



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on March 3, 2011

Libya: To Intervene or Not to Intervene?

For example, a [Rasmussen poll](#) finds that 67 percent of Americans “say the United States should leave the situation in the Arab countries alone.” (After so many years of neoconservative dominance of the Republican Party, it is perhaps not surprising that Republicans are almost four times as likely as Democrats to support U.S. involvement in these countries.)



Meanwhile, the Libyan rebels themselves have quite forcefully [turned down offers of weapons from the Obama administration](#). One rebel organization’s spokesman, human rights lawyer Abdel-Hafidh Ghoga, said, “We are against any foreign intervention or military intervention in our internal affairs. This revolution will be completed by our people with the liberation of the rest of Libyan territory controlled by [Libyan dictator Moammar] Gadhafi’s forces.” Likewise, former Libyan General Ahmed El-Gatrani, who is now with the opposition, emphasized that the revolt had originated within Libya and should remain in Libyan hands: “We don’t need foreign help as we moved on our own, on orders from no one outside.” Other protestors went so far as to post a [large sign](#) on a building reading “No Foreign Intervention — Libyan People Can Manage It Alone.”

None of this, of course, has deterred the would-be rulers of the world in Washington, London, and Paris from trying “to exercise early control over a nascent shadow leadership,” as the *Hindu Times* put it. [The Pakistan Observer reports](#) that “the United States, Britain and France have sent several hundred ‘defense advisors’ to train and support the anti-Gadhafi forces in oil-rich Eastern Libya where ‘rebels armed groups’ have apparently taken over.” One doesn’t have to be a cynic (though it helps) to figure out that this intervention has little to do with bringing freedom to the Libyan people and much to do with gaining control of “black gold.”

India, says the *Observer*, has also joined the intervention party, sending two warships and its “largest amphibious vessel” — coincidentally (ahem) supplied by the United States four years ago — which “has the capability to embark, transport and land various elements of an amphibious force and its [sic] equipped with mechanized landing craft, Sea King helicopters and armed with radars [sic], ship to air missiles and rapid firing guns.”



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In addition to the clandestine “defense advisers,” the United States has, according to Defense Secretary Robert Gates, sent two ships and 400 Marines to the Mediterranean Sea near Libya allegedly “to help with humanitarian relief and evacuations,” [reports Bloomberg](#). “The Pentagon wants to give President Barack Obama the ‘full range of options’ during the crisis, Gates told reporters.” Note that Congress, the branch of government charged with declaring war and thereby calling the military into service, is absent from this calculation.

This is not to say that Congress has been silent on the matter. Some senators, for instance, want to pass what the *San Francisco Chronicle* describes as “an aid package to Arab countries to solidify democratic gains and improve relations with citizens in a part of the world accustomed to U.S. support for questionable regimes.” “Events this powerful demand a response of equal power,” Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) said. “This is not about sending troops and tanks to remake a region in our image. It is about sending economists and election experts and humanitarian aid to help a region remake itself.” It is also about violating the Constitution, burdening American taxpayers with even more debt, and exercising control over foreign countries, matters Kerry conspicuously failed to mention.

Other senators, along with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and “more than 40 former U.S. officials and human rights activists,” writes Bloomberg, are calling for the United States to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. The Senate, in fact, approved a non-binding resolution on March 1 “calling for a no-fly zone over Libya and endorsing U.S. outreach to forces opposing Gadhafi’s regime,” the report adds. As the consensus in favor of U.S. intervention in every corner of the world is thoroughly bipartisan, so was the resolution, sponsored by Sens. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.) and Mark Steven Kirk (R-Ill.).

Gates, however, cautioned Congress that establishing a no-fly zone would necessitate an actual attack on Libya to take out its air defense systems, which would require more than one aircraft carrier. Nevertheless, he said, if the President — again, no mention of a congressional declaration of war — “decides to order air cover for Libyans opposing ... Gadhafi, the Pentagon can do it,” the *Chronicle* notes.

While, according to the *Chronicle*, “some NATO countries are drawing up contingency plans modeled on the no-fly zones over the Balkans in the 1990s,” Gates said that “there is no unanimity within NATO for the use of armed force.” This was made painfully clear in the case of the United Kingdom, whose prime minister, David Cameron, was forced to backtrack from his suggestion that British planes might enforce a no-fly zone over Libya and “to downplay his assertion that he was prepared to arm rebels seeking to oust” Gadhafi, in part because of opposition from other countries, [the Daily Mail reports](#).

Many, though not all, of these countries are demanding a United Nations resolution before they will intervene in Libya. To the extent that the perceived need for a UN resolution delays such intervention, it may serve a useful purpose. For the United States, however, a UN resolution is neither necessary nor sufficient to commit troops to battle — and neither is a unilateral decision by the President. The Constitution demands that Congress, not the UN, declare war; the President is only commander in chief when the military is “called into the actual service of the United States” by Congress. Unless and until a declaration of war passes both house of Congress, the U.S. government should take no military action against Libya whatsoever.

Even if such a declaration were to pass, military action, while then legal, would still be unadvisable. As the *Daily Mail*’s [Max Hastings points out](#), “the issue here is whether Western powers have the right to assume direct responsibility for destroying an Arab national leader, even when most of his own people want him out.” Indeed, attempting to do so could strengthen Gadhafi’s hand by convincing Libyans that



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removing him is a Western plot or at least will play into Western hands. With the West, especially the United States, already reviled by much of the Muslim world, most Libyans probably need little convincing.

As always, the Founders' advice to avoid foreign entanglements and quarrels suggests the best course of action with regard to Libya, Egypt, Tunisia, and every other country whose corrupt officials are finally getting their due: Butt out.

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