



U.S Democracy Campaign during The Civil War in Libya

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Abstract

The NATO intervention in Libya was one of the most contentious conflict in 2011. The permission given by the UNSC for NATO to intervene in Libya led to a debate that said intervention carried out in Libya was not based on the humanitarian objectives but for US national interest. This situation is strengthened by several NATO activities that show their involvement is for the US interest. Some of the US interest are protecting their territorial sovereignty from terrorism, oil interest and democracy campaign or ideology. Ideology is counted as their long-range or important interest. Previous studies have explained the other US interest in Libya such as the oil interest and terrorism. However, there are not many studies that precisely portray the importance of liberalism in this operation. Therefore, this research is questioning on the importance of democracy campaign during operation by NATO for the US. The main argument in this study is that US did not only launch the operation for humanitarian reason but for its own interest and that democracy liberal ideology interest hold the same importance as the other interest of US.

Keywords: *United States, Libya, National Interest, Democracy, NATO.*

1. Introduction

Arab Spring is a phenomenon that started a similar uprising in Arab countries. This incident began in Tunisia, when Tunisians demanded President Zine El Abidin Bin Ali to step down from the office.¹ This phenomenon then gave a rise of enthusiasm for countries around Tunisia to do the same with their authoritarian governments such as Libya, Syria and Egypt. The uprising that occurred in Tunisia succeeded in overthrowing its president with conducive conditions, giving some hope for Libya to build a new life

¹ History online, "Arab Spring," 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/arab-spring>. Accessed on 20 September 2021, 20.32 WIB



and get out from Gaddafi's authoritarian presidency. Libyans were hoping to be able to throw Gaddafi from his position he has held for decades. However, the reality did not meet their expectations and instead led to an internal conflict within the country. The struggle of power finally occurred and created a civil war.

Gaddafi ruled Libya for 42 years with an authoritarian system, leaving Libyans trapped and without access to democracy for their rights (Gebremichael, 2018:2). Gaddafi claimed his administration is what his people really want, but he doesn't give any opportunities for his people to build any political parties and prohibits the existence of independent media. In addition, during his reign Gaddafi implemented a 'stick and carrot' system in which loyalists get 'carrot' for their reward and 'stick' for the disloyal (Al-Ghwell, 2015).

These things then led to the emergence of the desire of the Libyans to be free from the authoritarian president, striving for independence. Rebel groups and demonstrators attempted to remove Gaddafi from office. This action then led to Gaddafi's response which included acts of violence and human rights violations to suppress the rebel groups (Tarik, 2011). Gaddafi and his troops used weapons in the form of sticks or baton weapons, tear gas, and others in arresting the rebels. He also arrested demonstrators and figures that demanded freedom such as Mohamed Al-Sahim, a journalist about Libya freedom (HRW, 2011). This rebellion succeeded in taking Gaddafi down from office but was not able to turn Libya into a free country as desired. This rebellion continued and actually gave rise to a new internal conflict because of the absence of government and the single political ideology that will unite the Libyan people. (Gebremichael, 2018:5).

The uprising actually worsened the humanitarian situation in Libya. Many third-party countries like the United Nations called for an immediate solution for the Libyan conflict. Various attempts were made by the United Nations to cease the conflict. UN's Secretary General Ban Ki Moon asked Gaddafi to stop the human rights violation that occurred as well as a ceasefire.² The same thing was conveyed by B. Lyn Pascoe, the UN Secretary

² UN News, "Ban Strongly Condemns Qadhafi's Actions Against Protester, Calls for Punishments," 2011, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/02/367342-ban-strongly-condemns-qadhafis-actions-against-protesters-calls-punishment>. Accessed on 20 September 2021, 21.10 WIB.



General for political affairs that asked Gaddafi to fulfil his obligations as a head of state to protect the public, human rights and asked for freedom for the media.³ The Security Council was asking Gaddafi to protect his citizens and asking him to receive assistance in the form of medical and medicines that will be distributed by the World Health Organization (WHO).⁴ Once there is no sight of Libya's internal change even after the effort that was been made and preventing the conflict from spreading to a larger scale, with a consent from the UN as described in the UNSC resolution 17 March 2011, on 23 March 2011 NATO carried out Operation Unified Protector (OUP) with United States as the leader, based on UN Charter Chapter VII article 41, Resolution 1970, Resolution 1973 regarding the missions that can be carried out by NATO.⁵ OUP is also a follow up action after the enactment of the no-fly zone in Libyan territory. This resolution is a form of fulfilling the obligation of member countries to carry out 'responsibility to protect' in the context of conflict resolution. In this resolution, it is emphasized that the UN Security Council is worried about the conditions that occur and rejects all types of violence. In the UN Charter, it is said that the UN Security Council can decide when the use of weapons is needed in an effort to resolve conflicts. This effort was forcibly ousted by the Libyan people on October 20 2011.⁶

NATO is an organization with collective defence as the main instrument. They committed to the principle that an attack against one or several of its member will be considered as an attack against all.⁷

Relations between the two countries, is not considered as a new one. Libya and United States have been involved in a few common interests since before President Gaddafi took over the government, replacing King Idris I. United States is also one of the

³ UN Meetings Coverage and Press Release, "Security Council Press Statement on Libya," 2011, <https://www.un.org/press/en/2011/sc10180.doc.htm>. Accessed on 20 September 2021, 21.16 WIB.

⁴ UN News, "Libya: UN to Use Previously Frozen Funds to Procure Medical Supplies," 2011, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2011/08/384402-libya-un-use-previously-frozen-funds-procure-medical-supplies>. Accessed on 20 September 2021, 21.23 WIB.

⁵ NATO, "Operation Unified Protector Final Mission Stats, Fact Sheet, 2 November 2011.

⁶ Al Jazeera, "The Death of Gaddafi," Al Jazeera online, 2018. <https://www.aljazeera.com/program/the-big-picture/2018/11/5/the-death-of-gaddafi>. Accessed on 21 September 2021, 17.58 WIB.

⁷ NATO, "Basic Points, A Political and Military Alliance," NATO, <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>. Accessed on 29 September, 21.59 WIB.



supporters in the 1949 UN Resolution regarding independence in Libya.⁸ The existence of US military base in Libya also made diplomatic relations between two countries increased. Oil is one of the reasons of the relations between US and Libya, but it's definitely not limited to oil. When Gaddafi took the office, he was committed to fight communism that in accordance with the US ideology. This paper argue that democracy is one of the US's interest when they invade Libya with NATO. Based on the studies, other than because of the UN Resolution, US's reason of taking part in the Libyan Civil War is to secure their national interest that could be threatened if the war keeps on going. There are several interest of the US such as oil policy, terrorism and democracy. Most previous studies explained about the other national interest. By using neo-realism theory, this paper will try to explain more on the democracy campaign of US in Libya. There are previous study that explain about why did US decided to take action in the Libyan War, explaining about the interest like oil and terrorism but there has not been a comprehensive study explaining US democracy campaign in Libya through NATO. Therefore, question raised in this paper is how did the US spread their liberal ideology in Libya and what is the importance for them. To answer this question the next section will present about the US national interest in the Libya and by using the neo-realism theory, this paper captures the importance of US interest and the involvement in Libyan Civil War.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The United States and Libya: The Contradictions of Intervention and Disengagement by Youssef M. Sawani

The focus of this journal is to analyze what are the US interest in Libya that makes them decided to be involved in the war. In this journal, he argued that NATO does not have protecting civilians as their main goal but their role was as an extension of the US that has various interest in Libya. US saw Libya in a strategic location, with a location

⁸ Embassy of Libya, "Libya-US Resolutions," <https://www.embassyoflibyadc.org/us-libya-relations>. Accessed on 29 September 2021, 22.09 WIB.



that directly adjacent to the Mediterranean Sea, as well with an abundant amount of oil resources that became US's important point. Libya's oil production meets 2% of the world's oil need, considering US is one of the biggest oil consumer in the world. The oil issue was not limited to the US but also European Countries as well. This article briefly explained that there was democracy interest in the process because NATO is the organization to counter Soviet's pact, the Warsaw Pact.

In my opinion, this journal is sufficient enough as he explained the US interest as well as the OUP by NATO but did not explain about how important democracy campaign in Libya actually is. By this paper, author is hoping to be able fill the gap in this journal.

2.2. The Role of the United States (U.S.) Interests in the Intervention in Libya 2011 by Zyad Muhammad Nuri

In this journal Zyad argued that in the process of the decision making, the UN was influenced by United States. In this journal he said that there are three main arguments on the motivations of the U.S participation in intervention in Libya, including: foreign policy interest and stability in MENA region which was threatened by Gaddafi's action, to stabilizing Libyan natural oil production resources, and to repay NATO allies for their support in the U.S intervention in Afghanistan.

This journal's main argument is that by seeing from the structuralist view, the concepts of humanitarian intervention which demand state to protect civilians from violence is contrasted with the main idea of realism: to protect their national interest before everything else. This is in line with author's argument that instead of humanitarian values, U.S choose to protect their national interest instead.

Again, this paper is sufficient enough to talk about U.S national interest but not the democracy interest. Zyad only explained it briefly then his focus is back to the terrorism and talking about the intervention other than interest. With that being said, author hope to fill the gap written by two authors above regarding the U.S democracy interest in the Libyan Civil War in 2011.



3. Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative study due to its research process. According to Cresswell, qualitative research is a method that emphasizes explanation in explaining the stages and results of research conducted. Interview techniques, case studies and literature studies are methods that often used in collecting research data.⁹ In this study, author used the narrative method and literature study in explaining U.S Democracy Campaign in Libyan Civil War. The literature study was carried out because the sources of the data obtained to explain this case were through books, journal, articles and official state documents released by UN, NATO, US and Libya. Historical factors are also obtained through this source, will be easier to understand if they are written in narrative form. This research method is used to answer the author's research question.

This research is conducted because of the question arise in many countries or scholar about what is the true intention of the US when they decided to conduct the operation in Libya. This study is using qualitative approach in order to be able interpreting the situation that happened in Libya at that time. This method also used to gain a better knowledge of US interest based on the perspective of Neo-realism theory.

4. Discussion and Result

4.1. Analytical Framework

This study will use the theory of offensive realism to explain the problems regarding US interest in Libya. This section aims to answer the question on how is the US spread its democracy or liberal ideology in Libya. For realist thinkers, the state is the only actor in international relations. The state as the main actor has the highest power to make decisions and determine other policies related to the survival of the country. To be able to do that, the state must possess power. There is no limitation on how many powers a country should have. This was caused by the fear among these countries especially big

⁹ John W. Cresswell, "Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mix Method Approaches," (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2009)



countries. The more power, they will have the bigger chance of survival. Every country has the right to have as much power as possible to ensure their own survival. Mearsheimer said that 'the best defense is a good offense,' meaning a good defense a country will have is when they have a good offense in order to maintain the safety of their country.¹⁰ In contrast to defensive realism which tends to 'preserving power,' offensive realism tends to choose to 'increasing power' to survive.

But this condition will create another problem or neo-realism call it 'Security Dilemma'. Security dilemma will occur because the state does not know about the intentions of other country then it will decide to increase its power to ensure safety.¹¹ However it is hard for one country to increase their power without threatening safety for other countries, in this case Mearsheimer argues that states must be offensive to each other. Security dilemma appear because actors in international stage is operating in anarchic system. Anarchy system is a condition where there are no centralized authority or ultimate arbiter that stands above states.¹²

As for national interest, Holsti said there are three types of US national interest and that is Core Interest and values, middle range goals and long-range goals.¹³ Ideology is counted as the long-range goals of US which then regulates how is the country relations in international system. United States is a country with democratic values as their main principles. This could be seen during the second world war when they compete with Soviet Union to spread their ideological values.

Mearsheimer then argue the existence of The Liberal International Order. Liberal international order is a condition where dominant state in the system obviously take liberal democracy as their system and must have enormous influence within the key

¹⁰ J.J. Mearsheimer, "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics," New York; W.W. Norton & Co, 2001) p.3.

¹¹ Ibid., p.35

¹² Tum Dunne, et.al, "International Relations Theories; Discipline and Diversity Third Edition," (Oxford University Press 2013) p.79

¹³ K.J. Holsti, International Politics; A Framework for Analysis Third Edition," (Prentice-Hall, Inc. Engelwood Cliffs: New Jersey. 1977) p.144



institutions that populate the order.¹⁴ The ultimate goal of these liberal democracies is to spread democracy across the globe while promoting open world economy and building an international institution. Or in easier way, we could say that liberal international order wanted to create a system that economically engaged and bound together by sets of common rules.¹⁵

4.2. U.S Democracy Campaign in Libya

The large number of actors involved in Libyan Civil War raises a concern for the US non-democracy ideology spread in Libya. Since 1975, Libya already had a close relationship to the Soviet Union. Soviet provided assistance to Libya when Chad invasion by providing 1 billion dollar worth of weapons, resulting in the instability in the Middle East and Africa.¹⁶ The Soviet Union provided assistance to Gaddafi to spread his radical ideas in Arab region and vice versa to Libya that giving their support to the Soviet for its revolutionary, anti-Western and anti-Israel movements in Africa, Europe, Asia and Middle East.¹⁷ This close relationship was also supported by the arrival of Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin in Tripoli in May 1975 to ratify arms trade agreement with Libya. The closeness proximity of Libya and Soviet Union then became a threat to the US. The rivalry between US and Soviet Union then influenced how the foreign policies of the two countries were formed and giving US more reason to be involved in Libya. This is the first reason on the importance of liberalism democracy policy in Libya.

Many experts argues that NATO's intervention under the lead of the US is an effort to fulfil their national interest instead of protecting Libyan people who were affected by human rights violations committed by Gaddafi. In a speech at the National Defense University on March 28 2011, President Obama said that regime change was not the main

¹⁴ John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security*, Vol.43, No. 4 (Spring 2019) p. 14

¹⁵ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶ P. Edward Haley, "Qaddafi and the United States since 1969. p.255

¹⁷ US Congress, "Libya: Background and U.S Relations, RL33142. November 2008."



objective of the operation.¹⁸ This statement is a little bit contradicted with what the action that has been done. The U.S democracy campaign in Libya is the extension of the other interest especially oil interest. Libya is estimated to be the 5th country with the largest oil reserves in the world, reaching 76.7 billion barrels and representing 2% of the total oil in the world and US is one of the biggest oil buyer.¹⁹ This policy then changed when Gaddafi took over office and nationalized oil with the aim of preserving the existing resources in Libya.²⁰

This condition does not meet the U.S ideal, where the liberal international order did not exist, preventing the US from fulfilling its national interest. The shortage of incoming oil will certainly have a major impact on the US economy. By taking Gaddafi down from the office, US was hoping for a policy and ideology change to the liberalism values. Holsti might put ideology in the long-range interest, the interest that is not the priority to be fulfilled. But seeing the urgency of oil politics in the civil war, it shows that liberalism is actually the value that US carry and spread in order for other national interest to be fulfilled. We might call the ideology as liberalism but the intention of US is still counted as neo-realism. Because there is an absence of higher authority above states or the presence of anarchy system. They could not make sure the intention of one country to another. US could not make sure the terrorism from Libya would not spread to their country, then the first reason for US to invade Libya is to hold terrorism, this prove that there is a security dilemma in the system. The territorial sovereignty is their main interest. But national interest could change depends on the time and place. In this context, democracy became one of their main interests because if there is an absence of liberal international order, it will be harder for the US to have an open world economy. The spread of the liberalism values is needed for the US to create liberal international order and giving open world economy as the result. This does not mean the objective in spreading liberalism values is only limited in Libya. The US wanted to spread liberalism

¹⁸ The Obama White House, "Obama's Speech on National Defense University," The Obama White House YouTube official channel, uploaded on 29 march 2011. Accessed on 30 September 2021, 20.11 WIB.

¹⁹ Kjell Engelbrekt, et.al, "The NATO Intervention in Libya: Lesson Learned from The Campaign," Contemporary Security Studies, (Routledge: New York, 2011) p.3

²⁰ Ibid.,



in the region because once the region have the same ideology, it will also be easier for them to reach understanding in economic sector. With that being said, it means the US could achieve their national interest to the maximum level if the countries in the region have the same ideology. We could see that this liberal democracy interest should be fulfilled first before the other interest.

4.3. The Role of NATO

In practice, Operation Unified Protector run by NATO does not act alone. There are several resolutions that causing UN to take this measure such as Resolution 1970, Resolution 1973 and UN Charter Chapter VII article 41. This resolution was issued because the values of Responsibility to Protect or often known as R2P. R2P could be used when a country is unable or no longer have the will to resolve the conflict on their own, then it will be an international responsibility.²¹ This was what happened in Libya where at that time, Gaddafi had no willingness to resolve the conflict and the UN began to consider this was a problem that must be resolved immediately. In 2010 and 2011, UNSC has held 24 meetings related to the situation in Libya.²² R2P became the foundation for UNSC to take action in this context is to do a humanitarian intervention as the effort to stop human rights violation in Libya.

The NATO actions in Libya cannot be separated from the US agenda to spread its ideological values, keeping in mind that the ideological competition history between US and the Soviet. NATO as the instrument of United States could also be seen from its position in the Middle East, where the position of US hegemony is also clearly visible. The existing regional system that was threatened at any times because of the many conflicts that occurred. With the presence of NATO that carried the ideology of collective defense' in which 'attack to one is considered against all,'²³ the US will have an easier

²¹ Report of The International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, "The Responsibility to Protect," (Ottawa, Canada; International Development Research Centre, 2001) p.XI

²² Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council 2010-2011

²³ NATO, 'What is NATO; Basic points, collective security,' NATO Official. <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>. Accessed on 30 September 2021. 17.49 WIB



access to be involved in the region. With the involvement of US in the region, the democracy liberal campaign will be easier to be carried out and national interest will be fulfilled. This is because the absence of institutions that share the same ideology, economy and political values in the region has become one of NATO's motivations to be engaged in the region.²⁴ With the involvement of NATO in Libya, people could see how they put interest in the community first, how they have democratic way to solve problem instead of solving it in one hand and how they build trust between each other to prevent conflict. It should be noted that NATO is also a political alliance where one of the main agendas is to spread liberal democracy values. NATO has the principle of helping member states assistance and cooperate to resolve issues related to security, build trust and prevent conflicts.

The liberalism in NATO also gave an example of burden sharing system in the middle east to keep the stability in the region. This is one of the democracy campaign by US through NATO in Libya and the region. By using NATO, the US will be able to fulfill its national interest with minimal budget as the advantage.

5. Conclusion

Based on the study that was conducted, it was found that the US did not only intervene in the interest of humanity but also for its national interest. This action is for the US survival in the anarchy system where there is no higher authority in the international stage.

The democracy interest in Libya did not get too much recognition when it is also the main interest of US. National interest could be changed depends on the time and place, so do the democracy. Democracy interest is not always be a long-range interest, the interest that does not have a greater urgency when in fact in this Libyan conflict, the other

²⁴ Igwe, Stanley C and team, "An Assessment of the motivations for the 2011 NATO Intervention in Libya and its Implications for Africa," Canadian Social Science, 26 April 2017.



interest will be harder to pursue if the democracy interest has not yet been fulfilled. By creating and introducing democracy in Libya, it will be easier for US to fulfil their oil interest because two countries with the same ideology will create a liberal international system, an open world economy. In this context, author think that the democracy liberal interest should be put in the vital interest instead of the long-range interest, seeing the other interest could only be fulfilled when this democracy interest is fulfilled.

In addition, NATO became the tool of United States to spread the ideology of liberalism and restrain the spread of communism. NATO indicate the importance of 1 common ideology and in this context is liberalism. So it could be conclude that democracy campaign that was done by US through NATO is very important for US interest.

6. Thank You Note

Thank you to Professor Banyu Perwita for this opportunity to write about U.S democracy interest in the Libyan Civil War. I'm learning a lot during the process and will keep the lesson learned in mind.



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