

Good morning. Thank you so much to everyone for attending this event to discuss the future of this important transatlantic partnership. In particular I would like to thank Douglas Shaw of the Elliott School, Paul Ingram of BASIC, Kennette Benedict of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, and Ian Davis of NATO Watch for putting together this very excellent summit.

Nearly nine years after it began operations in Afghanistan, NATO launched an offensive to protect innocent civilians in Libya. It is a new world and it was a new war. When NATO jets strafed Tripoli, they were not fighting another battle in the global war on terror nor were they protecting a European populace. NATO, for the first time in history, had been authorized by the international community to stop a sovereign nation from slaughtering its own people.

As we look back on the operation in Libya we must remember that it was both unique and precedent setting.

In late 2010 and early 2011 an entire region was inspired by the actions of one man. A street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in Tunisia protesting violations of his basic dignities. The people North Africa and the Middle East who had long been oppressed by local dictators and deprived of liberties, stood up to the face of tyranny. First, Tunisian demonstrators ousted President Ben-Ali after twenty three years in power. Then protests in Tahrir Square eventually brought down Egyptian strong-man Hosni Mubarak.

International attention soon turned to Libya and the protests against then-dictator Muammar Gaddafi. However, the removal of Gaddafi soon proved to be more difficult and more violent than what the world anxiously watched in Tunisia and Egypt. Attacks on civilians worsened, and the man once known as the “mad dog of the Middle East,” was making public threats to slaughter his own citizens in the opposition stronghold of Benghazi “like rats.”

On March 17, 2011, the United Nations Security Council took action. The panel approved Resolution 1973, imposing a ban on all flights in the country’s airspace — a no-fly zone — and tightened sanctions on the Gaddafi regime and its supporters. The demand was an end to the attacks against civilians, which it said might constitute “crimes against humanity.” The 10-0 vote with 5 abstentions authorized the NATO-led Operation Odyssey Dawn for civilian protection.

This was significant move in the development of the Security Council’s role in atrocity prevention. Resolution 1973 marked the first time the Council had authorized the use of force for human protection purposes against the wishes of a functioning state.

There are a number of factors particular to Libya that led to the international decision to use force. First, there was a widespread regional consensus for intervention. This support came from the Arab League, Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Gulf Cooperation Council. Without this broad international support it is unlikely NATO could have conducted a seven month mission.

Second, the Gaddafi regime had no international backing. Gaddafi had no advocates for him on the Security Council, the way that Serbia did in the Kosovo case.

Third, there was a clear and immediate threat to civilians. Gaddafi had even publicly announced the threat. We often identify atrocities after the fact, when it is too late to take any action. But here was a world leader, on national television, announcing his intention to slaughter civilians. Rarely is the international community faced with such situations.

And finally, toppling the Gaddafi regime posed no threat to regional security. Libya's neighbors, Tunisia and Egypt, had already experienced changes in government and Algeria was beginning to accede to the demands of protestors within its borders. A new government would not shift power dynamics in the region and thus NATO intervention was deemed low-risk.

NATO's intervention set a precedent for future civilian protection missions. However, the same conditions that made intervention possible are unlikely to apply to other countries.

Syria, for example, poses a more difficult situation. After nearly a year of continually escalating violence, the calls for an international response continued to grow. As we gather here today, 300 UN military observers are still set to be deployed to monitor the implementation of UN and Arab League Special Envoy Kofi Annan's peace plan. How that will be resolved is still to be determined. But what is clear is that Syria is not Libya. There is no cookie-cutter intervention strategy.

The first indication that Syria was dissimilar to Libya is the existence of strong protectors on the UN Security Council. In February 2012, Russia and China vetoed a Western and Arab League-sponsored resolution condemning Syria's violent repression of anti-government demonstrators. This action threw their heft behind a beleaguered and repressive President Bashar al-Assad as he intensified a military operation aimed at crushing the year-long uprising. Meanwhile the Russian and Chinese double veto marked a blow to U.S. and European efforts and hard work to rally behind an Arab League plan that would require Assad to yield some of his powers. The plan would hopefully have made way for the creation of government of national unity led by an individual with backing from the government and opposition.

The vote on the resolution followed weeks of difficult negotiations that pitted the United States, the European Union, and the Arab League against Russia, Syria's protector in the Security Council. It undercut a diplomatic push by the Arab League to secure the 15-nation Council's support of a plan that required Assad to yield power and prepare the country for democratic elections.

At the time, France's UN ambassador Gerard Araud summed up his thoughts on the vote saying, "It is a sad day for the council. It is a sad day for Syria." While the Russian envoy's reaction demonstrates the remaining position of many states and one of the impediments towards UNSC action on human rights abuses. He said, "We are not friends or allies of President Assad... We try to stick to our responsibilities as a permanent members of the Security Council, and the Security Council by definition does not engage in domestic affairs of member states."

Some have suggested this is a "revenge of the BRICS." However, these arguments are disproven by the simple fact that India and South Africa (two-fifths of the BRICS) voted with the majority in the 13-2 vote. Had Brazil been on the council, it would likely have also voted with the majority. The UN's failure won't end regional and international efforts to deal with the escalating brutality, but it will now force those efforts into other, less effective and less internationally legitimate channels.

The second reason why a Libya-type intervention will not work in Syria is because of regional power dynamics. Iran, a close military ally of Syria, will not allow the Assad regime to collapse. Even if the regime did collapse this is the very real concern that the Alawi and Druze minorities would be persecuted.

Finally, Syria is simply different geographically, demographically, and militarily. It has more densely populated cities than Libya, the opposition does not control large parts of the country, the Syrian military is much better equipped and trained, and the country's air defense systems are much more advanced.

After assessing the situation, we can naturally conclude that Libya was a unique case. But if this true, then it begs the question, what purpose NATO serves in this day and age? NATO is a collective defense organization set up as a buffer to Soviet dominance of Eastern Europe during the Cold War. NATO did not conduct military interventions until the Iron Curtain had fallen.

In the Libya operation the U.S. carried the bulk of the burden. The U.S. contributed:

- 66% of personnel
- 52% of aircraft
- 43% of naval vessels
- Flew 30% of sorties
- Launched 92% of cruise missiles
- Dropped 36% of the bombs

The U.S. had to quickly transfer personnel to the NATO air operations center in Italy to ensure operations would continue and even then a facility designed to handle more than 300 sorties a day struggled to launch 150. And 11 weeks into the operation, alliance members ran low on munitions and had to turn to the U.S. to make up the shortfall.

As former Secretary of Defense Bob Gates remarked last June, the lack of participation from NATO countries is not necessarily a lack of will, but rather a lack of resources. Out of 28 NATO countries, only six – the U.S., the UK, France, Greece, Turkey and Albania – spend more than the targeted 2% of their GDP on defense.

In an age of austerity this is understandable. Even the U.S. is searching for ways to cut back on its defense spending. But if NATO, the mightiest military alliance in history, is having trouble conducting combat operations, especially against one of the poorest militaries in existence, than member states need to have a serious reflection on the future of the alliance.

One area in which NATO can make a difference is adopting a Responsibility to Protect or R2P mission.

The intervention in Libya reawakened a debate in America and at the United Nations about the responsibility to protect paradigm – or R2P – as a means of atrocity prevention.

Libya marked the first time the R2P had been invoked since the 2005 World Summit, a pivotal point in the development of R2P doctrine. By invoking “the Libyan authorities’ responsibility to protect its population” the UN has given the humanitarian cause a boost. The success of the NATO mission further demonstrates the potential for limited humanitarian intervention. How things turn out on the ground in Libya will be another matter remains an unanswered question, that will test the international community’s stomach for such interventions.

Until recently, putting this norm into practice proved tough. Situations in Darfur, Sri Lanka, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo continued for years with UN member states failing to intervene. Even the diplomatic push to intervene in Libya was long and difficult, intense negotiations. However, the support of the “No Fly Zone” by the Security Council and its endorsement by Arab League, Organization of the Islamic Conference, and Gulf Cooperation Council proved crucial to the resolution’s passage. As attacking Libya without international backing, done more harm to R2P than good.

Problems persist with the adoption of the construct as a means for preventing atrocities. One problem with measuring R2P’s success is that it will always be in “what ifs.” By definition a successful R2P mission is proving a negative. This makes it difficult for the doctrine to ever become a norm, as there are few if any successes to ever point to. Even in the case of Libya, many critics of the intervention argue that we don’t what would have happened if there was never an NATO operation.

Another remaining question is the responsibility of the intervening forces after the campaign is complete. The now famous “Pottery Barn Rule” that Colin Powell used in reference to Iraq, remains an open question. In Libya the Libyans are taking the lead – though an important role for the international community remains – we will see what that means for the future.

Finally, the question of priorities. Does R2P undermine other global movements. For example many analysts are concerned that the Libyan example has undermined the global nonproliferation movement. Gaddafi had forsworn his WMD program in 2003 only to have been removed from power later. Are there rogue states – particularly human rights violating regimes –observing these events with the conclusion that if the Qaddafi regime had maintained its nuclear or chemical weapons program, it would have maintained a deterrent to intervention, thus ensuring regime survival.

These are problems that need to be worked out. However they are not an excuse for passivity in the face of preventable atrocities. This is not to say that the Libya model is a solution for all human rights abuses. The debate over Syria clearly shows a more complicated situation. However, Libya does prove that the potential for limited military intervention in the face of slaughter exists.

In order to further advance the emerging international norm of R2P NATO should build stronger partnerships with regional groups in North Africa and the Gulf region, such as the Arab League. Article 52 of the UN Charter empowers regional security organizations to maintain international peace and security as appropriate. By building up the capacity of partner regional organizations NATO can make significant progress in institutionalizing R2P.

In Syria, for example, the Annan Peace Plan will not come into effect under the supervision of 300 military observers. The UN mission there is largely toothless. The only appropriate action is intervention by the Arab League.

Make no mistake, military intervention is a last resort, but NATO should not be the first port of call. The burden should be on regional blocks. Until the rest of the world shares the U.S.'s commitment to democracy and human rights the system will not work. We will only have limited, low-risk interventions and larger problems will continue to brew.

Recommendations

Going forward there are no easy solutions or quick fixes. Each avenue offers trade-offs between legitimacy and effectiveness. However, like much of foreign policy in the twentieth century, it will be a combination of efforts that will best address the difficult challenges ahead.