

# Obama Speech, London Conference – Still No Clear Strategy for Libya

[the-subtitle ]

by Paolo von Schirach

March 29, 2011

**WASHINGTON**– On March 28, president Barack Obama used the august podium of the National Defense University, (NDU), at Fort Lesley J. McNair in Washington, DC to explain to America what his administration is up to in Libya. The speech was comprehensive and it probably succeeded in reassuring the people that the US was pushed into this engagement by serious humanitarian reasons; and that Washington, while strongly supportive of the efforts underway, wants other allies to be in the lead.

***But the president also said that, while Gaddafi needs to go, it is not the purpose of this military operation to make this happen.*** Really? And I always thought that military means were used to secure political ends. Well, in this special case, we have military ops used only for humanitarian purposes that have nothing to do, apparently, with broader political ends. And so it is. This is US policy.

**US policy now clear?**

Most commentators applauded the speech saying that it made everything clear. Sorry, I am still confused, as I still do not see a strategy aimed at bringing this conflict to a quick end, with the pro-democracy Libyans, yes those who we are rescuing, ending on top. In most conflicts the end happens when one side (hopefully the good guys) wins and the other

side loses. President Obama indicated that he is hopeful about Gaddafi's eventual demise. But this will be as a result of the combined pressures of the embargo, economic sanctions and total international isolation; and not because of current military actions that are only humanitarian. And this also explains that, while we are shooting, this is not a "war".

So, we have military ops, but only in pursuit of non political goals. Maybe. But it looks conceptually murky. Besides, if the end game –Gaddafi gone– has to wait until the sanctions will really bite, this may take a long, long time. But the summary from the president is this: ***"We want Gaddafi gone. And this is non negotiable. Now we are shooting at him; but the purpose of the shooting is to make him back off, not to crush him. (And all this while we know and he knows that we have enough fire power to pulverize most of his equipment")***.

### **The London Libya Conference**

The president's speech was followed by a big London gathering on Libya, with more than 40 countries represented, convened by British Prime Minister David Cameron on March 29. This was supposed to be and in some measure was an opportunity for the international community to re-emphasize its determination to save the Libyans.

All well and good. The humanitarian disaster that might have occurred, had Gaddafi's troops really conquered Benghazi, has been averted. The NATO plus others aircraft provided for the no fly zone are now the *de facto* rebels air force. The military mission clearly includes smashing Gaddafi's armour, artillery, transport and supply lines. This is good. And the substantial hits suffered by Gaddafi's forces have emboldened the Benghazi Rebels who started a counter offensive, regaining some of their lost ground in the East.

### **All is well for the Benghazi Libyans?**

So, all is well? Not really. If you are rooting for the

Benghazi Libyans, now represented by an “Interim National Council”, while you have reasons to cheer, you also realize that nobody, either in Washington or London, announced a convincing coalition strategy, (NATO, non NATO Europeans and some Arabs), aimed at bringing this conflict to an end. We all know that beyond the humanitarian crisis happily avoided, there is an insurrection underway. While much has been hinted about providing support, no clear decision to openly aid the rebels was made. In fact, as British Foreign Secretary William Hague stated, the issue of directly aiding the rebels did not come up.

### **No diplomatic recognition for the Interim National Council**

And, even worse, after all this outpouring of support, we are not even at the point of formally recognizing the Benghazi based “Interim National Council” as the legitimate provisional Libyan Government. Only France and Qatar have done so. And in London there were about 40 countries represented that did not follow this lead.

The US has finally decided to send a diplomat, the former Deputy Chief of Mission in its Tripoli Embassy, as envoy to Benghazi. But this is only for talks and the action implies no recognition. And yet, imagine the political impact of the 40 countries represented in London unanimously recognizing the Interim National Council as the legitimate representative of the Libyan people. This would have been politically very significant and it would have boosted the rebels morale. But it did not happen.

### **Do we have a clear policy?**

So, if we take all this together, president Obama reiterated on March 28 at NDU that Gaddafi has got go. So, that has not changed. But he also indicated that making him go is not the purpose of the military operations currently underway. So, coalition, (now NATO), aircraft are enforcing the no fly zone

while smashing Libyan tanks, but they are not really aiding the rebels, nor is any of this "*kinetic action*", (Pentagonise for combat), to be construed as part of the ultimate effort to defeat Gaddafi or to make him go. Got that?

### **This is the price we pay to cobble together a coalition**

I can ascribe these conceptual contortions and half truths as the price to be paid when you have to keep together a multilateral effort. But this means that a multilateral consensus can be forged and may survive only if we define a very narrow, limited objective –helping civilians– without saying anything as to how this conflict may be brought to an end. Humanitarian intervention is an emergency measure, it is not a policy. And, as such, it is not sustainable.

### **Help the Benghazi rebels now**

And yet, all know that the issue, if we could only wish away all the political constraints accepted to broaden consensus, is quite simple. The Benghazi Libyans, whatever their ideological and political mix, are the people who are fighting Gaddafi. If we are serious, they should be supported, massively, with whatever may be reasonable at this time.

### **Health care, communications equipment and armaments**

Start with meaningful, tangible amounts of humanitarian aid. Resupply the Eastern Libyan hospitals now treating thousands of wounded. Provide whatever logistics and communication infrastructure, (GPS, cell phones, sim cards), may be useful. Help the rebels set up their own TV and radio stations, so that they can broadcast their message to the country. And then look at their military needs. A disciplined, well organized army is not improvised in a couple of weeks. But something helpful can be done. We all agree that Gaddafi's army, while superior, is not a formidable force. If we keep bombing his logistics and supply lines, it will have less to fight with against beefed up opponents.

## **Worst scenario is a stalemate**

The worst scenario here is a stalemate. We help the rebels survive but we do not give them the military help they need to win. So, Gaddafi may not be able to regain the whole country; but he is relatively secure in the West, as the rebels are too weak to defeat him. And in all this you expect the West under NATO to continue to enforce the no fly zone –indefinitely? The idea that Gaddafi will soon fall because of the pressure of the embargo and the sanctions does not sound realistic. This may happen. But it may be months or even years from now.

## **Policy-makers know what needs to be done**

Again, this may be the best that a coalition based, multilateral initiative can provide: some good, but not the entire solution. Be that as it may, president Obama, president Sarkozy and Prime Minister Cameron and all the others know that the coalition effort underway should aim at ending the conflict sooner. A long, inconclusive stalemate will translate in partners peeling off and in postponing more and more the desired outcome of a more democratic Libya.

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# **It Is Not Just Libya, Arab Autocrats Fight Back**

[the-subtitle ]

**By Paolo von Schirach**

March 21, 2011

**WASHINGTON**– America, like everybody, has been caught by surprise and totally unprepared by The Arab Spring. And as

much as it would like to steer events in the direction of peaceful transitions to democracy, the US government leverage on rapid fire political upheaval in a complicated society is modest. And if, as now, the upheavals occur simultaneously in six or seven countries, America is almost powerless.

Long term, there are many possible constructive US interventions, from student exchange programs to organised connections with different segments of society to economic investments in modernization. But all this, even assuming the vision to craft such multi-layered strategies, takes a a long, long time to bear fruits. America these days is short of cash. And it is in general not well organised to create long term strategies, especially anything that would require sustained public financial support, as most international programs in Washington are subject to constant revisions.

### **America is a spectator**

Given all this, for the time being, America the super power is largely a spectator of rapidly unfolding events. The opportunity for Washington to use its still considerable influence to counsel old rulers in constructive ways to engage their societies came and went. The Doha speech by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was astonishingly accurate and prophetic. But, (no fault of hers), it came way too late. The hurricane of change about to sweep these countries waa already brewing.

### **Arab Spring is a mixed affair**

The Arab Spring is a patchwork of reform movements, revolt and convulsions in which pre-modern issues of tribalism and religious strife are mixed with a XXI century version of old desires for representative government and freedom of expression. Somewhere, like in Tunisia and Egypt, we have seen, (so far), the affirmation of the milder and more appealing reformist versions of pro-democracy movements.

## **Libya is in a category of its own**

Elsewhere, from Libya to Yemen, it is a bloody and confusing affair. The Libyan revolt is in category of its own because Libya has been not just under another autocrat, but under the despotic rule of a bizarre psychopath disguised as a head of state who managed to stay in power for over 42 years because of his control on a stream of cash coming from the country's oil. Whatever the composition and the motivations of the opposition to his regime –it is a mixed lot– the case can be made that getting rid of Gaddafi should be a net plus, even though we should recognise that this is still a bet on the maturity of a Libyan society unaccustomed to democracy and restraint.

## **Can Gaddafi survive?**

It is entirely possible that a post-Gaddafi Libya may turn into an ungovernable tribal country in which, whatever the legitimate aspirations of some, the drag of pre-modern ideas and customs may be too strong, thus preventing the establishment of a functioning, reasonably accountable new state. Still, be that as it may, it is too late now for second thoughts on Gaddafi.

In its own convoluted ways, the West decided that it did not want to see the Benghazi rebellion end in another blood bath. At the very last minute it chose to intervene militarily. At this stage in the game, whatever the policy confusion and the operational limits imposed by the UN mandate via Security Council Resolution 1973, adopted on March 17, Gaddafi long term is toast.

## **Reinstatement in the internationally community impossible**

True enough, if the West proves to be indecisive and divided, he may somehow survive the military intervention and keep fighting for his survival. But I cannot see any scenario whereby he can once again be internationally accepted as the

legitimate ruler of Libya. But Gaddafi, as I said, is in a special category, (I should say special psychiatric ward), of his own. There are not going to be more western-led punitive expeditions against other repressive Arab rulers because, as bad as they may be, it is hard to find another one that will match Gaddafi's weird profile.

### **Elsewhere: the emergence of urban elites**

Allowing for the fact that Libya is in a category of its own, the unfolding picture is that significant segments of the Arab world urban elites suddenly woke up and demanded accountable governments and a say in running them. Let's remember that, whatever the ancient glories of the Arab civilization, for centuries these societies ignored or shunned modernity. But now, after having been mere bystanders during the XIX century industrial revolution, the XX century technological revolution and finally the unfolding information technology revolution, all at once, the Arab world –the Arab elites, I should say– woke up.

### **Educated, well traveled**

Indeed, this spontaneous, sudden political outburst is led by the more educated and more worldly urban middle class citizens. It is not accidental that many of them speak foreign languages and have studied, worked and travelled abroad. Their children often have a western education. And therefore, in different ways, they acquired some western values, including an appetite for basic democratic principles.

### **The others follow**

But the rest of the Arab societies are not even close. They are composed of mostly uneducated and much poorer people. These people so far have been swept by the reformist wave and decided to follow it, or at least nod to it. The main supporters of the uprisings have been largely poor and disenfranchised youth clamoring for immediate change and

hopefully a better economic future.

### **Oligarchies could not deal with this**

Confronted with this wave, the brittle, ossified ruling oligarchies could not cope, nor could they constructively engage with this unprecedented fire. The Tunisian president panicked and fled. And this totally unexpected event opened the floodgates. This almost unthinkable, quick end solution to never ending tyranny emboldened the Egyptians and the Yemenis and the people of Bahrain and the Libyans.

### **Western elites started cheering**

The western elites looked at all this and started cheering for the pro-democracy movements that appeared, on balance, well meaning, reasonably well organized and led by earnest young people who, whatever their religious convictions, seemed to speak the very western language of freedom, democracy, elections, limited government that westerners can relate to.

### **Before, strong belief that there could be no palatable alternatives**

Up to that point, western observers were used to think that "this is the way it is in the Middle East or North Africa" regarding Arab governments. As unpleasant as they could be, the old autocrats were deemed to be the best that these societies could produce. The only alternative, we were taught, was fanatical Islam and al-Qaeda, its military and terrorist arm. As al-Qaeda is a global threat, pro-western Hosni Mubarak did not seem to be so bad.

According to the same logic, when Mouammar Gaddafi, whatever his political calculations, decided to publicly renounce his own weapons of mass destruction programs, because of his good deed he was –sort of– welcomed back into the international community; with western oil companies salivating at the prospect of juicy deals to further develop significant Libyan

deposits.

### **Democracy finally possible?**

After the great outburst of this democratic awakening, the prospect of geriatric leaders swept away by a wave of peaceful, youthful enthusiasm seemed exhilarating. Democracy, totally absent from the Arab world, except for Iraq where it was introduced after a long and bloody US military occupation, now seemed not just possible but real.

### **Libya, Bahrain, Yemen: violent reactions**

Then came Libya and reactions in Bahrain led by King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa and reprisals in Yemen by president Ali Abdullah Saleh. The nice theoretical template of “peaceful transitions” is gone. This is going to be a messy and bloody affair that will keep the whole region in turmoil for a long time. The fact is that there are no homogeneous, developed “democratic movements” fighting entrenched autocrats.

### **Pro-democracy elites are very small**

There is a huge cultural and often generational gap between the thin veneer of western educated urban elites and the rather primitive, ossified oligarchies used to stay in power forever, because of their monopoly of force. (Even within the Chinese Communist Party leaders retire. They no longer stay until death). In between these two extremes there are large masses of mostly young, uneducated people, with a female population generally held even further back by custom and religious beliefs. So here is the problem: the basic building block for democracy, a reasonably educated populace, is missing.

### **“Legitimate aspirations” articulated by few**

The point here is that when western leaders talk lyrically about supporting “the legitimate aspirations of the people”,

they are talking about an abstract construct. Certainly they are interpreting correctly the desires expressed by the Tahrir Square young Egyptians and many others. But Egypt has a population of over 80 million. And not even a small fraction was in Tahrir Square. The strong anti-Mubarak sentiment was real. But it was expressed by an elite and thus we cannot call it unanimous.

As all revolutions, the Egyptian uprising was led by a small segment of society. The elites have now the tough job of carrying along the rest of the country. The painful, complicated part is still ahead. Egypt is just emerging from the shadows. Popular participation is still a new concept. For example, the national referendum for amendments to the constitution that will finally lead to free elections saw a modest participation of around 40% of eligible voters. Rather underwhelming, I would say. The best organised political force to date is the Muslim Brotherhood. Secular, progressive forces are still in their infancy. We have seen episodes of anti-Christian rage, with people killed. Egypt, by far the best hope for Arab democracy, has a long way to go.

### **What role for the West?**

As I indicated above, even allowing for special treatment in Libya's case, the West has a tough job ahead if it wants to constructively help pre-modern societies graduate to the world of civic culture, accountable and honest government and workable development strategies. In the meantime, it will be hit and miss, with a lot of violence. While it is good to declare support for pro-democracy movements, we know that we cannot help so many legitimate causes in so many countries.

### **Lack of unity**

On top of that the West, not to mention the rest of the world, is not at all united; while America, still licking its wounds caused by an awful recession coupled with the ill effects of

runaway public spending, no longer has the agility and the means it used to have.

As I said, action on Libya is a special case. But, even in the case of military intervention against a madman, it took weeks for leaders to focus, acting in the end literally hours before it was all over. And the UN Security Council vote, while positive, reflected deep international divisions.

### **Leading developing countries, Germany not on board**

Fate has it that the countries that abstained are all the BRIC nations: Brazil, Russia, India and China did not agree on action in Libya. Add to them Germany and you have all the leading developing nations and by far the most important country in Europe. Let's see: 1.3 billion Chinese, 1.1 billion Indians; add the rest, and you get almost 3 billion people. No, not even on the morally compelling issue of dispatching a bizarre thug like Gaddafi there is real unity in the world.

The Arab struggle for democracy will be long and it has fewer supporters than one might have thought.

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# **US and Libya, a Matter of Leadership**

[the-subtitle ]

**By Paolo von Schirach**

March 19, 2011

**WASHINGTON** – Where is America's leadership in this Libya

operation –in it, so far: France, Great Britain, The US, Canada and Italy– with the bizarre name of “Odyssey Dawn”? (Who the hell came up with that)? America is “in”, no question about that; but it is not leading and it wants the whole world to know it, by proclaiming that, beyond the cruise missiles attacks targeting Libyan air defenses and probably command and control nodes, in a matter of days rather than weeks, it will take a back seat, letting others (wbo?) conduct most military operations.

### **Confusion about US role**

The way it has been presented, this whole thing of US role, going back to the inception of the uprising in Libya in February, is quite confusing. It has given observers the impression that America was and is uncertain about what to do about Gaddafi and the Benghazi based rebellion and how much it intends to do. In principle there would have been nothing wrong if president Obama would have said, from the very beginning of this crisis, that the US, while supportive and politically in full agreement with those who want to help the Benghazi Libyans, has its hands full in Afghanistan and therefore is only too happy to defer to Paris, London and whoever else. “As we deal with an ongoing, complicated conflict in Afghanistan, you take care of Gaddafi”. Nothing wrong with an upfront division of labor among like minded allies. Except it did not happen this way.

### **The world waited for the US to lead**

In a sense, the world, and certainly the major European allies, were deferring to the US at the beginning of the Libyan uprising. Let America set the stage and provide leadership. But president Obama, by dithering on next steps, after having repeatedly declared that Colonel Gaddafi lost his legitimacy and thus has to leave his job, kept everybody guessing as to what America would do to physically dislodge him from power. And this is not good for US international

standing and credibility.

### **Last minute March 17 UN vote**

In the end, there was the UN March 17 vote, with the US clearly on board, followed by the beginning of military operations with obvious US active participation. But let us not forget that the UN vote came only at the very last minute, when the situation in Libya was desperate and Benghazi was about to be taken over. And UN action started as a French-British, not US, draft Resolution.

### **Only about protecting civilians?**

After the vote, president Obama stressed that US military participation is limited, that it is about protecting civilians, and that it will be mostly in a support capacity, as opposed to leading the charge. No connection made publicly between the initially declared political goal of getting rid of Gaddafi, (I hope this is still on the table), and the use of military power against him by either the president, Secretary of State Clinton or anybody else. (And I still thought that the purpose of war is to bend political will and obtain political objectives. If we really have to believe the letter of the UN Resolution, the only goal here is to protect Libyan civilians. Yes, we do that. And then what happens? We go home with a chastised Gaddafi still in power?)

### **Is it possible to keep a low profile?**

This is all political, of course. There is a deliberate effort to minimise the US role, to say that the engagement will be small and temporary. But if this is political, frankly I fail to see the benefits. Just like you cannot be "a little bit pregnant", the US cannot be "a little bit in a conflict". If America is out, then it is "out", completely. But if it is "in", given its well known military resources and historic presence in the region, as a matter of public perception, it is "in" all the way. True or not true it does not matter.

## **Better to go in all the way**

Therefore America, once it decided to participate, might as well throw all it has got at the enemy in order to cripple Gaddafi; this way making the conflict short. Inflict a major blow to Gaddafi and provide strong reinforcements to the Benghazi Libyans. After suffering a crushing hit, it would be surprising to see a spirited response by Gaddafi's decimated forces, except the die hard who know that they have no place to go, once their leader is out of the picture. Now, this –a decisive, short intervention– would matter politically.

## **Winning this one cannot be that hard**

In all this, given America's low profile and an as yet to be defined "coalition of the willing", (beyond its French and British core), the major good news regarding the beginning of military operations against Gaddafi on march 19 is that the enemy is only Muammar Gaddafi.

## **But what is the goal?**

Indeed, whatever the degree of coordination among the countries so far participating, the mission should not be that hard. Except that we do not know what the "real" mission is, at least not based on what is officially on record. Weeks ago, the loud proclamations, starting in Washington, were that Gaddafi needed to go, for he is a failed leader who shoots his own people. Not much of a need to substantiate this charge. But then, condemnations notwithstanding, nobody did anything.

Then, when it became obvious that Gaddafi was actually winning against the Benghazi rebels, there has been the March 17 UN vote. Except that the language of Resolution 1973/2011, while broadly authorising the use of force, says that the purpose of such force is to protect civilians. It says nothing about "regime change" –which is precisely what was openly advocated beforehand in Washington and elsewhere.

## **Do we still have regime change on the agenda?**

So, here we have quite a bit of confusion regarding what the real purpose of UN sanctioned military operations now underway should be. Unless we cynically agree that it does not matter and that the point of a UN vote was only to get a formal green light. With that done, thereafter is catch as catch can, as the Security Council Resolution provided a sufficiently vague cover under which we can do almost anything.

## **A “coalition of the willing” is in charge**

Be that as it may, in Libya we see the emergence of another “coalition of the willing”. But it is an improvised affair, with more countries probably joining in; but only as individual participants, because regional groups are not in. The European Union, EU, has really no real mandate nor dedicated defense structures. The member states, all 27 of them, meet and talk. But essentially they EU as an institution is powerless. So, take the EU out of the picture.

## **Will NATO have a role?**

Then there is the 28 member strong NATO Alliance. (There is major overlap between EU members and European members of NATO). Well, this is a different story, at least in principle. In NATO you have an integrated military command structure and systems in place. Except that there does not seem to be a NATO-wide consensus on what to do about Libya.

NATO’s Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said last week that NATO was ready to go, as long as there was need, regional support and a UN Security Council vote that would authorise action. Well, now we’ve got all the above.

Yet, NATO as an Alliance does not seem to be all that eager to engage. Just to mention one key missing element, Germany, by far the most important European country and a key NATO member, abstained in the UN Security Council vote on March 17. Not

exactly what you would call a ringing endorsement. So, NATO eventually may decide to act as an institution. But this may probably amount to giving a nod to what is already happening: a few NATO countries are engaged in the operation in Libya anyway. Others may at best provide logistical support.

### **The real issue is America's role**

But the real issue is America, as world leader and as leading NATO member. President Obama says he wants to do as little as possible, hoping that keeping a relatively low profile will avoid political damage. I indicated above that if this is the objective, I am not sure that it will work.

May be I am just sentimental; but, when America decides to enter the fray, I prefer to see it in front.

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## **US: Finally Action on Libya? Hopefully Not Too Late**

[the-subtitle ]

**WASHINGTON** – I wrote yesterday that we have reached the end of the road in Libya, given Western inaction and Gaddafi's regained military momentum that allowed his forces to retake most of the lost territory in the East. I also said that America's international prestige and credibility has been hurt by the huge gap between strong language against Gaddafi used by president Barack Obama ("he has got to go") and the inability to take any action to "make him go". Menacing words, followed by nothing is not a good formula for reaffirming a Super power international prestige. (President Teddy Roosevelt had it right: ***"Speak softly and carry a big stick"***).

Regrettably here we have it backwards: lots of braggadocio and no stick in sight).

### **Many dismayed by lack of US leadership**

And there is a long list of many influential politicians and opinion writers who have expressed similar dismay at the failure of US leadership. Just look at statements made by Senators Joe Lieberman, (Independent of Connecticut), Lindsey Graham, (Republican of South Carolina), and John McCain from Arizona, the most senior Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee. And also read the editorials of The Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal, coupled with writings by Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times and judgement expressed by David Gergen, respected advisor to many presidents and CNN contributor.

### **Finally, change of tone in Washington**

Well, today, one day later, we see a change in tone by the Obama administration. The US is now fully behind the France-UK-Lebanon, (in representation of the Arab League), UN draft Security Council Resolution that would authorize a no-fly zone over Libya and apparently much more.

This is good, as far as it goes. The UN Security Council vote scheduled for some time later today, Thursday March 17, may allow the passing of this agenda. But this positive outcome would imply that Russia and China will vote in favor, or at least abstain. Unlikely, but possible.

Still, even if the UN passes the Resolution later today, thus giving a green light to some form of military action against Gaddafi, it is now painfully late, may be too late, as he has almost won; while the rebels are now fighting for their very survival within the last remaining Benghazi stronghold.

### **The West wasted time**

The West, the US in the lead, wasted three precious weeks. Real, tangible support for the Benghazi rebels at the beginning of this insurrection might have shifted the political balance in their favor, while giving tools to the insurrection, this way increasing its momentum.

Indeed, seeing that the international community was solidly with the rebels might have encouraged more Gaddafi people to defect, shortening the conflict and loss of life. Now it is very late. The loyalists who have been shooting fellow Libyans all this time are too compromised. Besides, now they think that they are winning, thus they are less inclined to jump ship.

So late in the game, in order to encourage massive defections from the Gaddafi camp, one would need a massive display of UN backed Western plus Arab League fire power and the credible determination to use it immediately. If the Gaddafi loyalists do not believe that the US, France and Britain, plus assorted Arab nations that may join in, really mean business, then the coalition shall have to fight them all the way to Tripoli. At this stage, "making Gaddafi go" may become a really bloody affair.

### **All is possible, provided US will to act**

All is possible of course. And, as everybody knows, at issue here is not whether the US has the tools. America clearly has superior armed forces. And France and the UK have their own. What has been lacking throughout this crisis is the willingness to lead. May be now president Obama changed his mind. And this would be good.

But it may be too late to help the Libyans and it may be too late to repair the damage to America's leadership. As I said, I am willing to be surprised. But fixing this mess today is a lot more complicated than just a few weeks ago, when Gaddafi was disoriented and on the defensive.

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# Britain and France Want to Act on Libya, Will the US Lead?

[the-subtitle ]

**WASHINGTON**— Paddy Ashdown , former British Liberal-Democratic leader and former High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina between 2002 and 2006 offered his opinion on what to do next in Libya. (*It is Time for Europe to back a no-fly zone*. The Financial Times, March 14, 2011). Ashdown writes with the credibility of someone who has been there, who has already seen the bad consequences of European indecisiveness and delay followed by more delay during the brewing Balkan crisis in the 1990s.

## **We have seen it before in Bosnia**

In the case of the Bosnian tragedy, European inaction allowed the continuation of a slaughter: *“about a quarter million people were killed—writes Ashdown—2 million driven from their homes, the United Nations was humiliated and and international rhetoric was shown to be sham”*. Well, today’s Libya crisis has not reached Bosnia levels; but it is already pretty bad. And we can see that, without any restraint imposed from outside and no apparent fear of retribution, Gaddafi’s forces are now advancing against the poorly organised and lightly armed rebels.

## **Gaddafi’s clan counts on Europe’s timidity**

And the Gaddafi family, judging from their pronouncements in interviews with western media, talk with arrogance,

threatening punishment for false friends like Italy who have now turned their backs against Libya. This arrogance can be explained in part as detachment from reality but in larger part because the Gaddafi clan hold a deep belief that a weak West in the end will sit back and do nothing. In the meantime, as the West holds meetings and issues statements, (another one in Paris just now in the context of the G-8), Gaddafi's forces crush the Benghazi rebels, conveniently described by Libyan media as "al-Qaeda terrorists".

### **We can do this**

Well, Paddy Ashdown has seen all this before and in his piece invites Europe and the West to take action. Besides, he observes, there is backing already. The Benghazi Libyans have asked for help. The Arab League has also endorsed a no-fly zone. We still do not have a UN Security Council green light; and it would be nice to get it. But this may not be easy, given standard Russian and Chinese opposition. Still, Ashdown concludes, "*given what is at stake for us, the right response of European leaders should not be to suck their teeth in indecision as they did last week, [at the EU summit]; but to back this [Security Council] Resolution and say they stand ready to enact it immediately if agreed*".

And so this is the even handed voice, hardly a blood thirsty war cry, of a former professional soldier who has been in the middle of a major crisis once before and who has witnessed the tragic consequences of timidity and political paralysis in front of a mounting humanitarian crisis. In the same *The Financial Times*, an Editorial invites "*America to get off the fence and back a no fly zone*".

### **Cameron, no- fly zone "perfectly practical and deliverable"**

And so we see some signs of British resolve. And, if we add to these opinions the more relevant forceful words favoring action uttered by British Prime Minister David Cameron, we may

hope that someone is actually awake in Europe. Cameron said that a no-fly zone over Libya is “*perfectly practical and deliverable*”. Mixing national interest concerns and the will to help the embattled Libyans , he also added that:

***“To those who say it is nothing to do with us, I would simply respond: Do we want a situation where a failed pariah state festers on Europe’s southern border, potentially threatening our security, pushing people across the Mediterranean and creating a more dangerous and uncertain world for Britain and for all our allies as well as for the people of Libya?”***

### **Britain and France want to take action**

So, Britain seems to be poised to do something. France has already recognised the Benghazi Libyans as the legitimate Government and French President Nicolas Sarkozy is also in favor of a no-fly zone. But, while all this is positive and comforting, within Europe the UK and France are a small minority. No chance of a EU wide forceful consensus on military action in Libya.

As for Sarkozy and Cameron’s attempts to craft a Security Council Resolution that could overcome Russia and China, well, good luck. If this type of desirable UN legal endorsement is considered essential, then the chances for action are slim.

### **In the end, America must lead**

In the end, while these two European leaders do matter, America is, as always, the key player. As of now, there is no clear sign as to what president Obama wants and may be able to do, given the difficult politics of a deeply divided Congress now in the midst of extremely adversarial budget negotiations. In theory could America lead a NATO operation in Libya even without a UN Security Council legitimising vote? Of course it could. But it is not clear that it will. To say ominously that “we have not taken anything off the table” and that “we retain all the options” sounds like strong language. But there is a

point in which, lacking action, threats become empty threats.

### **Washington declared that Gaddafi has got to go**

As I wrote before, it is not good for America to have publicly declared that "Gaddafi has got to go" and then appear hesitant when it comes to do something to actually make him go –right at the time when this outcome matters a great deal, as unhindered Gaddafi's forces are killing more Libyans every day. Whatever its current economic and fiscal predicament, America still has by far the largest array of the most expensive, most advanced weapons in the world manned by well trained, professional armed forces. The US is certainly not afraid of the Libyan Air Force. So, it is settled that Washington does not lack the tools to deal with a minor opponent like Libya. As for the will, who knows. But this is not just a small detail. This is critical; and, at some point, showing or not showing resolve becomes a litmus test of US credibility.

### **Will Obama take action?**

President Obama, by declaring that Gaddafi's time has expired, has in effect made America a party to this conflict in Libya. If Obama had said at the beginning that the US has no issue in Libya and would stay out of this conflict, no matter what, it would have been different. But he took a clear position, by default at least, in favor of the rebels. Now it is time to back it up with deeds.

As Prime Minister Cameron said, we can do this: "*it is practical and deliverable*". Is once upon a time Imperial Britain overconfident, or is America the Superpower confused as to its purpose and international role? This is no small issue.

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# Europe Will Not Act on Libya, US Slow: Has The West Any Resolve?

[the-subtitle ]

**WASHINGTON** – Regarding what Europe is doing about the crisis in Libya, if it were not for the tragic consequences of dithering and convening meetings of councils and special groups, as opposed to taking action, the whole European choreography of confabulation, including –almost unprecedented– a “EU Emergency Summit” on Libya, would look funny, almost a farce.

Consider this. On one side, there is this universally recognized bad guy, (or certifiable guy, if you prefer), Colonel Gaddafi, who is trying to fight back, kill the rebels who seek democracy, (on balance we call them the good guys), and reassert himself as Libya’s boss. And on the other side there is Europe, the EU, a union of 27 countries that met and strongly condemned him and his repressive actions against his people. You would think that after such strong words, European action against Gaddafi would follow. And, given that it is 27 to 1, without knowing much more, you’d think it is easy to know who wins this one. Well, not so easy, in fact. And this is why this a tragedy.

## **Libya versus the European Union**

Indeed, opposing Gaddafi the pariah, beginning on the northern shores of the Mediterranean and stretching all the way to the Iberian Peninsula, up to Scotland, the Baltic Sea and eastward to the Black Sea is the Mighty European Union. A great Union,

27 member strong, that, *if it were a real state*, would have the biggest GDP in the world and a much bigger population than the United States of America. Indeed, the European Union includes Germany, France, The UK and Italy –some of the largest economies in the world.

### **Gaddafi against the largest world economy**

So, a powerful union of European countries, (going back to 1957), that, taken together, constitute the biggest GDP in the world with a combined population of more than 400 million people have met to condemn Gaddafi and they are now confronting this third rate North African dictator who already lost control of half a country of about 6.5 million to spirited, if poorly organised, insurgents demanding freedom. And the somewhat damaged dictator does not have a powerful military. His armed forces may be effective against poorly armed Libyan civilians who have improvised an insurrection; but they should be no match against the combined resources of Europe.

In another era Gaddafi would have been treated as a painful nuisance to be taken care of swiftly by dispatching an expeditionary force aimed at supporting the Benghazi rebels while dealing a crushing blow to the dictator.

### **Europe matters on economy and trade issues**

But not these days. Europe has real power and indeed it uses it when it comes to trade and anti-trust actions. When EU authorities speak on these matters, Microsoft, Intel and General Electric listen, very carefully –and in some cases they tremble. Huge markets, millions of customers and billions of dollars are at stake. When it comes to economic and trade issues, Europe matters, a great deal.

### **EU: No real foreign and security policies**

But when it comes to foreign and security policies, Europe has

no real cohesion, no viable institutions, no mandate, no policies and no dedicated resources. And so –guess what– nobody pays any attention. Sure enough, recently, with the enactment of the Lisbon Treaty, Europe upgraded its executive structures. Now it has a President of the European Council, Mr. Herman van Rompuy is the incumbent; and a High Representative in charge of EU foreign policy, Lady Catherine Ashton.

Except that these are virtually unknown office holders who command no political allegiance, as they are nominated, rather than elected. Indeed, while the creation of these new positions may indicate tentative progress towards future political integration, at present they matter very little.

The President of the Council has no independent executive powers. Lady Ashton has some staff; but she is not in charge of anything much. She coordinates something; but she does not make policy and she does not lead Europe.

### **A Supercharged Chamber of Commerce**

The point is that Europe is not a country and is not even close to getting there. Europe is a supercharged Chamber of Commerce, with very important attributions and significant jurisdiction when it comes to the internal market and international negotiations on trade and a lot more. But when it comes to military action, nobody cares about a bunch of rich and semi rich countries that cannot field, let alone send into combat, any armed forces, as the EU does not have any.

### **Would Gaddafi care about EU resolutions?**

With that in mind, I doubt that Colonel Gaddafi, ensconced in his Tripoli palace, once told that the EU just held an “Emergency Summit” on Libya, said: *“Oh My God, they did it. This is the end. Now that the fierce Europeans met, they are really going to come after me”*. In fact, Europe, even after having gutted its military after the end of the Cold War, is

not militarily insignificant. In theory, individual EU members, starting with the UK and France, would have assets that could be brought to bear against a minor adversary like Gaddafi. But institutionally the EU has no real powers in security and defense and certainly not much will to create them. A EU-led campaign aimed at getting rid of Gaddafi is unthinkable.

### **Nicolas Sarkozy stands out**

In this rather disappointing picture that shows some of the world richest but weak states powerless when confronted with an otherwise totally manageable crisis, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France looks like a hero. He talked about possible military strikes, if Gaddafi attacks civilians. (Well, what has been doing all this time?). But at least, Sarkozy, with some British backing, is talking about "action". And, on a political level, he was gutsy enough to recognise the Benghazi Libyans as the real government. All very good. Except that no one else, aside from David Cameron within this august group of 27 agrees with him, at least not to date.

### **Rationalizing inaction as superior wisdom**

And you get a flavor of EU resolve on Libya in these statements by a EU diplomat reported by The Guardian, (*Nicolas Sarkozy calls for air strikes on Libya, if Gaddafi attacks civilians*, March 11, 2011):

***"The risks are high for potential civilian casualties and potential collateral damage. The efficiency of a no-fly zone is very questionable. Apart from anything else, European command and control facilities would not be able to get a no-fly zone up and running in less than five or six weeks, and Nato is suggesting it would take at least three to four weeks. The question is whether, in political terms, a no-fly zone can achieve what you want it to achieve."***

**Too difficult**

Now this is not exactly the language of feisty warriors. "It is too difficult". "It is going to take time". "There will be collateral damage". "In the end it will not work". But, with all its caveats and recommendations for inaction, this language is unfortunately indicative of the true European spirit: long on solemn declarations, political statements, exhortations and other theatrical stuff and short on almost anything else that might require "action" when the going gets really tough.

And so, dictators of the world –even little ones– do take heart. The Europeans have no stomach to seriously confront you. They are certainly ready to come and do business with you, in the name of international understanding, of course. (And the parade of leaders in pilgrimage to Tripoli after Gaddafi was rehabilitated after he gave up his weapons of mass destruction program is a testament to this). But if you misbehave, expect strong statements, and not much else. They will not come and get you.

### **No heroes, except for the Libyans**

In this story, unfortunately there are no heroes, except for the gutsy Libyans who have started a "come as you are" revolution with no plans, no high command, no real organised forces. With whatever they have got, they try their best against the residual army still loyal to Gaddafi.

### **No great inspiration from Washington either**

Unfortunately, if Europe's predilection for long meetings followed by toothless condemnations is depressing, nothing very inspiring coming from Washington either. I have already said in another piece that I find Washington's slow motion, if any, towards any action on Libya quite disturbing, as America, unlike Europe, is a recognised world power. Still, compared to EU gestures and talk, Obama's words on Libya during his March 11 press conference have a bit more bite:

*“So the bottom line is, is that I have not taken any options off the table at this point. I think it is important to understand that we have moved about as swiftly as an international coalition has ever moved to impose sanctions on Qaddafi. I am absolutely clear that it is in the interest of the United States, and more importantly, in the interest of the Libyan people for Mr. Qaddafi to leave. And I have not foreclosed these options.*

*Now, I do take very seriously making sure that any decisions I make that involve U.S. military power are well thought through and are done in close consultation with Secretary Gates, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen, and all relevant personnel. Any time I send the United States forces into a potentially hostile situation, there are risks involved and there are consequences. And it is my job as President to make sure that we have considered all those risks”.*

**He talked about “military action”**

So, Obama said again that Gadaffi has got to go. He also announced the appointment of State Department liaison with the Benghazi Libyans. Not a legal recognition of the rebels as the true government of Libya, but a big step closer to it.

And this time, may be inadvertently, the US president let it slip that he is carefully reviewing pitfalls related to sending US forces into a potentially hostile situation. He named the principals: the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the Secretary of Defense, he uttered the words, “United States forces”, hostile situation”. And those words, conjuring up possible action against Libya, have a certain ring coming from America. Unlike Mr. van Rompuy and the European Council, president Obama does have muscle at his command, and real muscle at that.

**The West does not shine here**

And yet, even though I find some comfort in seeing that the US

president is finally considering practical ways to make Gaddafi go, with force if necessary, if we take this altogether, the spectacle offered by "The West" in confronting this bizarre dictator is not that inspiring.

I certainly do not advocate "sending the marines" at the drop of a hat. But in this case, as in the case of Bosnia in the 1990s, the West talks a lot before mustering the resolve to do anything that is even remotely risky. And, in the case of Bosnia and later on Kosovo, it took America's belated push to have a semi-decent coalition action, via the NATO Alliance. In the meantime, the slaughter went on.

And here we are, a few years later, once again confronting another otherwise insignificant neighborhood bully, Gaddafi, who decided to go to war against his own people, hoping to get away with it. And Europe on its own will do nothing, notwithstanding its close proximity to Libya and geopolitical interests. Farther away, public relations challenged America, fearful of Muslim reactions to its use of force, while a bit more sanguine, is moving so slowly that it makes one wonder whether it intends to do anything at all.

### **So little resolve with such a minor opponent indicates weakness**

As I said, this is puny Libya we are dealing with, not the old Warsaw Pact with 30 Red Army armored divisions in East Germany. We are not talking about starting World War III, with a nuclear holocaust and the end of the world. This is why this is such a worrisome picture. On one side is embattled Gaddafi, and on the other side we have Europe and America whose combined GDPs amount to more than US 30 trillion, by far the largest mass of wealth on earth. And these economic giants do not have the resolve to come together and take swift action against a really minor gangster in a case in which there is really no doubt as to who is the villain and whose side should we be on.

The real strength and vitality of a civilization is measured also on the chances it is willing to take to uphold the principles it declares to value. If Libya is a test case, not much strength in the West, I'm afraid.

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# What Will America Do to Make Gaddafi Go?

[the-subtitle ]

**WASHINGTON**— After having declared in starkly clear terms that “Gaddafi has got go”, what is Washington going to do, right now, *to make him go*? Not at all clear. And this is worrisome, as America cannot afford to issue such strong statements with no follow on action. Consider this. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in a March 8 interview with Kay Burley of Sky News was really uncomfortable in declaring America’s support for a “no fly zone” over Libya. She went to great lengths in prefacing every answer with the proviso that this —the no fly zone— is not what the US wants; but (supposedly) what the Libyan people are asking for. And this no fly zone —if it will ever be enforced— would not be a US initiative; but an initiative that would emerge from a broad consensus within the international community: the UN, NATO’s North Atlantic Council, the Arab League, or whoever else.

## **Is America leading?**

Well, something does not add up here. It is alright for the US to consult and seek agreement on actions that —let’s not kid ourselves— entail hostilities (read that as “war”) with Libya. We have already had enough US-led, (mostly) unilateral, military interventions in this last few years. Adding another

one, may be too much. So, looking for consensus and the broadest possible participation and endorsements is a good idea.

Except for one thing: is the US leading or following on Libya? Is America a world power willing to use its clout to influence others? Or is Washington's position merely to go along with whatever "all the others" decide to do? Quite frankly, I am no longer quite sure. After having gone on a limb by declaring that Gaddafi's ousting is the only acceptable outcome of this crisis, now I do not see much US leadership.

### **Obama made it clear: Gaddafi has got to go**

The way I see this, at the very beginning, the US Government was a bit coy on the whole Libya uprising that started on February 15. But then we got a pretty clear idea as to where America stands from president Barack Obama himself. Because of his use of violence against his own people –the president more or less said– Colonel Gaddafi has lost his legitimacy to be Libya's ruler and has got to go. More such statements from Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and the US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, followed. Now this is stark; and clear. There does not seem to be much room for compromise.

America says that Gaddafi is too discredited and he is no longer a legitimate head of state. End of story. This clear US position is probably quite reassuring for the people of Benghazi who are trying to get rid of Gaddafi, while putting together some semblance of a credible, provisional government. As they struggle, the most important world power just signaled that it ditched Gaddafi.

### **What will Washington do now?**

But now, many more days into this conflict, after having done the easy stuff, (condemnations, sanctions, freezing of assets, and the like), the US Government is confronted with the difficult stuff. What is America going to do "to make Gaddafi

go”, as he does not seem to be inclined to take Washington’s thoughtful advice? Looking at Secretary Clinton’s replies to the Sky News interview mentioned above, not much. America will consult, will listen to and will follow what the international community will agree to do. (And bear in mind that the agreement could be to do nothing. If we are waiting for a UN mandate, it seems unlikely that Russia and China will endorse any Security Council Resolution authorizing no fly zones and/or the use of force through other means). Besides, does America have a recommended policy that it wants to see implemented? Not clear at this stage.

### **Difficult situation**

Look, it has been noted by many that this is a nasty affair. While there is an easy consensus in loathing Gaddafi, the situation on the ground is murky. Most likely the US has unreliable intelligence on who’s who within the composite groups fighting Gaddafi. It would be naive to assume that all of them are “good guys”. Most likely, there are some Islamic radicals and also many opportunists, people who were with Gaddafi until yesterday and then decided to switch sides, as they bet he would lose. So, getting into yet another conflict –even assuming no ground troops– with uncertain partners is no light matter.

### **Stay out of it?**

Richard Haas, president of the influential New York based Council on Foreign Relations, in a lengthy *The Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece (*The U.S. Should Keep Out of Libya*, March 8, 2011), made a fairly convincing argument as to the wisdom of staying out of the whole thing. Too messy –Haas maintains– and not really at the top of US national security priorities and concerns. Again, reasonable, prudent points. Except, in my opinion, that this warning comes too late.

**Washington is committed to making the Libyan dictator go**

Indeed, America's top leadership has already declared not that "perhaps Colonel Gaddafi should consider the idea of relinquishing power". No, Washington has said that he lost the legitimacy to be considered the rightful head of state and he has to go. But Gaddafi, (unless there is stuff going on behind the scenes, whereby he is negotiating terms for his exile, or something like this), has declared that he is going nowhere; and that he will fight to the end the –according to his propaganda– al-Qaeda-inspired and led rebellion. The situation on the ground so far at least indicates that Gaddafi's positions in Tripoli and the West of the country are still solid; while his forces are trying to reconquer lost ground.

### **Start with massive humanitarian intervention for the Benghazi Libyans**

So, what are we going to do to make him go? For starters it would be comforting to see a much more aggressive US-led humanitarian intervention. The Benghazi rebels need everything. Start by providing medical help, supplies, surgical equipment. This is the stuff that goes fast when hospitals need to treat hundreds of casualties every day. Provide logistical support. Give them ambulances, whatever. Give them cell phones, anything that may help their internal communications and improved cohesion. This actions, still short of military engagement, would be psychologically very valuable, as they boost the morale of the insurgents; while they would signal to the weaker links within Gaddafi's camp that the US is solidly on the other side. While some of this is humanitarian action is taking place, from what the public can glean, the US do not seem to be involved in an all out effort.

### **Be prepared to go further, if necessary**

And even if Washington would engage in a serious humanitarian operation, we should consider that this may not be enough. Clear signs of American supports for the Benghazi Libyans may

not be sufficient to cause cracks among Gaddafi loyalists. And so, what would America do to make the dictator go?

### **America's credibility now at stake**

This is no small matter. Having gone this far, having declared that Gaddafi has got to go, Washington cannot forget about the whole thing, and just sit back and watch as the people on the ground who want to make him go are fighting for their own survival. Does America want to lead, or does president Obama want to be regarded as the president of a "has been" power that barks but cannot bite?

As I said above, Richard Haas and others who recommend to stay out of this Libya mess may be right in principle. But it is too late now to back track. The very credibility and prestige of the United States of America has been invested and is at stake right now.

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# **Americans Do Not Know About The Welfare State Crisis?**

[the-subtitle ]

*"People in Washington assume that Americans understand how big the problem [of solvency for the US welfare state] is, but most Americans don't have a clue".*

*-John Boehner, Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives*

WASHINGTON – Now, this is a revelation, coming in an interview with The Wall Street Journal ("*GOP Aims to Tame Benefits Programs*", March, 4, 2011). So, Americans are clueless about

one of the most talked about and debated critical issues of our time.

But how can this be? We just had elections fought mostly on the need to cut spending. The Republicans won the fight with a huge upset. John Boehner got to be Speaker of the House precisely because of this victory. But now he candidly tells us that the very people who voted his party into the majority in the House *on a spending cuts platform* do not really know much about the future insolvency of the welfare state –which is the core issue of federal spending. And now, because of this ignorance, before we can fashion reforms aimed at reducing the weight and cost of the welfare state, according to Boehner, we really need to go out and explain to the same Americans what this is all about, so that hopefully we can bring them on board.

### **What were the 2010 elections about?**

And so, what were the 2010 elections about? And what about the sizable army of 87 Republican freshmen, many of them propelled by the anti-spending Tea Party Movement, who have come to Washington with the fierce determination to lay waste on the federal budget? Whom do they represent? Well, who knows.

Be that as it may, Boehner's (perhaps inadvertent) admission that the public is not aware of the real issues highlights the populist, as opposed to substantive, tenor of last fall's campaign. People were in truth very uncomfortable. The economy was very bad and unemployment historically high. On top of that, many thought that president Barack Obama was a Socialist, (yes, some actually did). They thought that the Democrats were going to nationalize "everything". A small but significant minority seriously believed (no, this is not a joke) that Obama is a Muslim and thus an alien element in American society. In simplistic terms, many Americans concluded that such disarray had to be the fault of the party in power. And so they whacked the Democrats.

## **Tell the truth now?**

But now, if we are really serious about rebalancing the books and cutting the spending that we were told would ruin us, (and it will), well now we discover that nobody really understood that this wretched spending includes the money that they, the voters, are getting via substantial welfare programs, benefiting mostly retirees.

## **The 2010 campaign was dominated by emotional issues**

Well, for anybody still under the illusion that in a well oiled democracy like America an election is an opportunity for a serious debate “on the issues” and then choosing the best political option via a freely given vote, this is another reminder that it is not so. While hard issues are out there during the campaign, people in large measure vote their emotions of the moment. Last November it was fear of the future and distress about the economy. Punishing the incumbent party, the Democrats, looked like a good plan, and so America did just that.

But, based on Boehner’s comment, it would appear that there was not much substance in the campaign that led to the almost historic Republican victory in the House, (and throughout America, with state legislatures and governors turning Republican in large numbers).

## **Now it is time to get serious**

And now, ironically, the Republicans, the victorious party, if they want to be serious in leading on how to solve the fiscal crisis –and some of them, including Boehner himself and House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan are serious– find themselves in the uncomfortable position of having to tell the people “the truth”: any serious action on federal spending will take some stuff away from them. It is not at all clear that the Republican Party as a whole wants to go ahead and do it. As all politicians, the Republicans know that voters

usually shoot the messenger.

### **Obama is not on board**

To get cover, the Republicans would want the Democratic president Barack Obama to lead on this, thus creating a national political consensus that would not make the Republicans the primary target of voters' anger. But president Obama has already shown that he is unwilling to lead now on something so complicated and divisive as welfare reform, just as he starts organizing his re-election campaign for 2012. He does not want to jeopardise his second bid for the White House. His proposed budget for fiscal 2011-2012 illustrates his timidity on the issue. There are cuts in his budget, but not the serious ones that could be politically damaging. The president right now does not want to fix federal spending for the long haul. Right now, he wants to be reelected.

So, if the Republicans really want to honor their campaign promises, they need to get in front, on their own, knowing full well that in American politics you normally do not win on a platform centered on taking stuff away from millions of voters.

### **Naive belief that it was all about "fraud and abuse"**

Last fall there was a lot of generic talk about spending cuts. But it was mostly in the context of a strong anti-Obama sentiment. People did not vote for a clearly understood reform plan of the welfare state. They voted against Barack Obama and in favor of generic cuts. Many naively thought that the deficit and debt problems are really due to waste, pork barrel programs and earmarks. Do away with abuse and favoritism and all is taken care of. Well, it ain't so, America, not by a long shot. If that's what you were told, well, you were lied to –once more. You can eliminate all pork barrel programs, all earmarks and all "waste, fraud and abuse" and you'll make only a small dent in the deficit. The real issue is entitlement

reform.

### **The real money is in entitlement programs**

If we really do get serious about spending reform, we got to start where the real money is: Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid and the other large welfare programs that collectively eat about 60 per cent of total federal spending, for a total of almost 2 trillion dollar in fiscal 2010. I repeat: that is where the real money is.

Of course, next to entitlements, (and leaving aside another 5 per cent of the budget that is devoted to paying interest on the existing national debt), there is the entire discretionary spending, totaling about 1.360 trillion in 2010. And that is also significant money. However, of this large sum, about 800 billion is represented by defense spending that constitutes about 22 per cent of total federal outlays. The Pentagon should not be immune from cuts. Yet, it is politically more difficult to cut the military when we are fighting wars and supporting deployments in theatre of hundreds of thousands of troops and all they need.

### **Discretionary spending is not a lot**

If we assume that we cannot really pare down defense that much, (at least until we fight in Afghanistan), what is left, amounting to about 528 billion in 2010, is what is normally referred to in federal budget jargon as "non defense discretionary spending". This is only about 15 per cent of total spending. And it includes all the federal programs you can imagine, from health to education, to the environment, to energy, national parks and space programs. Without too many calculations, it is obvious that, even doing away with entire chunks of supposedly useless spending, we do not accomplish much. You can abolish entire Departments and you save may be 2 or 3 per cent of total spending.

### **Why are we in this mess?**

Again, while some cuts across the board would certainly help, the real money is in entitlements and then defense. Defense is a difficult topic in war time. Entitlements –remember that they consume 60 per cent of the budget—are difficult any time, as they have an enormous constituency of elderly, and thus more inclined to vote, citizens.

But why are we in this mess? Very simple. Because of demographics, and unexpected increases in the cost of medical care over the course of many decades. Welfare programs were designed to take care of the elderly, then (1930s and 1960s) a relatively small percentage of the total population. But now they provide federal assistance to much larger numbers of people, simply because Americans live much longer. At the same time, medical care has advanced technologically; but it has gotten to be more expensive. More elderly people require more expensive medical services and the bill increases every year much more than inflation.

### **No higher taxes means fewer services**

It is fairly clear that Americans are unwilling to pay higher taxes in order to provide the additional funds necessary to re-balance the ever expanding welfare accounts. Without additional funds, people will have to get less or later, or both. In the case of Social Security, it is relatively simple. You raise the eligibility age, so that less money is given to each recipient. People will have to wait a little longer in order to receive benefits. You can also means test the system, given less to those who already have higher incomes.

Medicare is much, much tougher, as medical costs have to do with systemic deficiencies far too complex to summarise them here. Still, unless we can rein in out of control costs, the only way out is rationed care and/or having better off people pay more out of pocket. Which is to say that people will get services, only less than they are used to. Tough, but necessary.

## **Who wants to give the news and pay the price of honesty?**

This is the unpleasant stuff Americans, according to Speaker Boehner, are still clueless about. And the reality is that, if we want to fix our books, the era of practically free stuff coming from Washington is over. And it is about time someone would say so –in plain language. It is a shame that president Obama decided to pass on this one. The Republicans may be more serious on real fiscal reform. However, they know that, if they go ahead and spread the message, they may fall into a huge political trap –ironically of their own making. By becoming “the bad guys” on entitlement cuts, they will end up losing politically; while Obama, by defining himself as the protector of federal checks for the middle class, will get re-elected.

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## **Libya, Test Case for When and How a Government is Deemed Unfit**

**WASHINGTON** – With the unfolding Libya crisis we are witnessing the emergence of “limited sovereignty” as a novel, (and binding?), political as well as international law principle. As the situation in Tripoli evolves, we see a broad-based consensus whereby other governments declared that “Colonel Gaddafi is using force against his own people; and therefore he is unfit to rule and has to leave”.

As US Assistant Secretary of State Crowley (Feb. 28) put it:

***“But clearly, we – the President [Barack Obama], the Secretary [of State] have made clear, we believe that Gaddafi himself***

***has lost the legitimacy to rule, and we hope that he will go."***

Aside from the diplomatically soft "*we hope that he will go*", we have it from the U.S. Department of State –that is the Government of the United States of America, still the most important economic and military power in the world– that a head of state "*has lost his legitimacy to rule*", on the basis of having used violence against peaceful protesters.

### **When governments lose legitimacy**

And so, from all this we glean that if a government seriously misbehaves, not internationally but towards its own people– as it is clearly the case in Libya– then the international community has apparently the right to declare the ruler (Colonel Gaddafi in this case) unfit for the job and thus illegitimate.

Now, this is pretty strong stuff. We are not yet at the point of kicking out the "unfit ruler" with the use of force. In the case of Libya, we do not yet have a United Nations Security Council Resolution authorizing military power against Colonel Gaddafi predicated on his "proven" lack of legitimacy .

Still, even if we are not there yet, we have already progressed quite a bit in narrowing the legal discretionary powers of a sovereign government, by asserting that the international community or some of its key members have the right to dictate what an established government –whatever its own domestic laws– can and cannot do within its own boundaries.

### **A big change**

Now this is a big change. Let's keep in mind that the way the existing United Nations Charter used to be interpreted supposedly prevented other countries from interfering in the domestic affairs of any other Member of the UN.

Until now, the rules seemed to indicate that, according to the UN Charter, a government has clear international obligations, and thus liabilities in case of violations, only if it engages in actions amounting to threats to the peace. For instance, when Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990 he broke the UN rules regarding the prohibition of acts of aggression. Thus the international community, acting under United Nations cover, had a clear legal basis for a military intervention aimed at dislodging him. And so we had Desert Storm in January 1991 with the US-led and UN approved coalition that did the job.

Likewise, the US, even though on less clear legal ground, claimed that it had the right to act against Saddam Hussein in 2003, not because he was a dictator, but because it appeared that he had unauthorized weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) that could be used as instruments of aggression against other countries. The US case against Saddam was based on the notion that his regime represented an imminent threat to the security of other countries.

### **Internal affairs used to be off-limits**

However, up until recently, autocrats or totalitarian regimes in theory did not have anything to fear, as long as they did not threaten the sovereignty of other countries. Indeed, Art. 2, paragraph 7 of the United Nations Charter states that:

***“Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter; but this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII”.***

And, again the “enforcement measures” under Chapter VII were generally understood to deal with threats to the peace in the form of hostile military action against another country. So,

there seemed to be a broad agreement whereby whatever happened within the boundaries of a state is of no concern for the international community. And so, in principle, a repressive dictatorship, as long as it would be peaceful vis-a-vis its neighbors, could be a UN Member in good standing.

### **Now, domestic acts of government can cause foreign reactions and interventions**

But now, it is all different. Dictators and autocrats beware:

*We have now a new consensus that enables other governments and UN bodies to determine whether you have gone too far in repressing your own people; this way not only forfeiting your right to stay in office, but also opening yourself to be indicted by the International Criminal Court. In other words, what used to be thought as sovereign acts of government now may drive you out of office and may be put you in jail. Which is to say that sovereignty is no longer unlimited.*

### **Heavy stuff, no more sovereignty the way we thought about it**

As I said, this is pretty heavy stuff. We may welcome this development; but we should also acknowledge that as yet we have no credible, standing enforcement mechanism for these new principles, as the hesitation about next steps towards “the unfit ruler” of Libya attests.

True, on Libya we have had the quick and unanimous passing of UN Security Council Resolution 1970. But, without real enforcement teeth, (read: a mandate to mount a military action), sanctions and investigations will do little to change the balance of forces on the ground.

### **Libya, easy test case**

In all this, bear in mind that to use Libya as a test case is almost too easy, as we can all agree that Gaddafi is an exception even among autocrats. He is essentially a bizarre

thug, awash in oil money, masquerading as head of state. But, if beyond Libya and the outrageous Gaddafi, this becomes a new principle, how egregious needs the behavior of a ruler be in order to disqualify him from governing?

### **Definition of this new idea of limited sovereignty?**

I am not sure that the exact legal boundaries of this “limited sovereignty doctrine” have been defined. This is really uncharted territory. But it is clear that, whatever will happen regarding Libya and possible actions, including military actions, against Tripoli, there is now a much broader political, (if not legal), acceptance of a new principle whereby a ruler is alright as long as he governs with consent and as long as he allows people to protest peacefully to air grievances.

### **The old Soviet interpretation, gone along with communism**

In the past, in the good old days of the Cold War and the Warsaw Pact, Moscow showed us the enforcement of its own version of a “limited sovereignty doctrine”. Simply stated, the satellite countries of Eastern Europe were not allowed to stray from the established and Moscow-enforced ideological and political orthodoxy. Through military invasions in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and then through various actions in Poland in the 1970s and 1980s the Soviets and their proxies made that point.

We had to get to the end of the Soviet Empire in 1989 for this doctrine to be finally set aside. Without Soviet enforcement, the Empire fell apart –rather quickly, as the images of happy people dancing on the ruins of the Berlin Wall remind us.

### **Today, a “New Era”**

But now we have entered a “New Era”. We saw parts of this new consensus emerging during the bloody crisis and civil war in Bosnia. We saw it in Kosovo, a crisis that would have been

labeled “domestic” in earlier times, as Kosovo was legally part of Serbia. We have seen attempts at enforcing it in some cases in Africa.

## **The Arab Spring**

And today, with these unprecedented popular uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East, we have reached new levels. In the cases of Tunisia and Egypt the international community eventually applauded what appeared to be the acceptance of popular grievances.

Old autocrats finally relinquished power, ushering in (we hope) a new era of constitutional reform leading to real participation and inclusiveness. As these two countries decided to accept popular demands dealing with transparency and accountability, they get a pass and there is no need to intervene against them.

Likewise, in Jordan and Bahrain, monarchs seem to have accepted the need for broader reforms. And so, for the moment at least, they also get a pass. In Yemen, the situation is fluid and it may get worse. Stay tuned.

## **Limited sovereignty in Libya and beyond**

But in Libya, almost from day one it became clear that Gaddafi was not at all prepared to either implement reforms or quit. Protest rapidly morphed into open rebellion and Gaddafi tried to crush it using the old-fashioned instruments of violent repression. And, with that, apparently, he lost his qualifications to be regarded as a legitimate ruler.

The open question now is: “If this *“principle”* applies to Gaddafi’s regime on the basis of his use of violence against his own people, have we just opened a huge can of worms? How can we say that whatever applies to Libya does not apply in Belarus, the Ivory Coast, Sudan, Zimbabwe, Venezuela, Cuba, North Korea, Syria or Iran?

## **Oppressed people beyond the Middle East will take notice**

The Arab uprisings of 2011 put on the table the people's right to vote for their rulers, to free expression and to request a government accountable to them, elevating them to the status of "*universal rights*". I believe that it is important that these basic principles, taken for granted in all democracies, are now strongly reaffirmed; thus probably giving more courage to other societies living under repression that believed to be forgotten and isolated in their misery. Well, if now people in Africa or Latin America want to protest, they have a wider, worldwide sympathetic audience.

## **How do we enforce these lofty principles?**

However, the real thorny question, regarding Libya and beyond Libya, is how the international community intends to adjudicate which government is fit or unfit and what to do about those deemed to be unfit. Libya is the first test case of this new era; but it will not be the last. Thus, adequately preparing for the consequences of what we have unleashed would be wise –as we have indeed unleashed the "New Era of Internationally Accountable Governments".