Libya: NATO must stick to the R2P script

  NATO Watch 31 March 2011 Dr. Ian Davis, director of NATO Watch   The UN-authorised intervention in Libya has thrown up complex ethical issues of paramount importance, as well as misgivings about NATO assuming command of the military dimension. It is an intervention that has both an overt face and a hidden face, and behind every rationalization seemingly another rationalization, often of quite a different order than the declared protection of Libyan civilians.

What started out as an action that observed the majority of the norms of international law and multilateral consultation is now in danger of reverting to type. The heavy-handed application of unilateral US, French and British muscle and talk of regime change, arming the rebels and even assassinating Gaddafi risks breaking the fragile international consensus and many of the political gains secured through UNSC resolution 1973 – including the historic embrace of the responsibility to protect (R2P) principles agreed in 2005.

With NATO assuming command of all military operations, the Alliance must stick to the letter of the UN resolution and R2P principles. Five crucial steps are required:
    •The use of "all necessary measures" to protect civilian areas from attack by Libyan government forces should only continue as long as the attacks on civilians persist or are threatened   •Diplomatic efforts should be stepped up to achieve an early unconditional ceasefire and then work towards a lasting political settlement   •NATO should abide by clear and transparent rules of engagement

•Parliaments in member states should hold their governments accountable for NATO actions in Libya

•Open and careful monitoring of civilian casualties

  There was undoubtedly a strong anti-war case for staying out of Libya, but there was, and still is, a stronger pro-peace case for limited military intervention based upon a responsibility to protect civilians. But the limits of the Libyan intervention need to be clearly articulated and followed to the letter.   For further details, see this pdf document