

To the Shores of Tripoli

Michael Sean Winters | Mar. 18, 2011 Distinctly Catholic

Armed with a request from the Arab League for direct intervention in Libya, and a Security Council resolution that authorizes "all necessary measures" to protect civilians in that country from the harm being inflicted upon them by dictator (and madman) Moammar Gaddafi, the United States and its allies are preparing for battle. Western troops have not been seen along the Libyan shores since Montgomery chased Rommel from El-Alamein all the way to Tunis where, with help from Patton, the Hun was hurled off the African coast once and for all. Now, we want the Hun back.

To be precise, it is very important that this impending military action not wear the character of another neo-con-inspired, American adventure at democracy building in the Arab world. Instead, this military intervention must be "and must be seen to be" the result of the world's unwillingness to stand by and allow a madman to kill his own people with impunity. The military actions which are beginning as we speak must be multi-national in character and, preferably, European-led. France appears especially bellicose at the moment, so let them take the lead amongst our NATO allies in providing the military arms and equipment needed to enforce the no-fly zone and otherwise protect the nascent uprising from Gaddafi's mercenaries and his mercilessness.

The thought of direct U.S. involvement in Libya originally filled me with dread. This could turn out very badly. I thought and the prospect of American troops on the ground in a third Muslim country did not seem promising except for Al-Qaeda recruitment efforts. But, it has become clear that what is happening in Libya is not a Civil War. This is a war of one man against his country, but the one man is well-armed and his country is not. Additionally, economic sanctions were ineffective: Gaddafi may be crazy, but he is not dumb, and he evidently kept plenty of cash on hand for just such an emergency as the current one. And, the writings of several intelligent, wise liberals on the subject, such as [this by Leon Wieseltier](#) [1], have led me to re-visit my initial dread.

In this circumstance, then, the United States needed to get past its reluctance to intervene with military might, and push for strong action at the U.N. The procedures at the U.N. offices in Manhattan are, like those at the Vatican, slow, even glacial. To be clear: Hundreds, perhaps thousands of civilians have died unnecessarily in Libya while the diplomats debated. There is always a risk to action, but there are also risks to continued inaction and, because none of us in the West had to share in the latter risks, we should be especially attentive to them. The Libyan patriots took those risks and many of them have paid the ultimate price. Their courage and valor marks them as heroes for a nation wishing to be born. In the large and long scheme of history, it is good that the first casualties of this war of liberation were Libyan patriots, not NATO paratroopers. A nation is entitled to its own heroes.

It will now be up to NATO to decide how far and how fast they want to intervene in Libya. But, as Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice said yesterday, "There is no justification for [Gaddafi's] continued leadership now." That message was being sent to those aides who surround him, those policemen and army colonels who have been wondering whether to remain loyal to Gaddafi or to jump to the patriots. It was being sent too to those countries who abstained on yesterday's UN vote. Legitimacy and justification are issues for every regime,

including Mr. Putin and the despots who still rule China. As for Brazil, their ambassador expressed the concern that outside military intervention would ?change the narrative.? Indeed it will, and let us hope so, because the current narrative is ?World Stand By While Madmen Kills His Own People.? Gaddafi is not Mubarak. Gaddafi is more like Idi Amin. With tyrants like this, the only narrative that will do is an epilogue.

Let us hope it is not too late. Let us hope that the Libyan patriots will be emboldened to hang on, that many in the Libyan professional and military classes will abandon Gaddafi. Let us hope that the Arab Spring continues. There is, as Wieseltier points out, absolutely no evidence of anti-Western fervor in these uprisings throughout the region, which is rather stunning. These countries may be more ready for democracy than we imagined but, unlike the fancied scenarios of the neo-cons, the push for human rights and democracy had to start from within those cultures. The push could not come from abroad. But, once started, we are fools not to encourage and embrace and, in Libya, protect those who seek democracy.

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