

Editorial: Another dictator dies

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We're certainly not lamenting the death of former Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi. Before being kicked out of power this summer by NATO-backed rebels, he tyrannized and terrorized his people for 42 years. He also engaged in acts of international terrorism, such as the 1986 bombing of a Berlin discotheque that killed three people, including two American servicemen, and the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people.

But in recent years, Gadhafi, although still a tyrant at home, had agreed to give up his nuclear weapons program and was taken off the U.S. government's list of state sponsors of terror. He paid restitution to some

of the families of his victims.

A revolt broke out against his regime in February in the area around Benghazi, in the east of Libya. It then spread westward until it engulfed the whole country, finally ousting Gadhafi's regime from Tripoli, the capital; then moving on to Sirte, his hometown and where he made his final stand.

[Political cartoons: Death comes for Gadhafi](#)

Our concern is how President Barack Obama involved America in yet another conflict, in this case launching American bombing missions without even tacit support from Congress. The president used only the United Nations' approval of the use of force as justification for engaging our military. Yet the U.S. Constitution mandates that only "Congress shall have power to ... declare war." At least in the case of the Iraq invasion in 2003, President George W. Bush got from Congress the "Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iraq Resolution of 2002" in October that year.

"I'm not going to shed a tear for Gadhafi," Christopher Preble told us; he's vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the libertarian Cato Institute. "But he was likely to go even if there was no U.S. involvement." Mr. Preble pointed out that U.S. assistance to the rebels means "the United States now is implicated in the behavior of the new Libyan government, about which we know little."

For America, he said, "the vexing problem again is one of presidents starting wars. Next, why not topple governments in Syria, Iran and elsewhere? There are countries all over the world where some segment of the population is upset with its government." Of the world's 192 nations, about 60 could be considered ruled by dictators.

And he pointed to President Obama decision this month to send 100 U.S. troops to Uganda to help that government repel attacks by a rebel group accused of atrocities. "My hope is, it's a small operation," Mr. Preble said. Again, the president just sent the troops without authorization by Congress, even though "Uganda isn't essential to national security by any stretch."

Gadhafi's death will not be mourned, and our hope is that Libya's citizens find a path to individual liberty marked by a rule of law, a court system, property rights, a bill of rights and a government that will defend those liberties. At the same time, we are reminded that America's founders gave war-making powers to Congress because they were tired of Britain's King George III, the tyrant they threw off, starting wars on his own. We need to return to the founders' wisdom of caution in international military entanglements.