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## The Big Story: Questions continue to swirl about U.S. role in Libya



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Congress wasn't going to be in a particularly good mood about being cut out of the process on [Libya](#), and you had to feel for Defense Secretary [Robert Gates](#) having to defend something he opposed internally.

[Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee](#), Gates fielded many of the same questions rank-and-file Americans have about U.S. intervention into a civil war. Who are these rebels? Will the U.S. supply them with weapons? If so, who trains them to use them? What about on-the-ground [CIA](#) involvement? What, exactly, is the mission? How does it all end and when?

(Gates' answers, grossly paraphrased: Not clear yet. Probably not. Not us. Can't discuss that. You heard the president. Not clear yet.)

At [The Daily Beast](#), [Leslie H. Gelb](#) takes us deeper into the military's dissatisfaction with the Obama administration's war of choice:

Remember, underneath everything happening now are the two driving goals that President Obama set: to protect populations and to oust [Colonel Gaddafi](#). In all likelihood, U.S. coalition partners cannot achieve these goals without U.S. jets resuming combat missions. Even with more U.S. air power, it probably won't be possible to stop Gaddafi without using some coalition ground forces. So, pressures to do more and more will continue to lurk. All the Pentagon can do, then, is to raise tough questions (Who are those rebels we're determined to help, could they be Muslim extremists?) to diffuse pressures on the U.S. military to do more.

At National Review Online, [Mario Loyola](#) warns of the unintended consequences. From the left, at [Mother Jones](#), [Kevin Drum](#) crosses his fingers and hopes his choice for president knows what he's doing.

The Obama-morphing-into-Bush meme also is picking up steam. Editorial board colleague [Rodger Jones](#) noted this yesterday. [The Washington Post's](#) [Michael Gerson](#) says he should recognize the Bush Doctrine when he sees it, which he does in the emerging Obama Doctrine. At [The New Republic](#) (a leader so far in liberal interventionist thought), [David Rieff](#) pulls no punches:

The problem with this is that the liberal interventionists' idea of multilateralism is one in which other nations join America's efforts. "The world works best when America leads" is the way the late [Richard Holbrooke](#) liked to put it, which neatly encapsulates the liberal hawks' view that they can have U.S. hegemony and multilateralism, which a more skeptical observer might be tempted to call hegemony without tears. But most of this is institutional sleight of hand. These interventions happen if the United States will provide the muscle and don't if it will not. That is how defenders of the Libyan war -- up to an including the president -- can pretend that the fact that formally there is indeed a coalition, and that the United States has technically ceded the lead role in the operation to [NATO](#) (again, as if NATO was not a U.S.-dominated institution), makes such an intervention a horse of an entirely different color from those initiated by the horrid neocons, and never mind that, on this logic, in strictly institutional terms, the Soviets could have called the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 a Warsaw Pact operation.

And as a columnist from Obama's hometown newspaper, [The Chicago Tribune's](#) [John Kass](#) knows when the words he's hearing fail to comport with reality:

Now Obama's use of "his own people" becomes the platform from which the dovish president leaps into a third war. But what's in a president's heart is never reason enough to bring a country to war.

What counts is what's in the head. It is what a nation -- especially the world's superpower -- requires of its leaders. And what's in the head must be cold and clear.

Unfortunately, Obama has been anything but clear. He's been so confusing that a Rasmussen poll out Thursday offers some terrible news: Only 21 percent of Americans believe the U.S. has a clearly defined mission in Libya.

And why shouldn't Americans be confused? We don't know what he's doing there, exactly. And we've been getting mixed signals for weeks. First it was all about getting rid of Gadhafi, then it

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