



Libya 2.0 Will Fail Just Like Iraq 2.0

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In 2003, the United States intervened in Iraq. The country's unsavory strongman, Saddam Hussein, was swiftly toppled. The theory was that we'd made the world a little safer for democracy, and the hope was that, soon, a new freedom would flourish in Baghdad.

Except, of course, it wasn't.

As the last 13 years have proven, the unintended consequences of our regime change campaign cascaded throughout the Mideast, leaving the region at least inflamed as ever. After more than a decade, thousands of American lives lost, countless more injured, and billions upon billions of dollars down the drain, the United States is still bogged down fighting a terrorist organization made possible by that 2003 intervention.

This second (or maybe third? It's getting hard to count) iteration of the war in Iraq is exactly the sort of foreign policy failure President Barack Obama promised in 2008 to prevent—and yet here we are, with no plausible end to hostilities in sight.

In 2011, the United States intervened in Libya. The country's unsavory strongman, Moammar Gadhafi, was swiftly toppled. Soon, in an eerie echo of 2003, we were told a new freedom would flourish in Tripoli. America's involvement was "smart power at its best"!

Except, of course, it wasn't. On Monday, American bombs began dropping on Libya in earnest once again. It's been five years since we ostensibly liberated the North African country via a U.S.-led NATO campaign at the heavy urging of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and in that time—in a grim repetition of what happened in Iraq—the Islamic State has eagerly sought to fill the power vacuum American intervention inadvertently (though predictably, to everyone outside the foreign policy establishment) helped to create.

Much like Iraq 2.0, Libya 2.0 lacks even a tentative timeline. "We don't have an end point at this particular moment in time," said Pentagon Press Secretary Peter Cook on Monday at a press conference announcing the new campaign.

Nor, Cook admitted, is there a specific legal authorization for this action. Instead, the Obama Department of Defense has claimed as its permission slip the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force, a document created at a time when Islamic State did not exist and U.S. intervention in Libya was on no one's mind.

That the Constitution requires a formal declaration of war is apparently of zero concern to this White House—as is congressional authority and public support. Instead, Obama relies on his own assessment that further U.S. intervention in Libya is both vital to our national security interests and capable of success. The evidence for both claims is slim at best, and the latter in particular is difficult to credit in light of recent foreign policy failures in Iraq and Libya itself.

Indeed, as the Cato Institute’s Christopher Preble wrote at Politico in opposition to exactly such a renewed intervention as this, one must practically “rewrite the history of the first Libyan war to pave the way for” another round, while “an honest accounting of the 2011 bombing campaign reveals it as yet another foolish adventure in the Middle East—and offers a lesson for why the U.S. shouldn’t intervene once again.”

Yet for all his expression of regret over how Libya was handled, not to mention his name-making criticism of the war in Iraq during his Senate years and 2008 campaign, it is a lesson Obama has clearly failed to internalize. This imprudent new campaign is ample evidence of that.