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The Way Forward in Libya

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The Obama Administration, which launched the war in Libya with no clear military plan or exit strategy, now must fashion a suitable and acceptable way forward. The Administration's short-sighted effort to score a quick and easy military victory over Colonel Muammar Qadhafi's regime failed to end the threat to civilians in "days not weeks," as President Barack Obama promised. Although the Qadhafi regime's military power has been reduced substantially by air strikes, the rebels are unlikely to defeat the Libyan dictator any time soon. Unless Qadhafi can be persuaded to step down, civilians will continue to be killed in the stalemated civil war, undermining the stated humanitarian goals of the intervention.

While the rationale for direct U.S. military intervention was doubtful, there are no "do-overs" in war. U.S. policy must honor commitments to NATO but also scope the effort consistent with U.S. interests. The President has failed to consult Congress adequately on this matter; therefore, it is appropriate for Congress to propose a reasonable path forward that respects the commitments made to U.S. allies and the constitutional authority of the commander in chief but sets clear limits on what Congress will support.

Slippery Slope to Stalemate. The NATO-led air campaign, which has escalated in scope and intensity, has destroyed approximately one-third of the regime's military capacity. Last week NATO unleashed heavy daylight air strikes against Qadhafi's command center inside a Tripoli military base

to increase pressure on the regime. Libyan rebels now control approximately one-third of Libya's populated coastal strip, but they lack the requisite capacity to overthrow the regime. Qadhafi remains defiant, despite a steady stream of defections of senior military and government officials.

To ratchet up pressure on Qadhafi, the U.S. and other countries have increased economic and diplomatic support for the Transitional National Council (TNC), which the rebels eventually hope to transform into a post-Qadhafi government. The Libya Contact Group, an international coalition formed to facilitate a transfer of power in Libya, met for the third time on June 9 in Abu Dhabi. Its 22 member nations agreed to gradually increase economic and military pressure on Qadhafi's regime and pledged about \$1 billion in immediate aid to the TNC. While it increasingly appears that with support the TNC may be able to establish legitimate governance, it is still not clear it can topple Qadhafi or prevent the rise of extremist factions in the country.

The President's Problem. President Obama has supported NATO in undertaking an inconclusive and ill-defined military operation. This has put the credibility of the alliance at risk. Libyan operations

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are also distracting from support and focus on the critical tasks to be accomplished in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the President has alienated Congress by failing to adequately seek its consultation before committing U.S. forces. In turn, Members of Congress have called for invoking the unconstitutional withdrawal provision of the War Powers Resolution, which undermines the authority of the President to effectively serve as commander in chief.

The Role for Congress. The President's actions have put the U.S., Congress, and NATO in a bind. It is up to President Obama to extricate the nation from a failed policy. The Obama Administration's failure to include Congress in its Libya deliberations prior to launching the operation and its subsequent refusal to address congressional concerns are inexcusable and have justifiably angered Congress.

As frustrating as Obama's Libya policies are, however, Congress should not immediately terminate funding for the operation, which would force the U.S. to abandon its NATO allies in the middle of a war. Given the commitments already made by the President, Congress should support military operations until the end of the 90-day extension NATO authorized for "Operation Unified Protector" in Libya. Any funding of operations beyond that date should be prohibited unless supported by specific congressional approval. This is an appropriate constitutional action and a clear alternative to invoking the unconstitutional provisions of the War Powers Resolution.

By adopting this course, the U.S. fulfills its obligations to its NATO allies and extricates itself from a failed policy. Furthermore, this allows a sufficiently reasonable amount of time to transition the NATO effort from an inconclusive military operation that could well fail to a road map that offers the best prospects for the future of the Libyan people.

Rethinking the Endgame in Libya. At this point, the establishment of viable opposition authority in Libya and international pressure (including arms and financial embargos) are more likely than NATO

military operations to lead to the end of Qadhafi's regime. In recognition of these facts, Turkey formulated a road map that it put forth at an April meeting of the Libya Contact Group. Turkey's road map called for an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of regime forces from all besieged cities and towns; U.N. mechanisms establishing humanitarian aid corridors and peace monitoring; and a transition to a democratic political order that includes the participation of all political parties and elections within six months.

The Turkey road map was imperfect, but it has offered a starting point. The Turkish road map was rejected by the Transitional National Council, which mistrusted the emphasis put on an immediate cease-fire without requiring Qadhafi first to step down from power. The TNC rightly fears that Qadhafi will violate the agreement, as he has violated many past agreements. Subsequently, the rebels began working on their own road map for a post-Qadhafi Libya. Russia, which also has contacts with Qadhafi, offered mediation, but so far the Libyan strongman has refused to meet with Moscow's special envoy. Nevertheless, these efforts offer the start of a reasonable path forward.

The U.S. should support the continued isolation of the Qadhafi regime and efforts to broker an acceptable resolution of the civil war in Libya. This should remain America's goal even if we pull out of NATO military operations. International isolation and the Libyan opposition remain the most important—and in the long run, most sustainable—pressure points on Qadhafi.

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