

United States intervention under Barack Obama towards Libya and Syria

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Abstract

Obama authorized the military intervention in Libya to save the lives of peaceful, pro-democracy protesters who found themselves the target of a crackdown by their dictator Muammar al- Qaddafi. In effect, in Libya, Obama repeated the same mistake of winning the war and losing the peace that Bush had committed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Syrian civil war proved to be a monumental humanitarian disaster. The authorization for the use of military force against the government of Syria to respond to use of chemical weapons is a United States Senate Joint Resolution that would have authorized President Barack Obama to use the American military to intervene in the ongoing Syrian civil war. Obama was roundly criticized for not doing enough to end the war. While he conceded that the Syria's civil war was a monumental human tragedy, he placed the blame for it entirely on Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies.

Key-words: US, Intervention, Civil war, Syria, Libya, Barrack Obama.

Introduction: On March 17, 2011, the UN Security Council passed resolution 1973, spearheaded by the administration of US president Barack Obama, authorizing military intervention in Libya. The goal of authorizing was to save the lives of peaceful, prodemocracy protesters who found themselves the target of a crackdown by Libyan dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi. The dictator not only endangers the momentum of the nascent Arab Spring but also was poised to commit a bloodbath in the Libyan city where the uprising had started. The UN and other NATO countries established a no- fly zone throughout Libya and started bombing Qaddafi's forces. In Oct. 2011, after an extended military campaign with sustained western support, rebel forces conquered the country and short Qaddafi dead.¹In retrospect, Obama's was

an object failure as Libya has not only failed to evolve into a democracy but devolved into a failed state.

The Syrian civil war, also known as Syrian uprising or Syrian crisis²⁻³ is an ongoing armed conflict in Syria between forces loyal to the Ba'ath government and those seeking to oust it. The conflict began on 15 March 2011, with popular demonstrations that grew nationwide by April 2011. These demonstrations were part of the wider regional protest movement occurring in a number of Arab countries referred to as the Arab Spring. Protesters demanded the resignation of President Bashar al-Assad, whose family has held the presidency in Syria since 1971, as well as the end of Ba'ath Party rule, which began in 1963.

In June 2013, the death toll surpassed 100,000 according to the United Nations.⁴ Tens of thousands of protesters have been imprisoned and there are reports of widespread torture and terror in state prisons.⁵ International organizations have accused both government and opposition forces of severe human rights violations.⁶ UN inspections and probes in Syria have determined that the Syrian government's abuses are highest in frequency and largest in scale.⁷

Objectives:

The objectives of the research paper are:

- a). To explore the impacts of US intervention on Libya and Syria.
- b). To explore how much success has US achieved in establishing the democracy in Libya
- c). To explore the extent to which Obama administration has been successful in eliminating the Civil war in Syria.

Methodology:

Since the nature of the Research Paper is theoretical the data has been collected through secondary sources. For this purpose, Reference books, Magazines, News papers and Internet have been widely consulted to develop the plan of the Research paper.

Description:

Intervention in Libya

Stung by criticism that he had not done enough to save democracy in Egypt, Obama reluctantly agreed to limited US military intervention in neighboring Libya. The US action was prompted by an uprising, beginning in February 2011, against the regime of long-time Libyan dictator Muammar el-Qaddafi. Concerned about the possibility of a massacre of civilians, like those that

had occurred in the Balkans during the 1990s, British Prime Minister David Cameron and French President Nicolas Sarkozy persuaded Obama to intervene in the Libyan civil war. Obama justified his decision to get involved by saying, “To brush aside America’s responsibility as a leader and more profoundly our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances would have been a betrayal of who we are.”⁸ However, fearing a repetition of the extended US ground wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, he insisted that NATO take the lead in the operation to which he committed only US military aircraft.

Although the UN Security Council authorized the intervention in order to protect Libyan noncombatants, the allied effort quickly morphed into an ultimately successful campaign to get rid of Qaddafi. In August, with allied military support, rebel forces compelled him to flee Tripoli, the Libyan capital, but he was captured and killed by rebel soldiers two months later. However, the overthrow of Qaddafi brought only further violence as rival militias fought for control of the country. Among the victims of the renewed fighting was US ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, who was killed in an Islamist attack on the US consulate in Benghazi on September 11, 2012.

In the end, the continued warfare in Libya compelled Obama to concede that “we and our European partners underestimated the need for a much more aggressive effort to rebuild societies that didn’t have any civic traditions.”⁹ He had thought that the European allies, rather than the United States, should take the lead in rebuilding Libya. But the Europeans were unable, or unwilling, to do so. In retrospect, Obama’s was an object failure as Libya has not only failed to evolve into a democracy but devolved into a failed state. In effect, in Libya, Obama repeated the same mistake of winning the war and losing the peace that Bush had committed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Intervention in Syria

The Libyan experience reinforced Obama’s resolve to avoid US involvement in the Syrian civil war, which began in March 2011 with massive demonstrations against President Bashar al-Assad. After Assad attempted to violently suppress the demonstrations, opposition militias formed and the conflict soon blossomed into a full-fledged civil war. Some rebels had a democratic motive for challenging Assad’s regime, but the rebellion also had sectarian and international components. It pitted Syria’s Sunni majority against Assad’s ruling Shiite minority. Assad received vital military support from Shiite Iran and Lebanon’s Hezbollah, while his

opponents, with the notable exception of ISIS rebels, received considerable assistance from Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-run Persian Gulf states.

While Obama was determined to stay out of the Syrian conflict, after witnessing repeated government atrocities against civilians, in August 2011 he said that “the time has come for President Assad to step aside.” But Assad had no intention of giving up power, and with US forces withdrawing from Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama was not about to send US troops to Syria to oust him. However, in May 2012, the president said that he might be willing to order a US military response if as he put it, “we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized.”¹⁰

On August 21, 2013, Obama’s “red line” was crossed when hundreds of Syrian civilians died as a result of chemical weapon attacks by government forces. But at virtually the last minute, Obama called off a planned retaliatory US missile strike against Syrian military installations. His change of mind was prompted in part by a vote of the British House of Commons rejecting Britain’s participation in military action against Syria. Obama refused to act without Britain. In addition, Pew public opinion surveys revealed that most Americans also opposed military action against Syria; only 28% of those polled supported a US military response. As a consequence, Obama decided to refer the matter to Congress, which he realized would not endorse US military action against Assad.

Obama’s failure to carry through with his threat to punish Syria was roundly criticized by his Republican opponents as well as some Democrats. However, a few days later, Obama received unexpected help from Russian President Vladimir Putin, who persuaded Assad to hand over his chemical weapons to international observers for their supervised destruction. Putin intervened in Syria because he feared that allowing Assad to be overthrown would create a power vacuum in that country that jihadists would fill. He pointed to the US overthrow of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the rise of ISIS as a prime example of such action. But it was not only the spread of radical Islamism that Putin feared. He also was well aware that if the democratic elements in the Arab Spring uprisings succeeded in supplanting dictators in the Middle East, his regime could be next. Consequently, Putin not only rejected the US demand that Assad resign, two years later he committed Russian military forces to Syria to save Assad’s regime.

On September 30, 2015, Russian military aircraft based in Syria began a sustained campaign of air strikes against rebel forces and civilian facilities. In response, Obama condemned the Russian action, authorized Secretary of State Kerry to negotiate with the Russians in order to try to end the war, and continued to supply Syrian Kurds and Arab-Syrian forces fighting Assad's army, assistance that he had initiated in 2013. But the US aid proved insufficient in preventing Assad's forces from capturing the rebel-held city, Aleppo, in December 2016.¹¹

In the end, the Syrian civil war proved to be a monumental humanitarian disaster. By September 2016, almost a half million Syrian civilians had been killed and nearly 5 million had fled to other countries in the Middle East and Europe. The massive influx of terrorized people threatened to unravel the European Union after some member states closed their borders in response to the tide of refugees. Obama was roundly criticized for not doing enough to end the war as well as to relieve in a substantial way the plight of millions of Syrian refugees. The United States agreed to take in only 10,000 refugees, a very small fraction of the total. But Obama argued that he had done all he could, short of involving the United States in another Middle Eastern war, a step he was determined to avoid. While he conceded that the civil war in Syria was a monumental human tragedy, he placed the blame for it entirely on Assad and his Russian and Iranian allies. Moreover, he argued, no major US national interest was jeopardized by the war against Assad. More vital to US national security, he insisted, was the threat posed by ISIS, both in Syria and in Iraq, where he preferred to engage US forces, albeit in a very limited way. In the end, in Syria, as elsewhere, Obama's realistic inclination overcame his idealistic sentiments.¹²

Conclusion:

Obama authorized the military intervention in Libya to save the lives of peaceful, pro-democracy protesters who found themselves the target of a crackdown by their dictator Muammar al-Qaddafi. In effect, in Libya, Obama repeated the same mistake of winning the war and losing the peace that Bush had committed in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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