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By *Gene Healy*

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Sunday evening, the Drudge Report featured a trio of headlines: "U.K. to send team of spies to help oust Gadhafi"; "British Army readies for mission at 24 hours notice"; and "Obama goes golfing."

Let me offer a sound political axiom for the ages: Any and all complaints about the president golfing too much are presumptively wrong. In fact, if President Obama yields to growing pressure for "limited" military engagement in Libya, we may end up wishing he'd spent more time hitting the links.

Drudge is hardly alone in carping about Obama's reluctance to intervene. Unchastened by their role in the Iraq debacle, Sens. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Joe Lieberman, I-Conn., recently advocated arming the rebels and forcibly grounding Libyan planes. And on CBS' "Face the Nation" Sunday, Sen. John Kerry, D-Mass., called for "cratering Libyan airports and runways" while simultaneously insisting that "the last thing we want to think about is any kind of military intervention." (Figure that one out.)

Contra Kerry, top Pentagon officials seem to think that bombing a country actually counts as "military intervention."

"Let's just call a spade a spade," Defense Secretary Robert Gates said last week, "A no-fly zone begins with an attack on Libya."

"It's an extraordinarily complex operation to set up," said Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "We also have to think about frankly the use of the U.S. military in another country in the Middle East," Gates noted.

But let's stipulate that NATO warplanes (mainly U.S. fighters, of course) could deny pro-Gadhafi forces the ability to deploy air power. That would not impede their ability to murder on the ground. What then?

NATO flew more than 100,000 sorties in Operation Deny Flight, the no-fly zone imposed over Bosnia from 1993 to 1995, yet that wasn't enough to prevent ethnic cleansing or the killing of thousands of Bosnians in the 1995 Srebrenica massacre.

It did, however, help pave the way for a wider war and a 12-year nation-building mission. In for a penny, in for a pound -- intervention tends to have a logic of its own.

This is a good occasion, then, to reflect on a fundamental question: What is the U.S. military for? Humanitarian interventionists on the Left and the Right seem to view it as an all-purpose tool for spreading good throughout the world -- something like the "Super Friends" who, in the Saturday morning cartoons of my youth, scanned the monitors at the Hall of Justice for "Trouble Alerts," swooping off regularly to do battle with evil.

Our Constitution takes a narrower view. It empowers Congress to set up a military establishment for "the common defence ... of the United States," the better to achieve the Preamble's goal of "secur[ing] the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity." Armed liberation of oppressed peoples the world over wasn't part of the original mission.

America would be "the well-wisher to the freedom and independence of all," John Quincy Adams proclaimed in a famous speech on July 4, 1821, but she would be "champion and vindicator only of her own."

Some might find that perspective callous; I'd describe it as cautious, and essentially conservative.

Either way, armed humanitarianism is increasingly unpopular outside the Beltway. A recent Rasmussen poll had 67 percent of respondents rejecting the idea of direct U.S. support for any of the ongoing Arab uprisings, and a Wall Street Journal/NBC poll showed nearly twice as much support as opposition to Obama's handling of Libya.

In contrast to establishment hawks, Americans once again seem reluctant to go abroad in search of monsters to destroy.

Examiner Columnist Gene Healy is a vice president at the Cato Institute and the author of "The Cult of the Presidency."

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