

**Cooper: Libya is no place for half measures** Calgary Herald Barry Cooper 19 April 2011

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(...)As for London and Paris, the most enthusiastic supporters of what their German critics are calling 19th-century gunboat diplomacy, they are now berating their allies for not doing enough. The military problem is already clear: the rebels are incapable of defeating the Libyan army, even with the application of outside air power. The political problem is also coming into focus: a stalemate means a NATO failure. Worse, even a stalemate cannot be sustained.

The main reason for what will soon be an obvious debacle is the disconnect between military strategy and the political purpose it is designed to achieve. For France and the U.K., their political purpose, regime change, required the one thing prohibited by the UN, the use of ground forces. Our problem, along with the Americans, is the foolishness of invoking **responsibility to protect** in the first place.

Canadian intervention in Libya is not peacekeeping. It is humanitarian war-fighting. The **responsibility to protect** doctrine dictates that we are protecting potential victims on one side of a civil war from slaughter by the other. Our military mission is therefore limited to preventing war crimes without regime change. But by definition, that means we are taking the side of the weak, rebels whose sole virtue seems to be their weakness, but whose political goal is, precisely, regime change.

There are even worse things to consider. First, it is idle to pretend that Gadhafi, however unpleasant, is not popular with a large number of Libyans. Second, the goal of humanitarian warfare, bringing war criminals to justice, also encourages them to prolong their fight because it makes plea bargains impossible. Likewise, our unwillingness to inflict civilian casualties, however reasonable it seems, also prolongs the killing by both sides. Instead of overwhelming force followed by a trial of Gadhafi at The Hague, we have the casual application of insufficient force leading to an extended and inconclusive conflict.

In short, because humanitarian wars are in principle senseless, they are also endless. Libya is a very tough neighbourhood; it is no place for half measures. Unfortunately, none of our political leaders has seen fit to point this out or even to bring it up for discussion.

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