

The Islamic State (ISIS), Libya, NATO, and Preventing the Next 9/11

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Those who call for immediate military action rarely have a long-term strategy. That is why America's march of folly from Iraq to Libya has been a recruiting tool for jihadist forces, including ISIS.

As a member of Congress before and after 9/11, I took (and continue to take) the threat of terrorism seriously, and therefore I vociferously warned against military actions in Iraq and Libya; military actions which ultimately undermined our national security.

The West launched an attack against Libya, amid false claims about an impending massacre in Benghazi, to justify regime change. However, it was obvious to me, and a vocal minority at the time, that military strikes and the arming of unknown rebels (i.e. non-state actors: terrorists) would the result in instability, hurt innocent civilians, and create regional chaos, empowering extremists.

President Obama made the decision to attack Libya without the permission of Congress. I led the effort to organize a bipartisan coalition in Congress which almost stopped the Obama administration and NATO from continued bombing of Libya.

On March 31, 2011, I delivered this address on the floor of the House warning against the dangerous mistake of dropping bombs on Libyan cities under the guise of humanitarian assistance:

Our effort in Congress went against the lobbying power of the White House, the State Department, the Pentagon, NATO, NATO member country diplomatic corps, and many other hefty institutions. Unfortunately, the White House and Congressional leadership came to a political deal which enabled the war against Libya to continue.

While Libya may not make the front page on a daily basis, it stands as the latest example of blowback, the adverse consequences of our reflexive military intervention. Did you know that just a few weeks ago, Libyan jihadists captured 11 jetliners when they took control of the Tripoli International Airport?

Today, thanks to NATO action in Libya, terrorists are taking selfies with the planes they captured. They now hold a list of aircraft with flight ranges (in nautical miles, or nm) that make it possible to reach London, Paris, Washington DC, and New York City: Airbus 319s (3,700 nm), Airbus 320s (3,300 nm), Airbus 330s (4,000-7,000 nm), and one Airbus 340 (7,900 nm).

It is little wonder why, about the time the planes went unaccounted, British Prime Minister David Cameron declared that his nation is facing “its greatest and deepest” terror threat. Ironically, the actions of his government, and ours, created that threat under the umbrella of NATO.

Right after the sacking of Libya, NATO’s leader, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, declared, “Together, we succeeded. Libya is finally free.” His declaration joins President George W. Bush’s pronouncement of victory in Iraq — “Mission Accomplished” — as a tragic example of individual hubris, which becomes the burden of nations.

Delegates from 28 countries are now meeting in Wales to hear NATO’s plan for aggressively responding to Russia. Since there is no evidence that NATO learned anything from its misadventure in Libya, the world community should give pause when this unaccountable organization prepares to lead it into another conflict.

Now ISIS is making headlines, and the US, in response, is plotting a new expansion of the “war on terror” — which has been the very mechanism through which these terror organizations have flourished.

As provocative and gruesome as ISIS’ tactics are, we must make sure that our response to violent groups around the world does not send us spinning into another disastrous cycle of intervention, occupation, insurgency, deaths of innocent civilians, and the subsequent emboldening of more terrorism.

Backing terrorists to help bring about regime change results in perpetual war and a staggering national debt.

We must resist the illusion that the only “decisive” response to terrorism is bombing. Instead, we should begin to confront ISIS by drying up its sources of revenue from places like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Allies in the region must share responsibility.

It has been thirteen years since 9/11. It has been thirteen years since President Bush’s instigation of the “Global War on Terror” (GWOT). This failed strategy has brought chaos and terror to countries which had no capability of attacking us. The GWOT subsequently created more, not less, risk to America’s long term security.

Here is what we need to do:

- Stop creating wars.
- Stop funding and arming mercenaries.
- Stop causing abject chaos by “liberating” countries and delivering them to illegitimate non-state actors, i.e. terrorists.
- Stop NATO and other Western front groups from promoting neo-conservative agendas which lust for empire, for control of oil and gas resources, and which bait countries into conflict to cause an increase in arms trade.
- Stop playing the naïve fool and falling for the theater of propaganda while interest groups and arms dealers stand at the cash register.

America must transition to a new domestic economic model that does not rely on a military industrial complex and arms manufacturing in every Congressional district in order to function.

Only then can we embark on a new path of strong and patient diplomacy, working together with the community of nations to address security challenges, letting our allies take responsibility for regional security, being willing to talk to anyone in the cause of stability, and setting aside stale, ideological doctrines of intervention.

In the weeks and months ahead, when our leaders are calling for military strikes, without considering the consequences or knowing the end game, let's remember our recent history.

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