



[In Retreat? Western Security Policy after Afghanistan](#)

# Intervention without a Goal

The Case of Libya and Its Consequences

Lukas Kupfernagel/Thomas Volk

Almost overnight, the onset of the “Arab Spring” jolted the MENA region out of a collective deep sleep. In Libya, the dream of freedom turned into a nightmare that shocked both the country, and its neighbours in Europe, the Sahel, and North Africa. After two civil wars, a proxy war, but also some encouraging recent developments, it is time to ask: What went wrong in the past ten years? What went right? And which lessons can be learned?

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Ten years after the start of the so-called Arab Spring, Libya is still in a state of upheaval, but recent developments offer cautious hope that the situation is stabilising. Like many other countries in the region, Libya was caught off guard by the strength of public protest in 2011, leading to the toppling of long-time ruler Muammar al-Gaddafi and his regime. The years that followed remained tumultuous, and Libya became the site of a geopolitical proxy war between foreign powers. However, since the Berlin Process on Libya, convened by German Chancellor Angela Merkel under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) in January 2020, the situation in the North African country has been steadily stabilising. Moreover, the ceasefire between the warring factions has held since 23 October 2020, although UN estimates suggest that up to 20,000 foreign mercenaries remain stationed in Libya. More recently, the Second Berlin Conference on Libya in summer 2021 pushed for the withdrawal of all foreign mercenaries and troops, especially from Sudan, Chad, Turkey, and Russia, but this is not set to happen before 2023.

The political dialogue initiated in November 2020 by the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) pushed forward to initiate presidential and parliamentary elections that were supposed to be held on 24 December 2021, Libya’s 70<sup>th</sup> Independence Day. While these elections had to be postponed to June 2022, the armistice is still in place. This was also thanks to the personal commitment of UN Special Representative for Libya, former US diplomat Stephanie

Williams, who served until February 2021, and her predecessor Ghassan Salamé. Williams took over the Libya dossier once again in December 2021, this time as Special Adviser on Libya to the UN Secretary-General. In addition to this, in March 2021, the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) elected a transitional Government of National Unity (GNU) to restore the country’s institutional unity. The oil-rich Mediterranean country is still in a politically fragile situation, and violent clashes between opposing ethnic groups, militias, or tribal groups could flare up again at any time. However, despite this, Libya is on a path to consolidation that would probably not have been possible without the strong international support for a political solution that has been evident since 2020. It is worth looking back at the last decade of conflict in Libya in order to understand why the Berlin Process was needed to resolve deadlocks, and to what extent the escalating violence was also a legacy of the NATO-led international coalition that toppled Gaddafi but lacked a long-term strategy for the country.

The unforeseen protest movements that began in Tunisia in December 2010, and in Egypt, Yemen, and Syria in January 2011, resulted in the overthrow of long-time rulers Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak. They formed the trigger for the first protests against the oppressive regime of the eccentric despot Muammar al-Gaddafi, which kicked off in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi on 15 February 2011. This was four days after the fall of Mubarak in neighbouring Egypt. As in Tunisia and Egypt, the protests in

Libya quickly triggered a chain reaction, prompting thousands of citizens to take to the streets in Benghazi, Bayda, Derna, and Zitan. The people expressed their discontent and despair about the decades of humiliation they had suffered under Gaddafi and rose up against the regime.

Initially local and decentralised, the demonstrations attracted more and more support, partly due to the mobilising power of social media, and within a few days the protests had also reached the capital, Tripoli, in the west of the country. The security apparatus of this authoritarian state responded in brutal fashion, enraging the protesters still further and spurring them on to stronger action. The response of Gaddafi's forces often resulted in fatalities,

adding fuel to the fire of rebellion.<sup>1</sup> Within a few weeks, the initially peaceful protests had turned into a bloody civil war in which Gaddafi's troops attacked their opponents from the sea and, with the help of mercenaries from neighbouring countries to the south, also by ground and air. The UN Security Council passed a unanimous resolution, which included travel bans for Gaddafi and his closest relatives, and the freezing of their assets.<sup>2</sup> Even this (it seems) left him unmoved. So, at first, there was little surprise at the increasingly brutal response of the Libyan armed forces and Gaddafi's martial rhetoric. As late as March, he addressed the citizens of Benghazi with the following words: "They [Gaddafi's opponents] are finished, they are wiped out. From tomorrow you will only find



A French fighter jet returns from a mission over Libya: Paris was the key driver in the 2011 intervention in the North African state. [Source: © Benoit Tessier, Reuters.](#)

our people. You all go out and cleanse the city of Benghazi. [...] We will track them down, and search for them, alley by alley, road by road.”<sup>3</sup> The fact that this was not mere rhetoric was felt in the city when Gaddafi’s troops marched in with tanks and ground troops just one day after the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973,<sup>4</sup> which, among other things, called for the establishment of a no-fly zone over Libya. Less than 24 hours later, the French air force opened fire on the Libyan troops, followed shortly afterwards by the US navy. The international intervention force was completed by several NATO members, and the two Gulf states Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which would continue to play a leading role in later conflicts in Libya.

Under President Nicolas Sarkozy, France played a key role in initiating UN Resolution 1973. According to a 2016 report on the Libya mission by the UK Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee, Sarkozy’s objectives in the Libya intervention were as follows: to increase French influence in North Africa; to reassert the French military’s position in the world; and to secure more significant access to Libya’s oil production. The report also mentions Sarkozy’s domestic political motivations, with an April 2011 poll showing that over 60 per cent of the French public approved of military intervention in Libya.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections, Sarkozy was thus able to portray himself as a strong man, determined to ensure stability in Europe’s southern neighbourhood.

This 2016 report by the UK Parliament delivers a harsh verdict on the decision of David Cameron’s government to go along with the French narrative on intervention in Libya without closely monitoring what was actually happening on the ground. According to the report, the initial narrative of an urgent Responsibility to Protect quickly turned into an “opportunistic policy of regime change” without a consistent strategy for a post-Gaddafi era.<sup>6</sup> In a statement to the House in March 2011, Cameron himself referred to the need for military intervention against Gaddafi, saying that the Libyan leader had ignored previous UN resolutions, and that the Libyan people were calling for an

international response.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, he said, “the time for red lines, threats, last chances is over”; “tough action” was needed.

## In retrospect, Germany’s position at the UN Security Council proved to be correct.

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Consideration should also be given to Turkey’s role, particularly in light of the fact that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who was Prime Minister at the time, boasted of his strong contacts with Gaddafi. Moreover, as a NATO member, the country was manoeuvred into a particularly delicate position in the conflict. Erdoğan, who was seeking to win a renewed majority for his Islamic conservative AKP in the parliamentary elections in the summer of 2011, faced domestic sentiment critical of a French-led intervention in Libya. France’s standing in Turkey was already low at that time, fuelled by President Sarkozy’s repeated opposition to Turkey’s EU accession. As a result, Erdoğan and his then foreign minister Davutoğlu initially voiced strong criticism of the Libya intervention. In addition to domestic political reasons, the fact that there were at least 30,000 Turkish workers in Libya, as well as Turkey’s traditionally close economic ties with the country, may also have contributed to this attitude. However, after the mission command was transferred to NATO, Turkey, as a NATO member, showed willingness to participate actively in the mission. Subsequently, following a parliamentary decision in March 2011, the Turkish military provided five frigates and a submarine to monitor the UN arms embargo against Libya. In retrospect, this deployment is not without a certain irony, especially since Turkey itself has been repeatedly accused of breaking the UN embargo and supplying the internationally recognised interim government (GNA) with arms since 2019.

Germany decided to abstain at the UN Security Council – thus, for the first time, adopting a position that diverged from that of other NATO

and EU states. Nevertheless, in retrospect it can be seen that the German position proved to be correct. Although, for the Chancellor's Office, it was important from the outset that the resolution should not fail because of Germany's abstention, significant concerns were expressed about the practical consequences of a deployment. The majority of the German public was opposed to participating in a military intervention in Libya. One of the German government's key arguments was that a large EU country like Germany would have to be involved in military action if it voted for the resolution. But it was not keen to do this in light of the complicated situation in Libya, and the incalculable consequences. However, Germany supported the political objectives of the UN resolution, and its loyalty to the alliance within NATO was never questioned.

### **The rosy future that NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen portrayed for Libyans initially failed to materialise after 2011.**

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In the autumn of 2011, after nearly 10,000<sup>8</sup> air strikes, Gaddafi was history – lynched by rebels after an air strike on his convoy near his hometown of Sirte, he was buried in the desert in a manner unworthy of a self-declared king of Africa. With the fall of Gaddafi, NATO's Unified Protector mission ended on 31 October 2011, and just one day later, NATO Secretary-General Rasmussen appeared before the cameras to congratulate the Libyans on writing “a new chapter in the history of Libya”<sup>9</sup> based on “freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and reconciliation”.<sup>10</sup> He also affirmed that the intervention marked the end of “a successful chapter in NATO's history”.<sup>11</sup> But the rosy future that he portrayed in his speeches to Libyans in Tripoli, Benghazi, and Sirte failed to materialise over the following years. The National Transitional Council (NTC), which emerged in July 2011 from the Libya Contact Group founded in London, prepared for the first free elections for

2012. They were indeed held, but these incipient attempts at democracy after more than four decades of authoritarian rule were unable to save the country from violent conflict and division. So, what lessons can be learned from the 2011 military intervention?

#### **NATO Success or International Failure?**

Relatively quickly, NATO deemed the intervention in Libya to be a success, and at the outset it looked as if Operation Unified Protector would be a prime example of a successful Responsibility to Protect (R2P) mission. The three main pillars of R2P encompass the responsibility of states to protect their population from war crimes; underscore the willingness of the international community to assist each other in their protection responsibilities; and highlight their readiness to intervene in a timely manner in specific cases. In the Libyan example, the established no-fly zone was respected, sanctions were quickly implemented, and the Gaddafi regime was ultimately overthrown. It was also possible to install a government in the form of the National Transitional Council, which was to run the country until free elections could be held to ensure its transformation. Despite the fact that a monitoring and assistance unit was set up in September 2011 with the UN mission UNSMIL, the clear goal was a transition that should mainly be achieved by the Libyans themselves. On paper, the idea of a democratic transition in the hands of the Libyans – especially after the disastrous 2003 US intervention in Iraq – sounded like a promising strategy. So what were the failures that led outgoing US President Barack Obama to call the US involvement in the Libya intervention the “worst mistake” of his presidency in an interview in 2016,<sup>12</sup> and even to admit that the country had ended up spiralling into chaos in the aftermath of the intervention?<sup>13</sup>

#### **The Scent of Revolution vs. the Original Mission**

In attempting to answer this question, it is necessary to point to the complexity of Libya's social and geographic situation. The country





is shaped by three influential regions, all of which play (or have played) a key role in the social and military conflicts of the recent past. While Libya's western region, Tripolitania, has traditionally sought close economic ties with its neighbours north of the Mediterranean, the tribes and families of Libya's east, Cyrenaica, have always had close ties with Egypt. Even before the civil wars, the desert areas of southern Fezzan, with their porous borders with neighbouring Algeria, Chad, and Niger, were retreats for non-Arab tribes living semi-nomadic lives, which were ruthlessly persecuted under Gaddafi's rule.

Libya's territorial and social complexity plays a significant role in the country's national identity. A clear social contract was never drawn up, but at best was established by Gaddafi in his philosophy of *Jamahiriya* (state of the masses), set out in his Green Book<sup>14</sup> and portrayed as Libyan social and state doctrine. Even before independence, there was a degree of enmity between western Tripolitania, with its ideal of a republic, and eastern Cyrenaica, characterised by the Senussi dynasty and King Idris. After Gaddafi's coup in 1969 and the creation of his *Jamahiriya*, domestic and international public opinion focused on Gaddafi and his confidants, who



Controversial interpretation: On 17 March 2011, with the vote on resolution 1973, the UN Security Council authorised the use of military means to protect civilians in Libya. Germany and other states abstained. In the following months, however, the intervening international coalition also supported the Libyan rebels in overthrowing Muammar al-Gaddafi. Source: © Jessica Rinaldi, Reuters.

were composed of disadvantaged families from rural regions.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the publicly proclaimed grassroots democracy was a vehicle to build loyalties and gain total control over an almost uncontrollable country – creating a deceptive peace for many years. Even though the Green Book represented the official social contract, this collection of writings was unable to replace the tribal structures that had evolved over centuries and which, from then on, acted in a more informal manner. *Jamahiriyah* was the basis for the state system, conceived by Gaddafi himself, but it did not promise a common identity. The debate about identity politics, about whether the country can be described as Muslim or Arab, continues to this day.

### The fact that Gaddafi's opponents could offer little in the way of a common vision for Libya's future was overlooked.

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This complex and multi-layered social structure in Libya was given insufficient consideration during the NATO intervention in 2011. All the official documents ignored the country's social fragmentation and viewed Libya as a functional entity. So it is hardly surprising that some actors in the alliance were no longer merely concerned with the original goal of the Unified Protector mission – namely preventing Gaddafi's troops massacring the Libyan people – but also hoped the momentum of the "Arab Spring" would accelerate regime change through military means. However, they overlooked the fact that – apart from toppling the dictator – Gaddafi's opponents could offer little in the way of a common vision for the future of Libya, and failed to enter into dialogue with one another. Unlike most revolutions, there was no charismatic leader, no evolved opposition structures, or indeed any other institutions, such as a functional administration that could have filled the all-encompassing vacuum in the wake of an overthrow. Adequate concern

for the long-term political consequences for Libya was subordinated to the overriding goal of the core alliance in the NATO-led intervention: bringing about regime change in Libya by military means.

Ever since the beginning of the mission, the question of whether the explicit goal of the NATO intervention was regime change has been a controversial issue. Interestingly, as far back as the UN Security Council meeting of 17 March 2011, the British representative Sir Mark Lyall Grant stressed that the Gaddafi regime had lost all legitimacy, and the German UN Ambassador Peter Wittig also made it clear that it was a matter of sending a clear message that Gaddafi's time was over.<sup>16</sup> Such statements fuelled, and continue to fuel, speculation about whether regime change may have been a proactive goal of the alliance from the outset. However, one should not forget that the protests against the authoritarian Gaddafi regime during the "Arab Spring" after the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia covered the entire region and were initiated primarily by the local people themselves. For large swathes of the Libyan population, there was no question that the country's future could only be built without Gaddafi. Consequently, they were the ones who went on to kill the dictator.

If actors such as France had confined themselves to the original mandate, namely militarily protecting the civilian population from air strikes by Gaddafi's troops, this would not have been brought to such a resolute and speedy end. Without the direct and indirect support given to the rebels through reconnaissance and the bombing of enemy positions or arms deliveries, the insurgents would have struggled to push back Gaddafi's troops so quickly. On the other hand, a longer struggle might have led to the emergence of a leadership group or personality that could have symbolised a national awakening.

### Opportunity Makes a Thief – or Leads to War

For all the ambiguities in the implementation of Resolution 1973 and the overarching objectives

of military intervention, one option was ruled out right from the outset: the deployment of ground troops. But it was also clear that the no-fly zone, the freezing of Gaddafi's assets and those of his closest associates, and coalition air strikes would still not suffice to bring down the dictator. That is why certain members of the coalition decided to airlift arms and munitions to the rebels in order to redress the military imbalance. Despite the tricky legalities of the situation, the coalition agreed in principle that light weapons and anti-tank missiles should be airlifted to various rebel units throughout the country. Coupled with the stockpiles of weapons and munitions stored by Gaddafi's forces in arsenals throughout the country, this made Libya a hub for circulating all kinds of weapons, especially after the fall of the ruler. According to estimates by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), after 2011 as many as 700,000 weapons from former Libyan army arsenals entered circulation and the open market.<sup>17</sup>

The responsibility for the Eldorado of the free arms trade on Libyan soil cannot be solely attributed to the international community, and to NATO in particular, because the arsenal of the Libyan armed forces under Gaddafi was already one of the largest in the whole of Africa.<sup>18</sup> However, the military mobilisation of all rebel factions, regardless of their ideological stance and potential hostility towards international actors, also contributed to the fact that a united front against Gaddafi turned into an anarchic civil war that once again sent the country spiralling into chaos. Thus, for all its tragedy, it is also significant that the terrorist attack conducted by the jihadist militia Ansar al-Sharia on the US embassy complex in Benghazi on 11 September 2012, which killed US Ambassador Christopher Stevens, involved the use of US weapons that had been sold by Qatar in 2011 with Washington's knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

By arming anti-Gaddafi units in a less than strategic manner, the states involved in the intervention thwarted the fundamental arms embargo that had been unanimously adopted in Resolution 1970 in February 2011, albeit softened a few months later.<sup>20</sup> Coordinated and direct material

support in compliance with all international requirements, such as the approval of supplies by the UN Sanctions Committee, might have prolonged the struggle between the regime and rebels, but could also have prevented side effects such as the unintentional arming of jihadist groups.

## The overthrow of Gaddafi was necessary to protect the civilian population in Libya.

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### Priorities in a Fragmented Land

The fall of a regime, especially after more than 40 years of autocracy, rarely runs smoothly. The many tasks that await a transitional government all have a degree of urgency: administrative reforms, constitutional amendments, organising elections, as well as reforming the security sector, including the question of how to deal with members of the security forces under the previous regime, and possibly also irregular troops. This was also the case in Libya. Although the overthrow of Gaddafi was necessary to protect the civilian population and offer them future prospects, a fragmented opposition with different ideas about Libya's future, combined with a dysfunctional state structure, contributed to the further destabilisation of the country.

In retrospect, due in part to social fragmentation, it was politically naïve to assume that a weak transitional government could lay the foundations for a resilient Libya based on democratic values. The fact that the UNSMIL mission prioritised support for the political transformation process, but let the security situation slip through its fingers could have been avoided if it had focused more strongly on security issues.<sup>21</sup> A UN stabilisation mission that aimed to ensure the physical security of the Libyan people could have played a key role in preventing further escalation in the North African country.



## Friends Become Adversaries

In its early days, the original intervention in Libya was hailed as a success for multilateral cooperation in the face of a crisis.<sup>22</sup> Along with NATO members France and Britain, and initially also the US, non-members such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates quickly joined in, placing themselves at the service of the mission.

There were also a number of supporters who, for example, granted overflight rights for fighter aircraft, or allowed the use of their infrastructure on the ground. Thus Germany, which – like China and Russia – had abstained from voting on Resolution 1973 in the UN Security Council, at least managed to save face in the wake of international criticism for its passive stance. The mission's objective, namely to help the rebels overthrow Muammar al-Gaddafi, was achieved, but this was also the beginning of the end of the coalition of the willing.

### **Turkey has also used various means to bolster conservative Islamic groups in Libya, as it has done in other countries in the region.**

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The collapse of the coalition was followed by almost ten years of bloody conflict with shifting alliances, competing centres of power in eastern and western Libya, militias operating without legitimacy, and various foreign backers. In addition to the struggle for geostrategic influence by the ambitious powers Turkey and Russia – two countries that were originally critical of intervention – France, with its open support for General Haftar until 2020, also played a significant role in the conflict, and even conjured up a (further) conflict within NATO. Whereas most EU and NATO actors recognised the GNA as the main interlocutor, France openly sided with Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA). In this way, it not only stabbed its allies in the back, but also unwittingly protected Russian

intentions in Libya, culminating in the permanent installation of Russian Wagner mercenaries. However, by 2019, the narrative that Haftar was fighting Islamist terror and was generally a good partner for the international community was shattered when increased reports of LNA massacres emerged. Even if Paris was able to correct its position and save face – including through the Berlin Process – NATO's integrity was shaken by France's unilateral actions in the conflict.

A similar judgment can be made about Turkey's aggressive protectionist policy in Libya. While it must be noted that a political solution, such as the Berlin Process, only became possible because Turkey prevented the fall of Tripoli with a costly and personnel-intensive intervention – at the invitation of, and alongside, the UN-recognised GNA government – Turkey's role in the Libyan conflict remains dubious to this day. In the past, this NATO member repeatedly refused to let the EU's IRINI mission inspect Turkish ships off the Libyan coast to monitor compliance with the UN arms embargo. In addition, Turkey does not view the soldiers that it has stationed in Libya as foreign troops that should be withdrawn in the near future. In this respect, it refers to a 2019 agreement with the GNA. Libya is just one of several examples of how Turkey has expanded its role in the MENA region and its periphery. Turkey has also used various means to bolster conservative Islamic groups in Libya, as it has done in other countries in the region. At home and abroad, Turkey has faced regular criticism for the way it has poured troops and money into Libya. As early as 2015, critics within Turkey accused the government and President Erdoğan of supporting Islamist movements and groups in Libya.<sup>23</sup> Over the years, Turkey has consistently thrown its weight behind the government in Tripoli, and acted as a counterweight to Haftar's supporters.

It should be noted that every single actor in Libya has its own agenda for involvement in the conflict. Along with economic interests, primarily relating to investment in the oil sector, this includes issues such as political influence, strategic positioning in the Mediterranean region



## Libyen-Konferenz Berlin

Important process: UN Secretary-General António Guterres at the Berlin Conference on Libya in January 2020. In previous years, foreign actors had largely been unmoderated in supporting their respective favourites and allies with weapons, mercenaries, and propaganda. [Source: © Axel Schmidt, Reuters.](#)

or simply, as for Egypt, looking after its national interest by maintaining peace at its borders.<sup>24</sup> These varied interests were barely moderated in the past, and they have now led the external players to support their personal favourites with arms, regular and irregular troops, propaganda, and networks.

### **Conclusion**

*R2P is Important – but Follow-up Even More so*

The principle of R2P is controversial but important. Massacres such as those in Srebrenica or Rwanda have taught the international community that a wait-and-see approach leads to its own complicity, which is difficult to justify. In

2011, Muammar al-Gaddafi and his troops stood outside Benghazi – with clear statements that foreshadowed what could have happened to the insurgents. It was therefore vital to stage a rapid intervention, and adopt a resolution; the push for a coordinated intervention led by NATO was the right one. The criticism that some of the main nations involved in this mission disregarded the original mandate early on, namely the pure protection of the civilian population, and got carried away with supporting the overthrow of Gaddafi, remains a debate among scholars of international law. But the Libyan people could hardly have been protected from Gaddafi's revenge in any other way. Protecting Benghazi and a show of force from the international community would not have sufficed to prevent the

dictator from taking revenge on the insurgents. It is certain that this would have been carried out in a more subtle fashion by his security apparatus, and by groups loyal to him throughout Libya. Therefore, there was no alternative to his overthrow. The fact that he was captured by Libyan rebels also increased the legitimacy of the international troops, which limited themselves to their support role. Therefore, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen was not wrong in his assessment during his visit to Libya, even if the expansion of the mandate is at least a grey area under international law. The success of Unified Protector stands in stark contrast to an almost unprecedented defeat, for which Europe is primarily responsible. Although a sense of fatigue after the operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is understandable, Paris, Rome, and Berlin should have realised that a state in their immediate neighbourhood that has ceased to exist will not simply rebuild itself.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, the country was left to its own devices or to a very rudimentary UN mission, which paid little attention to the security dimensions, and which dwindled in importance in the years that followed.

### **Light footprint operations will be the exception rather than the rule.**

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Finally, it is necessary to mention the attempt by authoritarian states, especially Russia and China, to discredit the R2P approach and decry it as a Western pretext for staging eventually destabilising interventions. Russia has played a major role in Libya since 2019, and in the past gave particular support to Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar in his attempt to take control of western Libya. This involved Russia's private Wagner mercenaries directly opposing Turkish troops. In principle, Russia has been reserved and hesitant about the R2P approach, and is now deliberately using the Libya intervention as evidence to back up its concerns in this respect. According to Putin, the NATO intervention in 2011 was the trigger for the continuing chaos, and for the

outbreak of civil wars in Libya. This argument, however, may obscure Russia's real fear, namely that external intervention to prevent crimes against humanity could one day also be applied to governments that violate international law by claiming territory through force.

#### *What Does the Case of Libya Mean for the Future?*

The internationalised conflicts of the last decade reflect a reality that has already had economic repercussions in the past – the era of “Western” dominance is over and new players and regional hegemony are increasingly emerging, desirous of expanding their influence in specific regions, sometimes at any price. When it comes to Europe's immediate neighbourhood, as in the Libyan conflict, the EU and NATO should neither leave the field open to these actors, nor indirectly pursue a foreign policy with them that goes against their own allies. This is why, from the start, it is important to set a common course that does not permit unilateral action. This also makes it easier to keep strategic rivals in check, such as Russia and China – countries that have already acted as spoilers in conflicts, and will continue to do so. Furthermore, the following questions will remain central in future conflicts:

#### *How to Strike a Balance between Value-driven and Interest-driven Foreign and Security Policy? Where is Intervention Worthwhile?*

Military interventions are not particularly socially opportune in Europe and Germany. This is especially true when it relates to regime change in autocracies that are a threat to their own people, but which do not pose an immediate threat to Europe. It is commendable that R2P is fundamentally a concept that respects the moral compass and responsibility of the international community towards people who live in regions beset by conflict. What policymakers should be clear about, however, is that in the event of aggression by government forces that triggers the need for R2P, the continuation of the government in the conflict zone is not guaranteed and, in the vast majority of cases, not desirable. Therefore, light footprint operations

will be the exception rather than the rule, and interventions will be accompanied by regime change and the associated costly measures of state reconstruction.

*To What Extent Do Interventions Create a Breeding Ground for New Conflicts?*

Conflicts rarely resolve themselves, and even interventions are not always a guarantee of lasting peace. In the case of Libya, the intervention coupled with the relatively rapid waning of international interest in state reconstruction led to a major country in Europe's immediate neighbourhood turning into a hotbed and training ground for a range of conflicts that subsequently escalated. Fighters for the so-called Islamic State, who were trained and gained their first combat experience in Libya, later moved on to Syria and Iraq. Weapons and mercenaries moved relatively easily from Libya to the Sahel and back. Refugees (from other countries and internally displaced persons) became commodities for militias and organised crime. If Europe in particular had adopted a more comprehensive strategy for reconstruction after the fall of Gaddafi, it could have helped mitigate some of the aforementioned fallout from the collapse of the Libyan state. In the event of future conflicts on Europe's doorstep, it would, therefore, be desirable to have a proactive and, above all, coordinated European approach to minimise the risks of such a threat scenario.

*- translated from German -*

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**Lukas Kupfernagel** is Policy Advisor in the Middle East and North Africa Department at the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

**Thomas Volk** is Director of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's Regional Programme Political Dialogue in the Southern Mediterranean based in Tunis.

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