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## Libya now nation at risk with weak U.S. influence; embassy closes as chaos grows

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With violence spreading across Libya and the U.S. Embassy closing in Tripoli, Republican lawmakers over the weekend blasted the Obama administration for failing to stop yet another troubled Middle Eastern nation from descending into complete chaos, and even some Democrats conceded that America's influence in the world has waned considerably.

Two warring factions have turned Libya again into one of the most dangerous spots on Earth, and the country — in flux since the U.S.-backed overthrow and subsequent death of dictator Moammar Gadhafi in 2011 — is not safe for Western diplomats.

The State Department announced Saturday that it was temporarily shuttering its facility in Tripoli after rocket fire and bullets hit the complex. British officials confirmed Sunday that a convoy carrying embassy personnel came under fire, though no one was hurt.

The evacuation of the U.S. Embassy harks back to Sept. 11, 2012, when an American diplomatic post in Benghazi was attacked and four Americans, including Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, were killed.

The White House is taking steps to prevent a similar disaster, but critics argue that the broader goal of a peaceful Libya now appears little more than a pipe dream.

Some foreign policy analysts say the U.S. decision since the 9/11 terrorist attacks to act as a revolutionary power in Middle East — helping facilitate the overthrow of dictators such as Gadhafi, Iraq's Saddam Hussein and potentially Syria's Bashar Assad — has carried serious consequences.

Apart from the success or failure of nation-building efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan under U.S. occupation, it's foolish to expect Libya or other nations in the region to transform automatically into peaceful, pro-Western governments, said Benjamin Friedman, a research fellow in defense and homeland security studies at the libertarian Cato Institute.

“The evacuation of the U.S. Embassy is emblematic of the conditions that we helped create in Libya by supporting the overthrow of the Gadhafi regime. Whatever you think of the Gadhafi regime, I think it was naive of the Obama administration to think the result, to help the rebels remove him, would create some stable government,” he said.

“We’ve decided to become a revolutionary power in that part of the world. The fruits of revolution in that part of the world are chaos,” he said.

Congressional Republicans also have been quick to tear into Mr. Obama’s foreign policy, specifically as it relates to Libya. They say the administration, after Gadhafi was removed from power, failed to commit the necessary time and resources to stabilize the nation, which had been under Gadhafi’s rule for more than four decades.

“The deteriorated security situation in the region reflects the administration’s failure to have a long-term plan for Libya following an intervention that was conducted without appropriate foresight or close coordination with Congress,” said Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, the ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The situation in Libya, combined with flaring violence in Iraq, key gains by Taliban fighters in Afghanistan, an ongoing civil war in Syria and other instances of unrest across the Middle East and North Africa, serves only to highlight the immense foreign policy headaches facing the White House.

In Afghanistan, Taliban fighters reportedly have captured strategic territories near Kabul, putting the nation’s future in doubt. In Iraq, Mr. Obama — who made ending the war there a key goal of his presidency — was forced to send military personnel to protect the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad amid increasing violence. The U.S. also has dispatched military advisers to train the Iraqi army as it tries to fend off a growing Sunni Islamist threat.

Now Libya is in danger of becoming a nation destined for instability after U.S. intervention.

On Sunday, at least 38 people were killed in clashes between soldiers loyal to Gen. Khalifa Hifter and al Qaeda-inspired Islamist militias.

The Islamist groups see Gen. Hifter as an “American agent.” Although he has spent time in the U.S., American officials say, they haven’t had recent contact with him. He served as a top military official in the Gadhafi regime.

The heaviest fighting has been near the Tripoli International Airport. Dozens of people have been killed over the past few weeks, and video shot Saturday shows burning planes at the airport, the result of rocket and heavy machine gun fire, The Associated Press reported.

In addition to the U.S. diplomatic corps, the Red Cross and the U.N. Support Mission in Libya have ordered their staff out of the country. Neighboring Egypt and several European powers such as Britain and Germany have issued warnings to their citizens about being in Libya and/or its major cities. Former colonial master Italy also has evacuated more than 100 of its citizens.

Secretary of State John F. Kerry on Saturday appealed to Libyans to put an end to the “freewheeling militia violence” and embrace a political path toward a peaceful government.

“So many people died and gave so much effort to the birth of the new Libya, and we’re very, very hopeful that together all those people will recognize that the current course of violence will only bring chaos and possibly longer-term difficulties,” Mr. Kerry said.

He said the U.S. Embassy will reopen as soon as the security situation improves.

But even some fellow Democrats doubt that the U.S. can affect events in Libya and fear the days of strong American influence are over.

“Obviously, these situations are very difficult in the world. And while we should be as humanitarian as possible, I am dubious of our ability to really influence the outcome in this part of the world. We have not been able to do that in almost any place at all — maybe Tunisia,” Sen. Charles E. Schumer, New York Democrat, said during an appearance Sunday on NBC’s “Meet the Press.”