taking a coalition approach in Libya, the United States shared military responsibility and risk; ninety percent of the targets struck in Libya were by non-U.S. aircraft.[18]

Most importantly, opposition forces held a geographically defendable position in Libya. The opposition secured a main base of operations in Benghazi, and had credible military leadership in control of opposition forces. Opposition military leaders included officers who were defectors from the Gadhafi regime, and these officers were actively leading opposition forces in battle. Opposition forces were also able to control military facilities and had secured and held police stations in Libyan cities. Interim Transitional National Council (ITNC) leaders were also able to meet outside the country with influential international leaders and solicit support for the rebellion.[19] Recognition by the Arab world, European Union, and the United States brought legitimacy to the ITNC and its top leadership.[20] Because of this strong opposition force, the Libyan model required no foreign ground forces or foreign occupation compared to previous U.S. conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.[21] This was appealing to both the American public and to Arab countries wary of an increased U.S. military presence in the region. Without credible opposition forces, the limited means approach of Unified Protector would not have succeeded in stopping Gadhafi's regime forces nor would it have been successful in forcing regime change.

The presence of a credible ground force, with a geographically defendable position, provided air power a definable objective and a visible force to support from the air. Comparing Kosovo, early Afghanistan, and Libya, it is also apparent that each of these conflicts used air power to support a credible ground force. The Northern Alliance in Afghanistan was capable of establishing defendable bases allowing U.S. Special Forces to recruit and rally opposition forces against the Taliban. Overall success against the Taliban would not have been possible without the combination of precision air power with ground forces, able to fight for and secure territory.[22] Similar to operations in Libya, both air and ground elements combined to overthrow a hostile regime. Without both elements, major American troop concentrations would have been required to achieve U.S. objectives in both Afghanistan and Libya.[23] The three conflicts noted in Table 1 below possessed either a strong opposition force in the country, or a strong opposition force aided by outside Special Forces or the threat to use NATO ground forces. Table 1 is a comparative description of previous campaigns in Kosovo, Libya and Afghanistan. While each case was unique, as the table shows, ground forces with a geographical base were present in all three conflicts.

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Table 1: Contributing factors to the success of limited military intervention (1999–2011)

Conflict	Air Support	Opposition Geographical Base of Operation	Credible Opposition Force	U.S. Ground Force	Available Air Bases of Operation	International Mandate/Broad Coalition	Conflict Objective
Kosovo	Yes	Yes (Albania)[24]	Yes (Kosovo Liberation Army)[25]	No (but U.S. threat made)[26]	Yes	Yes (but no UNSC resolution)	R2P, Liberate Kosovo from Serbia[27]
Afghanistan (2001–2002)	Yes	Yes (Badakhsha, Panjshir Valley, north of Kabul)[28]	Yes (Northern Alliance)[29]	Yes (SOF)	Yes	Yes	Regime Change
Libya	Yes	Yes (Benghazi)[30]	Yes (ITNC)	No	Yes	Yes	R2P, Regime Change
Note: Table created for comparison by the author							

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Syria Crisis

In Syria, if the Obama administration exclusively applied the R2P principles discussed in the 2010 NSS, then U.S. leadership could decide to conduct military intervention in the name of human rights. However, before engaging militarily in another humanitarian crisis, U.S. policymakers should take each of the criteria used in Libya and apply them to the situation in Syria. By applying these criteria to Syria, it is evident that limited military intervention similar to the Libya campaign model does not fit in Syria. As a reminder, these criteria included an international mandate, a broad coalition to protect civilians, regional support, and a request for help from a credible opposition force.

Lack of an International Mandate

In Syria, there is no international mandate for military intervention in the form of a UNSC resolution. Notably, both Russia and China have aggressively objected to sanctions and both countries voted to block a UNSC resolution that would have imposed economic sanctions against Syria. The resolution, similar to UNSCR 1970 would have demanded that the Syrian leader halt all violence against his people.[31] Unlike in the Libya case, Russia sees Syria as one of the last strongholds for anti-American dominance in the region, and Russia has both economic interests and a military partnership it wishes to protect in Syria.[32] To emphasize this point, in November 2011, Russia deployed a carrier group to its base in Tartus, Syria, displaying Russia's continued interest in the nation and support for President Assad.[33] Without a UNSC resolution, a strong international mandate will not form against Assad to the level seen against Gadhafi. Furthermore, it is unlikely that the UNSC will pass a resolution authorizing force to provide international legitimacy for military action, as witnessed against Libya.

Lack of a Broad Coalition/Support for Military Action

While international disapproval of Assad's actions has been robust, a broad coalition supporting military force against his regime has not formed. In Libya, the French, and British supported military action against Gadhafi, and aggressively lobbied the United States to join a coalition that backed a no-fly zone.[34] However, in Syria, France's ambassador to the United Nations indicated previously that outside intervention in Syria could result in an all-out civil war, believing that military intervention could put the whole region in jeopardy of turmoil.[35] In addition, British Prime Minister David Cameron, a strong supporter for military intervention in Libya, believes Syria is a different case and recently said,

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"In Libya there was a United Nations resolution and support from the Arab League for action, whereas in the Syrian case there is neither."[36] Without support from key NATO countries such Britain and France, formation of a broad military coalition will be difficult.

Furthermore, intervention in Syria would require a more robust military effort than Libya, due to Syria's geography and defensive military capabilities.[37] Countries in the region have not called for military intervention in Syria with the exception of Turkey who has threatened Assad with military action.[38] The geographic location of Syria, compared to Libya, would require more logistical support for aircraft enforcing a no-fly zone, as there are limited NATO bases in the region.

Lack of Arab Support

Economically and diplomatically, regional pressure is mounting against Syria. The United States, along with the European Union and the Arab League have passed wide-ranging sanctions against individuals and organizations in Syria. In fact, 19 of the Arab league's 22 member nations approved sanctions ranging from a financial freeze on the Central Bank of Syria, to a travel ban on Syrian government officials.[39] However, Lebanon and Iraq both voted against the Arab League sanctions and are not likely to enforce serious economic restrictions.[40] Right next door, Turkey's Prime Minister Erdogan has publicly called for Assad to stop attacks against his people and has continued to engage Assad in diplomatic negotiations hoping to halt the violence in Syria.[41] Neighboring countries are ramping up pressure against Assad on the economic and financial front. However, the Arab League has not asked for military intervention and surrounding countries have not demanded the enforcement of a no-fly zone in comparison to the Libyan crisis.

Lack of a Credible Opposition Force

Syrian opposition leaders are pleading for help and asking for military intervention similar to those called for in March 2011, by the Libyan ITNC. On January 2, 2012, one exiled Syrian opposition leader and member of the opposition's Syrian National Council (SNC) executive board, Samir Nashar, said a majority of SNC members support military action. Nashar said the Syrian regime is worse than Gadhafi's regime, and Nashar has publicly called for a no-fly zone over Syria. Nashar pointed to the fact that Assad had not stopped his crackdown on dissent in Syria, even as Arab League monitors were in the country assessing Assad's implementation of a peace plan.[42]

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Nevertheless, these cries for help have not come from a robust Syrian opposition with a recognized and identifiable leader, nor have Syrian opposition forces secured defensible territories or a home base.[43] The Syrian opposition lacks a base or territory where they can reorganize and regroup, as the Libyan opposition did in the city of Benghazi. The Syrian opposition does not seem to have a centralized command center and opposition members are comprised of deserters and local militia with limited military weaponry. The Free Syrian Army (FSA) has not shown the capacity to keep and hold terrain in Syria, or organize under a credible leadership structure, as was the case in Libya.[44] In Libya, the fall of Benghazi to opposition forces gave the rebellion a home base of operations and a defensible position.[45] Table 1, shown earlier, depicted the need for a credible ground force to supplement NATO air power, and was a key factor in NATO's success against Gadhafi. This is a significant part of the Libyan model and, without it, foreign ground forces would be required in Syria or an air campaign may yield limited results.

Are These Criteria Too Stringent?

Some could argue that military intervention does not require an international mandate in a humanitarian crisis, such as Syria. The air war over Kosovo is an example of military intervention without a UNSC resolution. In Kosovo, there was no authorization from the UNSC for a no-fly zone to stop the ethnic cleansing perpetrated by Slobodan Miloševic. Russia would not publicly support military intervention, but private conversations with Russian officials indicated that the Russians would not openly oppose a NATO air campaign against Serbian forces.[46] Thus, NATO initiated an air campaign and achieved its humanitarian objective to stop Miloševic from killing innocent civilians before passing UNSCR 1244. In the Syrian case, however, there is no indication from the Russians that they would be willing to remain quiet, as they did in Kosovo, while NATO takes military action against Syria. This is mainly because of the Russian belief that NATO turned the no-fly zone into an excuse for regime change in Libya. Since Russia's abstention from UNSCR 1973 paved the way for military intervention in Libya, enforcement of a no-fly zone in Syria is a showstopper for Russian officials.[47]

Some may also argue that the requirement for a credible opposition force is not necessary to intervene with air power, and that only with air power were Libyan opposition forces able to gain and maintain a stronghold in Benghazi. Opposition forces in Benghazi were outgunned with limited options in early March 2011 as Gadhafi's forces advanced toward the city.[48] As well, after Operation Odyssey Dawn began enforcement of the

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no-fly zone, Libyan opposition forces were able to hold their position, repel regime forces, and eventually turn the tide of the rebellion. A visit from U.S. Senator John McCain to Benghazi, coupled with the deployment of Predator drones and fighter aircraft attacking regime forces, are what some may argue enabled opposition forces to gain the credibility needed to overthrow Gadhafi. Some believe that the use of air power alone was sufficient. However, in Libya, the air campaign started while opposition forces were in control of a significant amount of territory. Even before U.S. intervention, the opposition was able to repel regime forces in Benghazi, and hold their ground, something Syrian opposition forces have not thus far proved capable of achieving.

Additionally, some may disagree that the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), noted in Table 1, was a credible opposition force in Kosovo and that the NATO air campaign accomplished its objectives, without the help of opposition forces. Lieutenant General Agim Ceku, the former prime minister of Kosovo and chief of the KLA during the war, indicated this in interviews. According to him, the KLA was unable to hold territory during the war and used Albanian territory to regroup after military operations failed against the Serb Army.[49] While this may be true, it was not only the presence of an opposition force in Kosovo, but the threat of NATO ground forces by President Clinton that lent additional credibility to the opposition and enabled the success of the air campaign.[50]

Meeting the Criteria

By failing to meet the Libyan criteria in future humanitarian crises, the United States may find itself enforcing a protracted no-fly zone similar to the one used in Iraq following Desert Storm in 1991. During that time, military forces in the region numbered around 20,000. This force included the largest combined flying wing in the U.S. Air Force, and required the presence of a dedicated carrier battle group with supporting warships. This footprint caused U.S. relations in the Middle East to deteriorate in the late 1990s and increased U.S. security challenges in the region.[51] While the United States is trying to decrease its peripheral military commitments in the Middle East, the timing is not right for another prolonged no-fly zone.

In the future, because of a smaller force driven by budget cuts, the United States must be selective in its application of military force for human rights efforts. Another protracted military operation would place a significant rotational demand on U.S. Forces. Nation building requires ground forces to succeed and is a labor-intensive, expensive, and time-consuming

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process.[52] Without a clear, definable strategy with attainable criteria, intervention in a humanitarian crisis without a "land force" option could leave a NATO air campaign without achievable strategic objectives. Moreover, the opposition might fail and the United States may have to face the embarrassment of extracting itself from a conflict, in failure. The United States also cannot afford to act unilaterally in a region and risk becoming involved in a protracted war that may hinder its planned withdrawal of military forces from Afghanistan.

Conclusion

International support is vital to warrant military intervention in the name of R2P, and each situation is unique. R2P principles call for military intervention anytime a national government cannot protect its people from "large-scale losses of life or ethnic cleansing within its borders."[53] However, as indicated by President Obama in the 2010 NSS, repressive acts by a regime against its people do not always mandate the use of military force, and the U.S. must consider "the costs and risks of action against the costs and risks of inaction" when deciding possible military intervention.[54] The key to the Libyan model lies in the multilateral approach stated in the 2010 NSS, and not all states or regimes that raise the principles of R2P are candidates for military intervention.

While parts of the Libyan model are exportable, military intervention is not a panacea for all humanitarian crises as conditions must be favorable, with a high probability for success, before using military forces. Air power alone, in support of R2P, should be selective and only used after meeting the baseline criteria used in Libya. In the case of Libya, there was a legitimate international mandate, a broad coalition to protect civilians, support from the Arab world, and an identified indigenous opposition force. Military intervention in Libya was only initiated after meeting a set of criteria that minimized the likelihood of protracted military operations. U.S. military and political leaders, determined to invoke the principles of R2P in the next humanitarian crisis, must ensure the previously defined criteria are met. Otherwise, the U.S. military may find itself committed to a futile air campaign unable to achieve the Nation's strategic objectives.

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Lance "Cajun" Kildron is a U.S Air Force Colonel and F-16 Pilot with over 20 years' active service. He is currently the Vice Wing Commander of the 20 Fighter Wing, Shaw AFB, S.C. He was the 77th Fighter Squadron Commander during Operation Unified Protector, Libya and is a recent graduate of the Naval War College, Newport R.I. Colonel Kildron is a graduate of the USAF Weapons School and a distinguished graduate of the USAF Air Command and Staff College. He holds three master's degrees, one in aeronautical science from Embry Riddle University, a second in military arts and science from the Air Command and Staff College and a master of science in national strategic studies from the Naval War College. Colonel Kildron is a veteran of wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Expertise: Aerial warfare, Military Doctrine and Enemy Air Defenses.

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