

# Constructed Threat and U.S. Humanitarian Intervention in Libya

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## Abstract

Considering the fact that less systemic sensitivity has appeared towards U.S. military actions on the global scale and that the great powers in the international system do not engage in any serious effort at preventing this state, the role of domestic interest groups has increased as has the president's attention to their opinions. Despite the fact that no serious threat to U.S. security existed and the country's national interests were not at stake, Barack Obama ordered the use of military force against Muammar Gaddafi. Liberal humanists in the power structure played a crucial role in order to make the necessity of attack inevitable by aggrandizing the threat. By embracing the opinion expressed by the liberal humanists and repeating this aggrandizing for election purposes as well as for preserving his own liberal base, Barack Obama found a military attack on Libya rational and necessary.

**Keywords:** Systemic Constraints, Interest Groups, Liberal Humanists, Risk appetite, Security Fear

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### **Introduction**

In the past two decades, the world has undergone significant changes and developments. The prevailing international system, apart from what we call it, should be considered different from its counterpart during the ideological conflict in terms of power alignment and the status of actors. In the 1990s, under Bill Clinton, the United States changed the geographical map in Central Europe and new states were established with the U.S. help. The Russian state failed to do anything to counter these U.S. policies.

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, under George W. Bush, the United States engaged in regime change in Afghanistan and Iraq. China and Russia, one of which sees U.S. military operations on its southern borders, while the other finds a U.S. military presence in a Third World country under its influence during the Cold War era, failed to embark on any practical action in countering the United States. U.S. conduct and the reactions shown by the preeminent states in the international system including China and Russia demonstrate that systemic constraints have decreased for the United States for a variety of reasons. On the other side, systemic opportunities have abounded for this state significantly. Lessened concern for the negative reaction of the great powers would mean that the United States will find further latitude, which arises from its internal conditions and the pressures and demands made by strategic interest groups.

As constraints generated by the superior actors of the system decrease, U.S. leaders will pay more attention to domestic



considerations in shaping these policies and to attract support for them. It is through the lens of these factors that U.S. actions under Obama in Libya have to be looked at. The active presence of American troops in several scenes around the world did not instigate enthusiasm for new adventurism among the public.

The main question is why Barack Obama decided to use force against Muammar Gaddafi. There might be several answers to the question, but given the systemic considerations and change in the international system, as well as the fact that the superior actors of the system show lesser sensitivity to U.S. conduct at the global level, attention has to be paid to the domestic level. The hypothesis is that liberal humanists in the power structure who belong to the liberal faction of the Democratic Party managed to sell the necessity of an attack on Libya by aggrandizing the threat and imminence of a genocide.

### **I- Systemic Considerations and Higher Risks**

Conditions in the global stage have taken shape in such a way that has provided the superior actors of the international system with excessive maneuverability. This fact has given rise to another apparent characteristic on the other side of the spectrum. The bulk of states that are not among the Western powers or among the superior players are experiencing excessive systemic constraints. This is for the first time within the past 100 years that such a situation has emerged. The reason for the excessive maneuverability of the superior actors is obvious; none of the great powers feel any existential threat in relation with the other large powers in the system. These states possess the veto power within the UN Security Council, and because of this unique privilege, they are capable of legitimizing military operations and invasions under the flag of UN authorization. These actors play a crucial part in managing the global scene for economic, military, cultural and political reasons.

Obviously, in written history, the larger role played by the great



powers in establishing order has been self-evident. However, what differs now is the key point that none of these actors is concerned about a threat to survival. This distinguishing feature of the current age gains more importance if we learn that the U.S. military budget is higher than those of the other superior states in the system including Russia, China, France and Great Britain. Given this huge military discrepancy, the fact that “for the first time in centuries, there is no perspective of conflict between great powers threatening world peace” (McNamara, 1995: 326-327) becomes more significant.

The existence of such a tangible discrepancy in military capacities and modern combat technologies has enabled the United States to take more risks. This would mean that if the United States embarks on military action or operations in which the possibility of attaining the goals is uncertain, unlike the period of ideological conflict, there is less necessity to observe caution. In the Cold War era, the great powers like the United States and the Soviet Union knew this very well; that failure in the realm of foreign policy would bring about numerous costs and adverse consequences for them. For this reason, further caution was demanded from the decision-makers who implemented policies, understanding this key point.

Of course, this does not mean that wrong decisions were not taken by the great powers, which happened a lot, but it reminds us of the fact that policies were designed and implemented with the knowledge that the rival players acted in the context of a zero-sum game. The United States accounted for 42% of world military expenditure in 2010, whereas Russia accounted for 3.6% and China, which has taken the place of Japan as the world’s second biggest economy, only accounted for 7.3% of global military expenditure (Scoble, 2011).

This clearly demonstrates why the United States, as a country that possesses such a huge volume of military capacity, does pay less attention to the risks of policies in the international scene as compared to what it used to do. In the midst of existential enmity,



competition in many regions were conducted just for the purpose of catching up, without any attention being paid to the strategic place of the region in question or national interest priorities. A clear example of the dominance of this outlook was the dispatch of Cuban soldiers, encouraged by the Soviet Union, to Angola; an African nation freed from Portuguese colonialism. It led to direct U.S. involvement in support of anti-government militants under former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. In the past two decades, evaluations have changed fundamentally, though it does not mean that great non-Western military powers like China and Russia and non-Western economic powers such as China do necessarily share the will and determination. It, however, means that these states pursue specific objectives, considering how they define their own national interests, the status they possess in the international system, elite priorities in the domestic scene, and the capabilities they possess in all material and psychological aspects as well as the political culture dominating society. These objectives might give rise to conflicts between the actors, but their realization is not intended to destroy or remove the adversaries, but to promote their domestic and international status. After the fall of the communist system in December 1991, the Russian leaders have pursued the goal of playing a continental role and consolidating a more superior status for themselves in Europe. The Chinese leaders have aimed at turning their country into one of the economic pivots of the world along with the European Union, the United States and Japan. This strategy necessarily rules out any military confrontation with the United States beyond the strategic region of the South China Sea and on Taiwan so that the main goal - to become the world's first or second biggest economic power - can be attained. This framework is the economic-centered policy of attracting foreign (mainly Western) investment and production for export, which was pursued by Deng Xiaoping since 1979. He theorized this policy, which has been the executive framework for the Chinese leaders during the past three decades, as follows: "Do not



seek shining and being seen, respect lack of transparency, never become the central actor in the scene, and set your goal as doing something great” (Carnbanis, 2011).

According to this very logic, the Chinese leaders declined to use their veto power to directly challenge the United States despite their objection to U.S. justification for initiating military strikes against Libya. The interests of the great states in the system do not contradict fundamentally and each of them try to attain their objectives within the overall framework they’ve designed for themselves. The difference between U.S. strategy and those of the superior powers of the system on the one hand and their outlook on U.S. objectives and interests have led to the increase in American acceptance of risks and the possibility of non-implementation of policies, while the United States is not posed as a threat.

Overall strategy means “... how best national security can be promoted and international order be established” (Ikenberry, 2001-02: 25). In an age described as the ‘age of terror’ by Americans, the War on Terror, which is now re-designated as ‘struggle against extremism’, lies at the heart of U.S. overall strategy. To pursue this policy, the United States dispatched troops to Afghanistan in 2001 and the excuse that Saddam had connections with al-Qaida among other things was used to justify the invasion of Iraq. Today, more than 100,000 American troops are stationed in Afghanistan and a significant number are still in Iraq. The third front where Americans are active in line of realizing their overall strategy includes aerial strikes on Pakistan’s tribal regions and assassinating al-Qaida and Taliban leaders in the country.

After the late 1960s, when the Ba’ath Party came to power in Iraq, the Soviet Union became Iraq’s closest military ally and a peace and amity treaty was signed between the two states. This increasing military and political closeness did not preclude the United States from attacking Iraq in 2003 with 130,000 troops. The Russian government failed to do anything to prevent the fall of the Ba’athist



regime and even the likelihood that Americans would establish military bases in Iraq in the future did not instigate concern to the degree leading the Russians to seriously warn the United States; a warning like what John F. Kennedy gave to the Kremlin about the Soviet military presence in Cuba.

For ten years, the United States has been fighting near China's southern border with Afghanistan in order to ensure that the country is run by those who do not threaten U.S. regional and global interests, which is its minimum demand. In a wider form, Americans seek to establish military bases in Afghanistan, providing the grounds for changing people's lifestyles and worldviews in the war-torn country. By continuously violating Pakistani sovereignty and without any regard for international law, Americans proceed, using drones, to kill residents of the tribal areas in Pakistan, which is one of the closest Asian countries to China. It led U.S. ambassador to Pakistan, Cameron Munter, to demand a reduction in these strikes and attending to the opinions expressed by the Pakistani authorities.

U.S. appetite for risk is so high that a CIA agent named Raymond Davis killed two Pakistanis in a mission in January 2011 and was then released from prison and left the country after he paid blood money to the victims' families (Entous, 2011). The U.S. military strikes on Libya never caused any concern among the Russian and Chinese leaders and they did not seek to prevent it all from happening, using their veto power. All of these things point to the fact that today, the United States has large maneuverability for acting in the global scene, given lack of serious operational objection on part of the great powers.

France under Jacques Chirac did not allow its opposition to the U.S. invasion of Iraq to go beyond a lecture by Prime Minister de Villepin in the UN General Assembly. Russia and China, which did not find any justification for the U.S. strike on Libya, preferred not to attend the voting session. Given the performance of the great powers in the system, the United States currently pays further attention to its



domestic considerations in shaping its global actions, since it faces reduced international pressure as compared to the preceding decades.

Considering the fact that “states are sensitive to environmental constraints and opportunities” (Adams, 2003-04: 92), it is better understood why the United States has adopted an aggressive foreign policy in the world stage. The reason is that the United States has put aside deterrence, which characterized its performance in many spheres, trying to change governing political equations. This change in world outlook, which means less sensitivity of the great powers to U.S. acts, has resulted in intensified extravagance among Americans.

The U.S. aerial bombings in Afghanistan and Pakistan continue to kill many civilians. Even though there is public knowledge that the suspects are among the civilians and acting to destroy them would result in vast casualties among ordinary people, scant attention is paid to this reality. After every operation ends, American commanders show regret about what they call ‘collateral damage’ and regard the case as terminated. Given the fact that systemic constraints exist in their minimum possible form, the United States does not see any structural necessity to restrict its inhuman acts that violate the sovereignty of other states.

The lesser the systemic sensitivity, the higher U.S. appetite for risk will be, leading it not to consider the repercussions of its acts, because it knows that it would not bring about costs or that it would be manageable. For this reason, little effort is made to omit the possibility of killing innocent people when hunting those affiliated to al-Qaida and the Taliban. Lack of serious concern about the reaction of the great powers in the system has led American decision-makers to pay more attention to domestic considerations and the reactions of strategic groups inside the country. In fact, a reverse relationship is seen here. Although systemic sensitivities to U.S. international conduct decrease, in contrast, sensitivities to domestic reactions increase. The American decision on a withdrawal from Afghanistan had nothing to do with the realities of the operational field. It is





obvious that the Americans have failed to attain their main goal, which was to remove the Taliban and prevent the presence of al-Qaida members in Afghanistan. What has accelerated the decision on a withdrawal is domestic necessities and people's vast opposition to the U.S. presence in Afghanistan. Since 2012 is an election year, people's opinions matter a lot to the officials in the White House.

The White House's attention to domestic pressures and views of interest groups is best manifested in the military strikes on Libya. Reduced concerns of great powers such as China and Russia about U.S. conduct have heightened American leaders' attention to domestic sensitivities concerning their international actions. Currently, what matters to decision-makers in the foreign policy realm more than any other time in the past is the fact that they are obliged to pay further attention to domestic considerations than they used to do, seeking achievements abroad in order to consolidate their status.

## II- Systemic Considerations and Reduced Fear

The fact that the United States looks at the possible costs of failure in its policies with fewer concerns and that it expects less serious negative practical responses to its decisions on part of the great powers in the international system have provided the country with huge latitude in designing policies and how to implement them. A more extensive spectrum of options, more time for evaluating policies, higher capacity for give and take, increased possibility for continuing inefficient policies and ultimately more extensive domestic power due to less fear arising from the challenges posed by the superior powers in the international system and their exploitation of consequences of power arrogance for the United States have occurred in the new millennium. This vast sphere for U.S. unilateralism has provided the possibility for America to engage in military adventurism even in countries located in the marginal geographies in relation to U.S. national interests, posing the least possible threats to the country; Libya has to be considered as the salient example of this new reality.



Appetite for risk, a deepening feeling of power arrogance and decreased caution in the foreign policy realm have evolved. Power equations demand a different understanding in the perspective of major powers. Significant economic, technological, cultural and social developments in the past several decades have led the great powers to re-evaluate their relations. These actors look at the international scene as an arena for promoting their status and influence according to their capabilities in shaping international interactions or managing them.

Since they do not have any existential enmity with each other and none of them seeks to destroy the other one, the game in this competition arena is one of double sum. This understanding has disrupted many traditional and historical equations to the benefit of the United States, because this country enjoys further capabilities in comparison to other superior actors of the system, requiring it to play a more influential role in shaping the equations or managing events.

Until around 2030, when China is projected to acquire the status of the world's largest economic power, the United States will enjoy this ideal short-term opportunity. It is public knowledge for American decision-makers that "U.S. hegemony will not last indefinitely" (Layne, 2006: 37). Knowing this fact and the quality of aforementioned economic, political, technological, cultural and social developments have led the superior actors of the international system to not feel any threat on part of the United States. Power equations have evolved on the world stage, perceptions of decision-makers have been structured in a way and domestic requirements in large countries have been directed in a line. Moreover, reference values in these societies have found a degree of coordination that the prevailing outlook among the governing elites in large powers is observable in contradiction with the traditional understanding that "There is no escape from the evil of power, regardless of what one does" (Morgenthau, 1974: 201).

What distinguishes the present time is the undeniable fact that fear and consequently efforts at balancing the United States in its hard



form seldom occurs. This in turn has created a vast arena for the United States to expand its influence or consolidate its status in many areas of the world.

There is a heated debate and disagreement going on concerning why the great powers do not feel any serious threat to their security on part of the United States. But what is challenged less often is the fact that “since the fall of the Soviet Union, no other power, whether Japan, China, India, Russia, a European country or the European Union has not increased its capabilities sufficiently to become an axis (vis-à-vis the United States)” (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008: 13).

Large countries are increasing their capacities and do their best to promote their status, acquiring further worldwide influence and prestige. Chinese and Indian actions can be clearly interpreted in this direction in such a way that there is a widespread consensus that the present century belongs to China as the past century was dominated by the United States. Nonetheless, what these countries do not point to as their own policies and do not give priority to is the removal of the United States or military confrontation with it. Unlike the past, when everything among the great powers was largely calculated in the zero and one context, today the superior actors of the international system have given a free hand to the United States in pursuing its objectives in the foreign policy realm, avoiding any serious effort at containing America.

They do not feel threatened in security terms by the fact that the United States has adopted an aggressive foreign policy and put aside deterrence, which characterized its foreign policy for consecutive decades after 1945. The United States implemented regime change policy in Afghanistan and Iraq without being challenged by any of the superior players, and since March 2011, this policy became the basis for attacking Libya under the pretext of defending innocent civilians.

The prevailing theory in the early 1990s was that with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, we will certainly witness the balancing of the United States and the formation of parallel axes that



will counteract the trans-Atlantic power (Layne, 1993: 5). The undeniable reality, however, is that none of the superior actors has made any effort during the past two decades to catch up the United States in military terms. Saudi Arabia, a country with a population of less than 30 million, accounted for 2.8% of world military expenditure, whereas the world's second largest economy and the most populous country, a medieval empire, had a 7.3% share. This clearly demonstrates that the superior actors of the system do not assess the U.S. 42.8% share of the world's military expenditure as a threat to their security, requiring a military balancing.

This fact, which contradicts all theoretical discussions from Thucydides to the present, has caused the great powers including China, Russia and France to adopt a soft balancing policy, relying upon the application of international law, diplomacy and international institutions (Pape, 2005: 8). But this is just a hollow justification. An analysis of U.S. conduct since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the reactions of the great powers show vividly that these actors are not concerned or fearful. France, which played the major role in criticizing the U.S. invasion of Iraq, never called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council. Even though they declared the military operations in Libya as going beyond UN authorization, the Russian and Chinese governments and even the Russian statesmen who met with high-ranking Libyan missions several times in the Kremlin never used the legal mechanisms at their disposal in order to operationalize their own perception of the conditions, depriving the United States of the legal authorization to continue strikes on Libya.

Some have suggested that fear of U.S. policies has led a number of great countries to emphasize economic development and efforts at economic balancing rather than hard balancing (Brawley, 2004: 110). In this relation, attention is paid to the creation of a single European currency and Chinese economic development policies. This theory, entitled economic pre-balancing can never justify the indifference of the great powers to U.S. aggressive policies. The Russian and Chinese



states now possess a capacity to reduce U.S. maneuverability singly or in an alliance, confining the United States to an entirely passive position.

Policies pursued by the great powers at the global level and their analysis of power alignments and of international conditions have led the United States to enjoy more suitable opportunities to implement its objectives, counting very little on the type of reaction shown by the superior powers of the international system in its equations. This would, in practice, mean that the role of domestic considerations and influence of internal parameters in shaping decisions in the foreign policy realm will be further enhanced. “To a significant degree, the United States is the most powerful state in the world, but it does not pose a serious threat to the vital interests of the superior powers” (Walt, 2002: 139), which leads to their inaction in preventing U.S. expansion of its sphere of influence (Iraq) or military adventurism without any justification based on national interest (Libya).

Imbalance, which is a conduct at the entity level and was made the governing policy by the great powers in the past two decades, has resulted in systemic implications; one of which is the promotion of the U.S. status and place in power equations. It is crystal clear that the superior players enjoy the capacity to restrict the area of practice and make the implementation of aggressive U.S. policies costly, but they decline to apply it regardless of the reasons behind it. “Regime change as a means of use of force is not considered by Europeans as a legitimate method in international politics” (Sorenson, 2009: 234). Nevertheless, France did not call upon the United Nations to meet in order to revoke the Security Council’s authorization in an effort to challenge the United States. That “... when the states face imbalanced power, they seek to increase their power or ally with the other states in order to restore international distribution of power to the balanced conditions” (Waltz, 1997: 915) has never been realized by Russia and China, which are quite outstanding in terms of size and population, during the past two decades when the United States was engaged in



military operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Libya.

Contrary to Clausewitz's opinion that "defense is always the strongest form of war" (Clausewitz, 1976: 358), Americans have adopted extremely proactive and aggressive policies in areas beyond the sphere of influence of superior powers in the system in recent decades. The reason for this is that American leaders have come to the conclusion that countries like China and Russia, which are among the prominent players at the global level, and Western allies including France and Great Britain, do not feel vulnerable, and that they find possible vulnerability arising from U.S. global conduct as manageable and non-lethal. Although anarchy makes all states vulnerable to adverse consequences, obviously states with higher capabilities show less vulnerability as compared to others (Mearsheimer, 2001: xi). This feeling of manageable vulnerability to America's rising military power and its aggressive policies in the international scene might explain the "dilemma of failure to convert capacities to power" (Baldwin, 1979: 163-164).

The great powers' intentional failure to seriously challenge America's aggressive military policies in recent decades appears as an obvious reality. Undoubtedly, these actors have taken steps in this direction for a variety of reasons arising from their overall strategic frameworks. This has caused the dramatic reduction of systemic constraints for the United States and simultaneous increase of systemic opportunities for the country. The great powers' provision of opportunities in the international arena for the United States becomes more significant if attention is focused on how much the United States is in trouble due to financial and economic problems. Indeed, America's current national debt is around 101% of gross domestic product, that is \$14 trillion (Samuelson, 2011). One in seven Americans are reliant on government food aid (Charen, 2011) and more than 10% of the labor force, i.e. 14 million people, are unemployed (Zuckerman, 2011). At the same time, the U.S. administration has allocated \$687 billion to its military budget in



direction of continued aggressive policies in the foreign policy realm; this is six times bigger than China's military budget, which is the largest creditor of the United States. This indicates that in spite of knowing the troubles the United States faces, the great powers do not deem it necessary to exert pressures on Washington in order to make its aggressive policies very costly so that the White House put aside its assertive internationalism.

Such a safe international space has led American leaders to be further influenced by domestic pressure and conduct of interest groups both in the executive and at the civil society level, undertaking actions in the world stage which are not among the priorities arising from national interests. The huge maneuverability in the international arena and the fact that no serious challenge is directed at the United States by the great powers has led America to show higher appetite for risk on the one hand, and accept the influence of interest groups with fewer concerns on the other. This means the U.S. is paying more attention to domestic power equations, while foreign power equations impose fewer constraints. These were the realities at the world scene that made U.S. adventurism in Libya possible, whereas there was no justification for it in the framework of national interests. This gave American leaders the chance to gain the authorization for military strikes by aggrandizing the threat and elevating a civil war in Libya to a humanitarian issue without any concern for the reaction of the great powers.

### III- Liberal Intervention and Libya

Since the second half of the 1950s, when a change occurred in the international system, we have seen that the axis of liberal humanism has become very active in the U.S. foreign policy scene. It is quite obvious that this intensified activity, playing a larger role and enjoying further resources, becomes more extensive when Democratic presidents are in office due to party requirements. Liberal humanists believe that 'humanitarian missions' have to become one of the



essential factors defining national interest (Western, 2002: 116). They maintain that moral nature has to be granted to U.S. policy, which under current world conditions is the more reliable and logical method for promoting the U.S. status. Indeed, they have revealed the idea that current U.S. power, which is unmatched throughout history in military terms, must have moral implications. Contrary to the logic governing U.S. foreign policy during more than four decades, when assessments and policies were undertaken without giving priority to moral categories, liberal humanists view moral considerations as more important than strategic considerations. At the age of communications technology, in an era when economic development is at the heart of most of the great powers' policies, and in a period when the European Union has marginalized the traditional concepts of sovereignty by removing borders and creating a single currency, the most effective weapon and capability in the U.S. arsenal will be intervention in the affairs of other countries for conducting humanitarian missions. American actions in Somalia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo were justified according to this very logic and the great powers took part in such military operations along with the United States or basically failed to do anything to prevent them.

U.S. involvement in Somalia was very short-lived and the display of corpses of American soldiers in Mogadishu left them with no option but to terminate the humanitarian mission without any result. Concerning Bosnia and Kosovo, considering the fact that stability and security at the heart of Europe was at stake, U.S. intervention within the framework of a humanitarian mission found a strategic justification, and as such military involvement in central Europe received vast domestic support. With Barack Obama's coming to power and his emphasis on multilateralism, resetting relations with Moscow, considering the theory of new and old Europe as meaningless, and putting less stress on the dilemma of human rights in relations with China, international space became so soft that liberal humanists within the executive power – and particularly in the





National Security Council and at the civil society level - found a more salient chance to express themselves and to influence the shaping of foreign policy. While Barack Obama increased the number of American combat forces in Afghanistan to 100,000 from 30,000 amid severe protests from the liberal faction of his Party, and he proceeded to extend the presence of American military forces in Iraq in spite of the discontent of the liberal pressure groups inside and outside his Administration, and while he ordered intensified use of drones to kill al-Qaida and Taliban members by violating Pakistan's aerial sovereignty - leading to dissatisfaction of liberal members of the society - a crisis started in the African country of Libya.

In 1969, in the heyday of the ideological conflict, Muammar Gaddafi came to power and given historical considerations and domestic equations, put anti-Westernism in general and anti-Americanism in particular at the top of his agenda. In the international scene, he sought to introduce an all-out shift after removing King Idris from power, which was quite natural. In the domestic scene, he embarked on changing the power alignment, but continued to rule in its conventional form in the vast Libyan territory.

The advocates of the monarchy came from the eastern tribes; thus high-ranking positions and resources were wielded by the eastern tribal people centered on Benghazi. The rise of Muammar Gaddafi changed domestic power equations and the government's social base was transferred to the western tribes centered on Tripoli. The country's resources were consumed for the benefit of these tribes and Gaddafi ran the country according to the tribal equations which have consistently prevailed throughout the country's history.

A change in international conditions, decline of nationalism and anti-Western policies and consequently decreased popularity of Pan-Arab leaders, Libya's nuclear surrender to the United States and the destruction of anti-American-Western prestige for the Libyan leader had all made Gaddafi particularly vulnerable. It was quite obvious that with the rise of social movements leading to the Arab Spring, which



began in Tunisia in North Africa in late 2010, Libya would be affected too. The country's eastern tribes seized the opportunity to become armed in order to acquire political power, considering the regional conditions and Gaddafi's domestic weakness; thus given Libya's internal circumstances and historical tribal disputes, it was clear that a conflict would ensue. In the Cold War era, it was possible for the political leaders of countries like Libya to blame foreign elements for domestic shortages. But change in the conditions of regional countries altered the equations suddenly, leading historical tribal enmities in Libya to evolve into armed hostilities. The fact that Barack Obama indicated that "Many regional leaders tried to channel their population's discontent to the outside" (Krauthammer, 2011) shows vividly that he is knowledgeable about the historical and native causes of the crisis in Libya.

What has been apparent in Libya during centuries under autocratic rule has been the tangible trait of tribal power and absence of popular power in society. These traits have been observed since 1951, when the country was freed from colonialism, came under United Nations' control and a constitution was codified. The Americans also know that in a closed society under autocratic rule, these are tribal and idiosyncratic requirements that give rise to political equations. "Domestic support will likely reduce when support for tribal leaders and military commanders disappear" (Warrick and Sly, 2011).

What began in Libya following the developments in Tunisia and Egypt was apparently a civil war from the onset. This was not a war in which democrats confronted the ruthless, but it had to be assessed in terms of tribal considerations. In the United States, however, liberal humanists presented the realities in a different framework in order to give priority to their own opinions and assessments.

Samantha Power, a journalist who emphasized the importance of humanitarian intervention in the Balkans under Bill Clinton and wrote a book on the same topic, joined Obama's foreign policy team



after he came to power, running the Office of Multilateral Affairs. Along with Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes, Senior Director at the National Security Council Gayle Smith, Director of National Security Council for Human Rights Jeremy Weinstein and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, she has formed a circle that can be called 'humanitarian interventionists'.

This theory which has attracted some advocates in the foreign policy community since 1991, is of an entirely idealistic nature. It views the use of military power for the protection of human rights, if needed, not only as legitimate but also a moral obligation. To them, the use of military power for protecting human rights is one of the basic principles of liberalism. Unlike neo-conservatives, who based their interventionist policies at the global stage upon Wilsonian institutionalism - indicating that "fostering democracy is more important than preserving stability" (Desch, 2007-08: 23) - liberal humanists make Kantian moralism the basis for prescribing the use of military power, suggesting that "power that is used for enforcing law... is not for the external authorization, but for the purpose of internal perfection" (Waltz, 1962: 337). It is indeed the essence of rule of human rights.

#### **IV- Liberal Intervention and Aggrandizing the Threat**

The armed uprising of tribes residing in eastern Libya made their confrontation with Gaddafi's advocates who were spread among the tribes residing in western Libya inevitable. Intensified conflicts in Libya mobilized liberal humanists in the Obama Administration, calling for U.S. involvement in this civil war. The problem, however, they faced from the onset was the fact that first, American citizens were unwilling to get involved in Libya, and second, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives, contrary to its endorsement of the invasion of Iraq under George W. Bush, did not agree with U.S. involvement in Libya at all. Third, and most importantly, Barack Obama had to be convinced to accept U.S. involvement in a



geography that posed little threat to America's national interests under conditions when the United States was experiencing military hostilities in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. In order to make a strike on Libya possible, liberal humanists had to initially convince Barack Obama that a just war was always necessary as Teddy Roosevelt observed in this regard that "In the long-run, a just war is much better for the human spirit than a successful peace" (Walt, 2011).

From the beginning of the debate over the invasion of Iraq in the Illinois Senate and then in the U.S. Senate, Barack Obama expressed his objection to the use of military force for resolving world problems. He and his fellow-thinkers held that the use of military power would lead to hatred of the United States, even though liberal objectives such as democracy promotion were at stake. After he entered the White House, there was a discussion that Barack Obama had adopted pragmatic realism as the basis of decision-making and would ignore idea-centered realism which was the basis of decision-making under his predecessor. He described war for democracy promotion as a silly war, promising that he would not involve the United States in such wars. He observed: "The United States cannot use its military forces everywhere there is a problem. Considering the costs and risks of intervention, we should always measure our interests as contrasted to the need to action" (Burt, 2011).

Liberal humanists led by Samantha Power persuaded Barack Obama to consider military action in Libya. Since Obama belonged to the liberal faction of the Democratic Party and because liberal moralism and attention to human rights represent essential criteria for justifying internationalism for liberals, the President was largely susceptible to embracing the opinions of humanist hawks. Considering that Barack Obama needs the full support of all liberals in the Party in order to prevent the rise of a rival candidate from within the Party for the 2012 elections, and given that France and Great Britain had declared that they wanted to play the leading role in



attacking Libya within the framework of NATO command, he found it in his own personal interest to pay attention to the demand of liberal humanists. Most importantly, Barack Obama had been assured by the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations that the UN authorization of an attack would be achieved.

After Obama was convinced by the liberal humanist hawks within the foreign policy-making apparatus, the aggrandizing policy for the Libyan crisis and unrealistic reading of the country's events were put at the agenda of the White House and advisors at the National Security Council. What occurred in Libya had all the characteristics of a civil war: (Toft, 2007: 112-113) 1- The war is centered on which group will take up the government. 2- At least two organized belligerent groups have to exist. 3- One of the belligerent parties is the prevailing government in the country. 4- War takes place in the territory of a state which has been recognized internationally. However it was apparent that no justification or reasoning for convincing the United Nations and the U.S. domestic scene for intervention in the civil war would be accepted. Hence, the reading of Libyan events in the framework of humanitarian issues was put forward, which had the two characteristics of being lies and being aggrandized. Aggrandizing the threat via an unrealistic reading provided the chance for gaining the approval of European countries and marginalizing China and Russia in order to gain authorization for an attack. Aggrandizing the threat became necessary in order to justify military intervention.

Aggrandizing the threat has a particular framework: (Kaufmann, 2004: 8-9) 1- Claims have to be beyond ambiguity so that the experts who lack biased outlooks consider them as likely. 2- A continuous pattern of statements based on a worst case scenario is expressed within the framework of a set of real issues which are not logically relevant or not closely related. 3- In the assessment of information a double standard is used so that the threat appraisal further highlights the worst possible events. 4- Claims are based on cyclic logic. Due to



the necessity of aggrandizing the threat to gain legitimacy for the use of military force, the liberal interventionist mixed up the realities in the first place, discussing a humanitarian crisis in Libya. It was argued that engaging in a humanitarian war was necessary, because the Libyan government had adopted a genocide policy. The U.S. Administration drew the worst possible scenario for Libya and reiterated it frequently. In this relation, in order to strengthen this idea, Barack Obama indicated that “the key principle that has to be observed” is a time “when a potential humanitarian crisis is imminent ... We cannot suffice to the hollow words, we have to act” (Calabresi, 2011). It was persistently reiterated that a humanitarian crisis was taking place and that what occurred in Rwanda in the 1990s, in response to which the United States did nothing to prevent, should not be allowed to be repeated in Libya.

By drawing parallels between Libya and Rwanda, the liberal humanists succeeded in putting the cloak of genocide on the civil war in Libya. Although a country’s foreign policy cannot be based simply on “support for conduct or lack of which in the past and only on emotions” (Noonan, 2011), liberal interventionists managed to implement such a policy with the aforementioned characteristics. Many observers criticized the comparison between Libya and Rwanda, condemning it as flagrant lying by the liberal interventionists. “In Rwanda, genocide targeted an entirely specific ethnic group. The civil war in Libya broke out between an autocrat and his advocates on the one side and a group of tribes, movements and ideologies on the other. The first one is killing and the second one is a war” (Chapman, 2011).

Nonetheless, Barack Obama and the interventionist liberals who have gathered at the National Security Council spoke consistently about genocide and a tremendous humanitarian catastrophe. Obama suggested that there were numerous necessities for the United States to act. “Barack Obama exaggerated the humanitarian threat in order to justify military action in Libya” (Kuperman, 2011) and “Gaddafi



forces did not engage in extensive massacres intentionally in none of the cities they captured” (Walt, 2011).

As a liberal, opposing the nationalist traits which conservatives put emphasis on, Obama had continued to negate the concept of exceptionalism. However, he proceeded so far as to accept the conception of American exceptionalism as a nation in order to gain the support of neo-conservatives bound to a different America.

On the Libyan situation and the events occurring there he indicated that “Some nations might condone the atrocities carried out in other territories, but the United States is a different country” (Traub, 2011). Thus in his viewpoint, since the United States is replete with humanitarian concerns about the people of another territory, it is necessarily viewed as an exceptional nation.

Because Obama and humanitarian hawks knew that there was little material justification for U.S. intervention in Libya, all of the sudden they resorted to exceptionalism, which has a strong nationalist essence, in order to boost their own confused reasoning. “Putting aside American responsibility as the leader and more profoundly our responsibility towards other human beings under such circumstances will be certainly considered as betrayal to what we are” (Smith, 2011). The only way the West led by the United States could ensure UN authorization for attacking Libya was to succeed in portraying the crisis in the country in the framework of a humanitarian issue under the guise of genocide. This was the only way by which they became able to activate the notion of responsibility to protect as ratified by the United Nations in 2005. According to the notion, this is the responsibility of UN member states to protect and defend civilians in countries entangled in war and crisis where the belligerent groups act with the intention of genocide. “What Samantha Power and her supporters demand is to institutionalize and consolidate the principle of responsibility to protect in international law. Samantha Power’s agenda indicates why Barack Obama embarked in action and when he did it” (West, 2011).



The necessity of aggrandizing the threat was felt because no other justification could be brought in for military intervention. Beyond the National Security Council and U.S. mission to the United Nations, there was no interest in becoming involved in the Libyan crisis within the U.S. power structure, from the State Department to the Defense Department and Congress: U.S. interests were not threatened at all and Libya did not pose an imminent serious threat to the United States. Within this context, then Secretary of Defense Robert Gates announced that “Libya did not pose any threat to the United States and there was no vital national interest involved in Libya to justify the intervention” (Gates, 2011). Considering that “Libya did not constitute any threat to U.S. national security interests” (Hanson, 2011), little interest in military intervention was expressed by the senior military commanders at the Pentagon, high-ranking officials at the State Department and the majority of US Congress members. It was evident for them that France and Great Britain, because of their economic stakes and preserving the prestige arising from the golden age in Africa, found it in their national interest to gain UN authorization for attacking Libya and to intervene in the country’s civil war. A large number of citizens as well as the military and elites responsible for foreign policy found a minimum of utilitarian justification for intervention. Senator Jim Webb from Virginia, who was U.S. Secretary of the Navy in the 1980s, presented the prevailing opinion as such: “I am concerned about the precedent for the unilateral decision by a president of the United States to use force in an environment where, to summarize, we were not under attack, we were not under a threat of an attack, we were not implementing a treaty, we were not rescuing American citizens” (Bolton, 2011).

Along with aggrandizing the threat in Libya, another issue that needed to be distorted was that in the event of intervention, how long this involvement would last. Considering economic conditions particularly America’s growing budget deficit, enormous national





debt, high unemployment rate, low economic growth rate, and military activity in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan, there was very little acceptance among the American people for an entry into another war. Knowing these facts, it was always stressed that the military operation would be short-lived. Since the goal is not regime change, but rather defense of civilians, there would not be any necessity for protracted intervention. In this regard, Barack Obama informed Congressional leaders that the operation in Libya would be terminated “not within weeks but within days” (Will, 2011). Nonetheless, considering that there was a war between the country’s eastern and western tribes and no party enjoyed absolute superiority, the perspective of a short-lived intervention as claimed by the American leaders was explicitly unrealistic. After months of war between the belligerent parties, it was NATO’s extensive attacks that ultimately made the fall of Gaddafi’s regime possible.

Aggrandizing the Libyan threat became more necessary, since the time-table of intervention was impossible to control. Another issue that was distorted in the direction of the military attack on Libya, and was not discussed by the U.S. administration, involved the composition of Gaddafi’s opponents. This is all while the Americans based their intervention upon the protection of their lives against the Libyan government’s alleged genocide. The liberal humanists advocating intervention put emphasis upon the attachment of Gaddafi’s opponents to liberal values including freedom and democracy, portraying protests in Libya as being part of the Arab Spring that was occurring in the other regional countries. However, the Americans were never successful at naming those who were in Gaddafi’s opposition leadership and held the record of commitment to values supported by the United States.

The Libyan National Transitional Council consisted of four groups (Rosenthal, 2011): 1- A minority group of those who can be truly called democrats. 2- Royalists. 3- Religious extremists who called for a government with their own envisaged values. 4- Former



members of Gaddafi's regime who joined the insurgents. The composition of the Council revealed that most of Gaddafi's opponents found Western values in contradiction with their own beliefs and certainly would not be among allies of American values after the removal of Gaddafi. Many pointed to the likelihood that with the fall of Gaddafi, an ideal opportunity would be created for al-Qaida supporters and Arab militants fighting American values to establish training camps in a vast territory with a small population.

With the extensive efforts made by liberal humanists in the decision-making apparatus for military intervention in Libya through aggrandizing the threat and distorting the realities of the operational setting, UN authorization for attacking Libya to protect civilians was attained. The United States initiated the attack on Libya under the pretext of "an emergency action for defending civilians" (Drogin and Richter, 2011) within the framework of a UN mandate. The U.S. military attack was founded upon suspicious data from inside Libya, insufficient information about Gaddafi's opposition forces and aggrandized fear of the consequences of non-intervention.

American statesmen deliberately aggrandized the threat so that the necessity of an attack on Libya was felt. Barack Obama and liberal humanists justified the military attack on Libya by aggrandizing the threat under conditions when the United States did not feel threatened by Libya at all, little evidence existed concerning the imminence of a genocide in Libya, minimum enthusiasm was found among the American public, and there was widespread disagreement in the executive power concerning the intervention and the U.S. Congress did not find any reason for declaration of war. After initiating the attack, Barack Obama used the method of aggrandizement of threat, suggesting that "We knew that if we waited one more day, Benghazi -- a city nearly the size of Charlotte -- could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world" (Chapman, 2011).



## Conclusion

The U.S. military attack on Libya has to be regarded as one of the most unjustifiable acts undertaken by America in recent decades. Libya lacks any strategic value for the United States; its resources are controlled by Western companies, and oil - the only considerable resource in the country for the European powers - has consistently been exported.

Learning that the world scene has undergone a change in the beginning of the new millennium, Muammar Gaddafi became a marginalized leader, putting aside Arabism and his ambitions. Gaddafi's opponents were committed to Western values and institutions as much as the Libyan leader had been in the past decades. Gaddafi posed a scant threat to U.S. interests on both the regional and global levels. Nonetheless, pressured by the liberal humanist hawks in the decision-making apparatus - and particularly in the National Security Council - Barack Obama ordered a military attack. By aggrandizing the threat, liberal humanists managed to justify the attack on Libya.

The civil war in Libya was aggrandized and presented as a case of genocide by the liberal humanists. With China and Russia declining to oppose the intervention, the United States managed to acquire the UN Security Council's authorization, thus granting the aggrandizement of the situation a legal justification as well.

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