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Neocons' Goal: Iran by Way of Libya

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By Stephen J. Sniegoski



Although the neocons had initially been rather cool toward the popular uprisings in the Middle East which threatened regimes friendly to the U.S. and Israel, such as Mubarak's in Egypt, they have reverted to their militant regime change stance toward Gaddafi's regime in Libya. In espousing this interventionist position, they are not as conspicuous as they had been regarding Iraq and Iran, when they had stood in the vanguard, but are only one component of a popular mainstream cause, which unites many otherwise disparate groups. Nonetheless, they are a vital players who apparently look to involvement in Libya as a chance to renew their now-stalled effort to reconfigure the Middle East in the interests of Israel (whose interests, they allege, coincide with those of the United States). [See Sniegoski, *The Transparent Cabal*, <http://home.comcast.net/~transparentcabal/>]

The Libyan uprising has captivated the minds of many mainstream American liberals who simply advocate military intervention there for humanitarian reasons, a position harkening back to the widespread liberal support for U.S. intervention against Serbia over Kosovo. Thus, we see such liberals as Senator John Kerry and Bill Clinton advocating a no-fly zone over the country to prevent Gaddafi from using his airpower. And while some of these liberals have been hawks on the Middle East and thus not much different from the neoconservatives (and often called neoliberals), such as the staff of *The New Republic* magazine, support for U.S. involvement in a no-fly zone also includes numerous opponents of the war on Iraq. For example, Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times wrote in his article "The Case for a No Fly Zone": "I was a strong opponent of the Iraq war, but this feels different. We would not have to send any ground troops to Libya, and a no-fly zone would be executed at the request of Libyan rebel forces and at the 'demand' of six Arab countries in the gulf. The Arab League may endorse the no-fly zone as well, and, ideally, Egypt and Tunisia would contribute bases and planes or perhaps provide search-and-rescue capabilities." [*New York Times*, March 9, 2011, March 9, 2011 <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/10/opinion/10kristof.html>]

Kristof provides what serves as the appeal of the no-fly zone to liberals and others who shy away from full-scale military intervention. It appears to offer a way of supporting the anti-Gaddafi protesters without getting deeply involved in an actual war.

Similarly, Shadi Hamid, Director of Research at the Brookings Institute's Doha Center and a Fellow in its Saban Center for Middle East Policy, contends that the situation in Libya is completely different from what had existed in Saddam's Iraq. "This is not an Iraq situation," he said. "This is a situation where a regime is killing its own citizens in broad daylight. It has

said unequivocally on television that it wants to kill its own citizens. So this is unprecedented. It's very rare to hear a leader declare his intentions in such a manner, and I think we should take it seriously." [Cecily Hilleary, "Libya: Is Military Intervention a Viable Option?, Voice of America, March 2, 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/Voalibya>]

The popularity of the idea of U.S. action in Libya was manifested by a non-binding resolution that received unanimous support in the U.S. Senate on March 1 which "urges the United Nations Security Council to take such further action as may be necessary to protect civilians in Libya from attack, including the possible imposition of a no-fly zone over Libyan territory." Although not calling for unilateral American action, any UN involvement would invariably rely heavily on United States air power.

Furthermore, in Europe, usually the bastion of anti-war feeling, there is even stronger support for military intervention than in the United States. President Nicolas Sarkozy of France has taken the lead here and France has become the first major power to offer official recognition to the rebel Libyan National Council as the legitimate representative of the Libyan people. Support in Europe for military involvement even has firm backing from leftist and the Green Parties. [Jean Bricmont, "Libya and the Return of Humanitarian Imperialism," *CounterPunch*, March 8, 2011, <http://www.counterpunch.org/bricmont03082011.html>; Diana Johnstone, "Libya: Is This Kosovo All Over Again?," *CounterPunch*, March 7, 2011, <http://www.counterpunch.org/johnstone03072011.html>]

And, on March 12, the Arab League voted to back a no-fly zone over Libya and recognized the rebel movement as the country's legitimate government, which increased the pressure on the United States to intervene.

Neocons expressed their support for a more militant U.S. stance on Libya in a February 25 open letter to President Obama from the Foreign Policy Initiative (FPI), a two-year-old neoconservative group that is often looked upon as the successor to the Project for the New American Century (PNAC), which had pushed for the war on Iraq. The organization's directorship is comprised of neocon stalwarts: *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol; Brookings Institution fellow Robert Kagan; former Iraq Coalition Provisional Authority spokesman Dan Senor; and former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and Ambassador to Turkey, Eric Edelman. Kagan and Kristol had co-founded and directed PNAC.

In addition to these aforementioned individuals, other neocons signing the FPI document included Elliott Abrams, Paul Wolfowitz, Max Boot, Eliot Cohen, Thomas Donnelly, Reuel Marc Gerech, John Hannah, Michael Makovsky, Joshua Muravchik, Danielle Pletka, John Podhoretz, and Randy Scheunemann.

The FPI letter, reminiscent of missives sent by PNAC and other neocon ad hoc committees to Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush advocating militant action toward Saddam Hussein, proposed a series of actions for the United States and NATO to take against the Libyan dictator, which included the establishment of a no-fly zone, naval control of Libyan waters to prevent sea attacks against civilians, the freezing of Libyan government assets, a consideration of a temporary halt to importation of Libyan oil, and the immediate provision of humanitarian aid. The letter asserted that failure to take more aggressive action "will cast doubt on the commitment of the United States and Europe to basic principles of human rights and freedom." The letter maintained that "[t]here is no time for delay and indecisiveness" and that "clear U.S. leadership" is required.

Other neocons who have expressed support for a U.S. enforced no-fly zone against Libya have included John Bolton, Charles Krauthammer, Michael Ledeen, and Richard Perle. For Bolton this represents a 180 degree change from his outright opposition to the uprising in Egypt which he held would bring about the rule of the anti-American Islamist Muslim Brotherhood. And Richard Perle had actually been lobbying in favor of the Gaddafi regime around the time in 2006 when the U.S. removed Libya from a list of nations that sponsor terrorism and restored full diplomatic relations.

Most advocates of the military action against Gaddafi view it simply in humanitarian terms—as a way of stopping a brutal, crazed dictator from slaughtering his own people and thus allowing for human freedom and democracy to prevail. And this is how the neoconservatives are presenting it. For example, Bill Kristol in criticizing Secretary of Defense Robert Gates for opposing U.S. military intervention in Libya, focused on its humanitarian aspect: "Is it right to characterize an attack on the Gaddafi regime's air defenses and airplanes, and the execution of a no-fly zone that would protect the Libyan people from Gaddafi, as 'an attack on Libya'? Can't we distinguish a regime that's lost whatever legitimacy it once had from the nation that regime is destroying and the people that regime is terrorizing?"

[“Gates' successor should understand that our power is a force for good in the world, says FPI Director William Kristol,” *The Weekly Standard*, March 5, 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/kristolgates>]

It can be seen that most advocates of United States intervention in Libya perceive it as being (1) fundamentally humanitarian; (2) very limited in scope; and (3) dealing with a rather unique situation. The neocons, however, likely perceive it in broader strategic terms. For them, United States action against Libya would serve to revive their stalled Middle East agenda by providing the ideal justification for the U.S. to become involved militarily in the internal affairs of Iran, currently their (and Israel's) major target, which they so far have been unsuccessful in achieving. Neocons have pointed out that the democratic wave threatens the Islamic regime in Iran, which they certainly want the United States to facilitate. As Michael Ledeen put it at the time of the revolt against Mubarak's regime in Egypt: "if we're going to praise the Tunisian and Egyptian freedom fighters, all the more reason to hail the true martyrs in Iran."

[Michael Ledeen, "Egypt: Revolution? By Whom? For What?," January 28, 2011, <http://tinyurl.com/ledeenegypt>]

That neocons would exploit any U.S. intervention in Libya to justify intervention in Iran is underscored by continued propagandizing about the alleged Iranian nuclear threat. For example, last month, a neocon-inspired fearmongering documentary, *Iranium*, was released, which was screened across the U.S., including at AMC Theatres, the second largest movie theater chain in North America. It portrays Iran as a brutal totalitarian state and the mastermind behind world terrorism, including the alleged training of Al Qaeda terrorists. The documentary implies that Iran strives for global domination and that it would possibly use nuclear weapons against the U.S. and Western Europe. It calls for "crippling sanctions" against Iran and holds that "if economic pressure is not successful then military force may be utilized."

Iranium features neocons and their fellow travelers, such as Bernard Lewis, a scholar on the history of Islam and the Middle East and one of the intellectual gurus of the neocons; James Woolsey, the CIA director under President Bill Clinton; John Bolton, former Ambassador to the UN in the George W. Bush administration; Frank Gaffney, founder and president of the American Center for Security Policy; Dore Gold, former Israeli Ambassador; Harold Rhode, a specialist on Iran and a long-time Pentagon official who helped to set up what became the Office of Special Plans, which provided some of the most extreme propaganda to justify the invasion of Iraq; Michael Ledeen, a veteran neocon who has focused on Iran and authored *Accomplice to Evil: Iran and the War Against the West*; Reuel Marc Gerecht, senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, who was previously a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and director of the Middle East Initiative at PNAC; and Kenneth Timmerman, executive director of the Foundation for Democracy in Iran.

Just as in the case of their propaganda build-up to the war on Iraq, the neocons are appealing to both democratic idealism and fear regarding Iran (and would, in all likelihood, greatly intensify this effort should the U.S. intervene militarily in Libya), so as to win over two different audiences for their cause. The humanitarian approach simply echoes and amplifies the view many liberals hold on the subject, though many are reticent about actually launching wars. The fear approach appeals to the national self-interest of conservatives and more non-ideological people.

If the United States should make any type of military attack on Libya, and if that attack in any way could be portrayed as successful (which would require far less than the establishment of a new non-Gaddafi democratic regime) immense pressure could be brought to bear on President Obama to take the same militant approach towards Iran. Neocons are already arguing that the current democratic upheavals in Libya and the Middle East vindicate the neocon-inspired "Bush freedom agenda." Since Bush's agenda involved the use of force in addition to ideas there is the definite implication that this should also be applied when needed. And, if the United States intervened militarily in Libya, it would have once again ignored international law's prohibition of initiating military force against a sovereign country, further helping to establish the precedent that international law's position on this matter is passé and thus making opposition to such aggressive wars more difficult. (Most wars in recent times have been justified, at least in part, with a "humanitarian" rationale; even Hitler went to war against Poland on the grounds that it was oppressing its German minority.)

Should Obama attempt to resist calls to intervene militarily in Iran, he would likely face charges of hypocrisy and outright indifference to American security. For it likely would be argued that the Iranian situation is far worse than that which had existed in Libya, because unlike Libya, Iran poses a threat which reaches far beyond its borders, even affecting U.S. security. The neocons have already argued that Iran threatens to poison the other democratic uprisings in the Middle East and move them in the direction of anti-American Islamism. If Iran were successful in the latter effort, they maintain, the inhabitants of those countries who overthrew their old rulers would suffer even more under a totalitarian Islamist state. And even worse from the standpoint of American security, the creation of Iran-friendly regimes in the region would enable Iran to exercise hegemonic power over the Middle East sources of oil. In achieving such regional hegemony, Iran would control the world's oil spigot posing a grave threat to the United States and the industrialized West and be in a much better position to enhance its budding nuclear program.

The aforementioned scenario is not hypothetical and largely represents neocon thinking at this time. The neocons have expressed concern as to why the U.S. is making no effort to take advantage of the revolutionary ferment in Iran to bring about regime change and continue to excoriate the Obama administration for failing to take action there during the popular protests following the disputed 2009 Iranian presidential election. [An editorial at that time (June 29, 2009) in *The Weekly Standard*, co-authored by Bill Kristol, was titled “Resolutely Irresolute: Obama dithers while Tehran burns.” <http://tinyurl.com/obamairan2009>]

If the U.S. opts to intervene in Libya, only an obvious failure would definitely serve to prevent an attempted replication in Iran. Thus, while the uprisings in the Middle East have threatened to lead to democratically-elected governments that, in some instances, would be more hostile to Israel than their autocratic predecessors, the neocons still have a way of making the ultimate regional outcome a net positive for what they regard as Israel’s fundamental security interests.

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After graduating from the college, I joined Pakistan Army and was commissioned in a Tank Regiment. I am a veteran of Indo-Pakistan war. After leaving the Army, I joined IT as a profession. I was hired by Kuwait Air Force And Air Defence as an Adviser to computerise it's entire operation. Here I was the Chief Coordinator of the Project, Kuwait Automated Support System (KASS). It was a state of the art leading edge technology where we established over 500 online terminals network with dedicated voice and data communications. It had the Satellite linkups to connect with other systems and track the inventory movement for KAF & AD. On this project, I was coordinating with US Navy, IBM World, AT&T and Martin Marietta for development, deployment and operation of the KASS. Writing has always been a passion with me, been writing for 25 years for various newspapers and periodicals. Now for the last four years, I have formed my virtual Think Tank, Opinion Maker. Here we have some ...

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