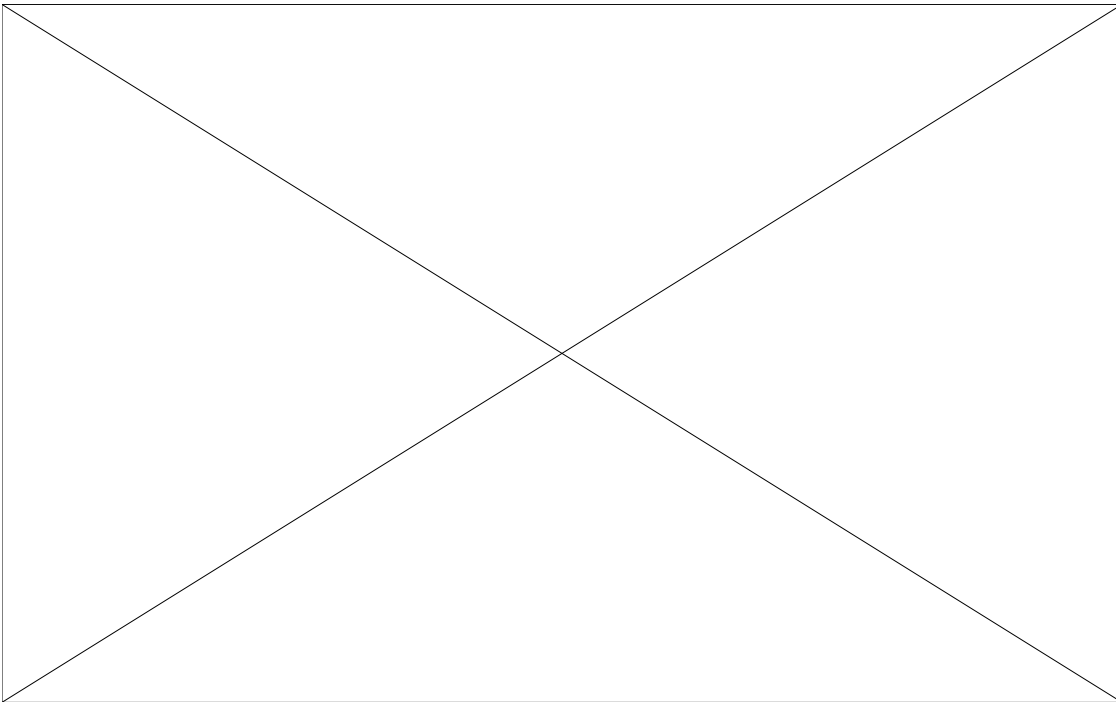


Cato Video: How Does Obama's War Measure Up to the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine?

Chris Preble of the Cato Institute, and former boss of mine when I interned there, looks at how the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine applies to Obama's war in Libya. I recommend watching this short video if you are not familiar with the Doctrine:



Chris also [blogged](#) on the subject at Cato-at-Liberty.

I don't find any fault with his analysis, but I do want to comment on one of the five key questions in the doctrine.

To review, the doctrine was first coined by Ronald Reagan's Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, in a speech at the National Press Club in 1984. Weinberger was aided by a rising military officer, Colin Powell, who later adapted the concepts for his own purposes as National Security Adviser for Reagan and later as Chairman of the JCS under George H.W. Bush. The essential elements boil down to five key questions:

1. Is there a compelling national interest at stake?

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There is **no compelling U.S. national interest** at stake. The rationale for the mission is purely humanitarian: stopping violence against civilians. Whenever the United States involves itself in such missions, it inevitably raises questions about why we are intervening in this case, and not in others.

Preble correctly assesses that there is no US national interest in Libya. I also agree that selective engagement in humanitarian missions is problematic, as it puts us in a position of being expected to act and thus angering many both when we don't, as well as when we do (a concept discussed more thoroughly in [Preble's book](#)).

All that being said, I wonder if the doctrine is being too strict here. Perhaps it should be seen more as a balancing test, weighing the cost versus the scale of the humanitarian crisis. I would make that threshold fairly high before intervening, but surely another holocaust would be something we'd be willing to stop, even without a compelling U.S. interest.