

Failure in Libya

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [NATO'S WAR ON LIBYA](#)

Libya represents the failure of the interventionist project envisioned by the Obama administration: as [rebel gangs run wild](#), attacking rival tribesmen – and “traitors,” like their former commander-in-chief – the country threatens to become what the more ambitious interventionists love best: a [Failed State](#), that is, a state that fails to maintain its monopoly on the use of force in a given geographical area. For the War Party, [every such failure](#) is [an opportunity](#) to fill the power vacuum.

Faster than you can say “[I told you so](#),” we’ll have boots on the ground. No other course is possible, given what is unfolding in Libya at the moment. The country has [no real government](#) – a condition the Powers That Be cannot allow any longer than a few weeks. It could be that the [National Transitional Council](#) (NTC) will proclaim itself the “official” government, having already achieved this recognition from the [NATO powers](#) and [the UN](#). Yet the reality on the ground is and will continue to be quite different. As the smoke begins to clear, one thing is becoming apparent: foreign troops will be patrolling the streets of Tripoli quite soon – and indeed [they are already](#) there, albeit out of uniform.

As Libya comes more and more to resemble [Somalia](#) writ large, the blowback coming our way from the “[responsibility to protect](#)” doctrine will continue to waft over Washington, and the capitals of Europe. The West cannot and will not allow such disorder to exist in such [close proximity](#) to Europe: Somalia borders the Indian Ocean, but Libya’s famous beaches line the Mediterranean. Without a real government to deal with, the West will be forced to negotiate with the many tribal entities and independent actors who are splintering the former Libyan state into ever-smaller pieces. With the [Western region demanding](#) more representation in the NTC, the Gadhafi loyalists still on the loose, and [thousands of weapons](#) – some of them [quite sophisticated](#) – disappearing into the Libyan night, it’s quite a muddle – which just about describes the state of our Middle East policy at this juncture.

Look at what this administration has “accomplished” on the Libyan front: a three-way civil war, at the very least, between various [rebel factions](#) and [Gadhafi loyalists](#) – and the prospect that heavy weapons, including from Gadhafi’s arsenals, have fallen into the hands of the [Libyan Islamic Fighting Group](#) (LIFG). The “former” leader of this terrorist outfit is the [new commander](#) of the rebels’ armed forces. Once tagged as the Libyan franchise of al-Qaeda, LIFG is supposed to have been disbanded, but it has merely taken on a new name: the Libyan Army.

How did this happen?

Under the “liberal” Obama, the US has launched a [major effort](#) to consolidate and extend its Middle Eastern colonization program into fresh territory, pushing forward the frontiers of

empire both [physically](#) and ideologically – and this latter aspect of the new aggressiveness is what I find interesting.

The “[responsibility to protect](#)” doctrine, the banner [unfolded](#) as we went into the Libyan battle, represents the complete descent of the ruling elites of the West into [madness](#). If insanity requires a certain unselfconsciousness, an inability as well as an unwillingness to see one’s actions objectively, then surely this describes the Western mindset as we hail Libya’s chaotic “[liberation](#).” To look at what is happening in that country and declare it a “success” – or, indeed, anything other than a catastrophe – is clear evidence of mental disability. The blinding madness of our ruling elites has them lurching from [one disaster to the next](#), and proclaiming it a [great success](#) – without any awareness of how close the whole imperialist project is to collapse.

As Afghan insurgents strike at [the very heart](#) of the American occupation, [Kabul](#), and Iraq [comes apart](#) at the seams, ever-cheerful US officials tweet their imaginary “victories.” The Taliban is [in retreat](#), the Afghans are “[stepping up](#),” and [the Iraqis, too](#) – we’ve been subjected to this torrent of lies for years, now, and I doubt anyone even listens anymore. It is like that voice coming out of the ever-present telescreens in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, hailing “our glorious victory on the Malabar Front!”

This administration speaks in a different voice than its predecessor, but it’s a change in tone rather than content: the point is still to get us to sign on to the combined [world-saving project](#) and [war of revenge](#) that commenced the day after 9/11/01. But the tone has significantly altered: this is imperialism of the “[smart](#)” variety,” one that seeks to sell the [old imperialism](#) as a form of militarized [social work](#) – a particularly useful fiction as we begin to intervene [more aggressively](#) in [Africa](#).

This talking point, mainly aimed at an American audience, is complemented by our new counterinsurgency doctrine, known as “[COIN](#)”[.pdf] : championed by CIA director and former Middle East top commander Gen. David Petraeus, this doctrine is an Americanized version of the [old Maoist-Guevarist strategy](#) which likened revolutionaries to fish who must “swim among the people.” By living with “the people,” and sharing their lot, the theory is that US troops could themselves deploy the tactics of a classical insurgency, in effect mimicking the enemy. Just as the Viet-Cong, or, say [Hezbollah](#), created a parallel government in the shadow of occupation, so Afghan villagers would gratefully accept the “[government in a box](#)” US strategists had designed for them. The Petraeus Doctrine, in short, amounts to a policy of nation-building from the bottom up: “[clear, hold, and build](#),” as the COIN-dinista slogan puts it.

So much of this New Think consists of [slogans](#), instead of real arguments: a collection of talking points, however, is not a real military strategy.

It all sounds hunky-dory: gain the people’s confidence by successfully protecting them against the Bad Guys, giving them “infrastructure,” and building institutions that inspire confidence in the American presence. There’s just one problem, however: the Afghans’ conception of just exactly who are the Bad Guys is [quite different](#) from our own. The COIN-dinistas evade the central problem of counterinsurgency theory: how to reverse the natural hostility of a population to an army of occupation. This “live with the people” strategy was tried by the British before and during [the American Revolution](#), in the course of which British soldiers, including Hessians, were boarded in the homes of the rebels – and we all know how that [turned out](#).

There's no escaping it: no matter how you dress it up, whether in the clean white robes of "humanitarianism" and the "responsibility to protect," or the purple robes of "benevolent global hegemony": today we are King George III. Our far-flung legions are fighting insurgencies throughout Central Asia and the Middle East, from Afghanistan to Somalia and [several points in between](#). Our President is a [veritable Emperor](#), in the foreign policy realm, with the military at his beck and call. We maintain a commanding global presence in the form of bases and military assets on and around [every continent](#). America is a world empire, one that has lost its [republican veneer](#) almost entirely, and no counterinsurgency theory can change the context within which US troops abroad operate.

The geniuses over at the State Department elevated the [demonstrably unsuccessful](#) Petraeus Doctrine to the level of policy, and applied it to Libya – with entirely predictable results. But that's the essence of madness, isn't it: repeating the same nonsensical behavior while expecting different results each time.

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