

No, India Is Not Going to Suffer Because It Abstained on the Libya Resolution

Daniel Larison April 5th, 2012

The award for the least persuasive argument of the week goes to [Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan](#):

And yet it's clear that India's vote [on the Libyan resolution] will have long-term consequences for the country's strategic standing.

It's clear that this is what will happen? No, it isn't. One would be hard-pressed to think of *any* consequences that India's abstention on UNSCR 1973 will have for India, much less long-term consequences for India's "strategic standing." The Indian U.N. ambassador [believes](#) that subsequent events have vindicated India's decision to abstain: "And I think in retrospect we were absolutely right." Well, [why wouldn't he think so?](#) Who exactly is going to hold an *abstention* against India?

Rajagopalan suggests that Western governments were deeply disappointed in India's abstention, and maybe that's true, but no Western government is actually going to punish India or spurn Indian cooperation on other issues because it took a different view of the international response on one issue that was tangential at best to Western interests.

Rajagopalan continues:

But India's actions surrounding the Arab Spring have made India look as if it is standing against the spread of democracy itself.

What does supporting armed intervention in another country's civil war have to do with the "spread of democracy"? If we think about it for a moment and set aside democratist propaganda, we see that it has nothing to do with it.

Democracy has not spread because of the Libyan intervention. As Benjamin Friedman [noted](#) today:

Meanwhile, Libya's revolution has destabilized Mali. Qaddafi's fall pushed hundreds of Tuareg tribesmen that fought on his side back to their native Mali, where they promptly reignited an old insurgency. Malian military officers, citing their government's insufficient vigor against the rebels, mounted a coup, overthrowing democracy that had lasted over twenty years. Thus far, the military intervention in Libya has reduced the number of democracies by one.

Like other abstaining democratic governments including Germany and Brazil, the Indian government judged that foreign military intervention was the wrong

response to Libya's internal conflict. Ongoing disorder in Libya and the disaster that has hit Mali indicate that they were right. In fact, the real mistake the abstaining governments made was not to oppose armed intervention more forcefully when it might have made a difference. Rajagopalan keeps accusing India of "standing in the way" of the supposed spread of democracy in Libya, but standing in the way is exactly what India didn't do. No doubt India abstained rather than voted no because it valued its relations with the Western governments that were intent on intervening in Libya. The Indian government believed it was a mistake, but they weren't going to risk their relationships with the intervening governments to prove the point. Americans interested in good relations with India should appreciate that India abstained on UNSCR 1973 rather than voting no.