

Libya: Is there a place for military intervention?

World Bridge Blog Refugees International Ron Capps 10 March 2011 *Ron Capps directs RI's Peacekeeping program and the Partnership for Effective Peacekeeping.*

With all the turmoil in the Middle East over the past few weeks, we've been more or less glued to Al Jazeera watching regimes fall. The regime in danger this week is, of course, that of Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya. (...)

(...) But let's back up a bit. At the 2005 World Summit, international leaders agreed to a principle known as the **Responsibility to Protect** (R2P). This commits states and the international community to protect civilians against ethnic cleansing, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide. At least in theory, the U.S. and the rest of the international community have a responsibility to step in and provide protection for the Libyan civilians that Qaddafi is attacking.

The U.S. military has moved some assets into the Mediterranean Sea to be closer to Libya in case they are needed. But it seems quite unlikely the U.S. will make any bold military moves. The Secretary of Defense and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs have both made statements signaling their concerns over a possible military intervention.

So why isn't the U.S. taking action? It's a good question. For one thing, military options are limited. The U.S. could try to impose a no-fly zone over Libya to keep Qaddafi from bombing his own people, but that's not as easy as it might seem. Libya has a very effective air defense network - said by some to be the second best in Africa - and it's unclear who controls it right now. The U.S. would have to destroy or at least significantly degrade that before it could effectively control the skies over Tripoli and Benghazi.

The U.S. could make a few targeted airstrikes against military targets in order to cripple Qaddafi's ability to wage war. This would be slightly easier and would actually be a pre-cursor attack to establishing a no-fly zone. (...)

(...) Now back to **R2P** for a moment. The principle rests on three pillars: the responsibility of a nation to protect its own people; that of the international community to assist and encourage nations and leaders to do so; and the ultimate responsibility of the international community to act to stop war crimes and crimes against humanity when a sovereign leader does not. The international community clearly missed the boat in Libya on the first two. The Security Council voted over the weekend to authorize the use of force and invoked **R2P**. Now it's up to the rest of the world to decide on a course of action.

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