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Libya: What Now?

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[Justin Logan](#) ^[2]

The UN Security Council has passed [a resolution demanding a cease-fire and authorizing a No-Fly Zone over eastern Libya](#) ^[3] by a 10-0 vote with five abstentions all coming from relatively large, important countries (Russia, China, Germany, Brazil and India). The Libyan government, unsurprisingly, has [immediately announced a cease-fire in acquiescence to the UNSC resolution](#) ^[4]. Equally unsurprisingly, [the Libyan opposition has stated that the Qaddafi forces did not, in fact, cease firing](#) ^[5].

We are now siding—to some degree—with the rebels. (Those skeptical on this point may wish to re-read their [Richard Betts](#) ^[6].) For all their chest-puffing and stern pronouncements, I doubt that David Cameron, Nicolas Sarkozy, Amr Moussa, or Anders-Fogh Rasmussen is going to figure out what our ultimate military objective is, where our red lines are, and, most importantly, what sorts of outcomes we are willing to tolerate. If the country becomes de facto partitioned, will we (or NATO/the Arab League/the UN) in turn [recognize two or three countries birthed from the former Libya?](#) ^[7] Do we have reason to believe that something resembling “stability” is going to follow whatever result emerges from the military action? If not, do we intend to engage in stability operations in Libya? If so, who pays and fights?

President Obama, in his [speech](#) ^[8] today, says that the UN resolution centers on “an explicit commitment to pursue all necessary measures to stop the killing, to include the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya.” But then he also says that he wants “to be clear about what we will not be doing: the United States is not going to be deploying ground troops into Libya.” Logically, then, if the measures authorized by the UNSC resolution fail to stop the killing, what next? Either you’re moving away from your demand that the killing stop—imagine the *Washington Post* editorials!—or else you’re looking at introducing ground troops.

There are many more questions like this that could be asked. I certainly hope the administration and the Greek chorus of Beltway interventionists has thought a lot harder about these questions in this instance than they generally do. But I would not bet on it.

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[3] http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/fp_uploaded_documents/110317_UNSC%20Libya%20resolution%20final.pdf

[4] http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europeans-say-intervention-in-libya-possible-within-hours-of-un-vote/2011/03/17/ABSb9pl_singlePage.html

[5] http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20110318/ap_on_re_af/af_libya

[6] <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/50545/richard-k-betts/the-delusion-of-impartial-intervention>

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