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Libya: A Time for Others in the Region

A Policy Update Paper

By

Derek Burney

CDFAI Senior Research Fellow

And

Senior Strategic Advisor to Ogilvy Renault LLP

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Derek H. Burney (71) is Senior Strategic Advisor to Ogilvy Renault LLP. He is Chairman of GardaWorld's International Advisory Board and a Director of TransCanada Pipelines Limited. Mr. Burney is a Senior Research Fellow at the Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute and a Visiting Professor and Senior Distinguished Fellow at Carleton University.

Mr. Burney headed the Transition team for Prime Minister Harper from January to March, 2006. He was President and Chief Executive Officer of CAE Inc. from October 1999 until August 2004. Prior to joining CAE, Mr. Burney was Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Bell Canada International Inc. (1993-1999).

From 1989-1993, Mr. Burney served as Canada's Ambassador to the United States. This assignment culminated a distinguished thirty-year career in the Canadian Foreign Service, during which he completed a variety of assignments at home and abroad, including a period as a Deputy Minister of External Affairs.

From March 1987 to January 1989, Mr. Burney served as Chief of Staff to the Prime Minister. He was directly involved in the negotiation of the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. He was the Prime Minister's personal representative (Sherpa) in the preparations for the Houston (1990), London (1991) and Munich (1992) G-7 Economic Summits.

In February 1992, Mr. Burney was awarded the Public Service of Canada's Outstanding Achievement Award.

In July 1993, he was named an Officer of the Order of Canada.

Mr. Burney was conferred Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from Lakehead University, Queen's University, Wilfrid Laurier University, Carleton University and the University of Windsor.

His memoir of government service - *Getting it Done* - was published by McGill-Queen's in 2005.

Mr. Burney was born in Fort William (now Thunder Bay), Ontario, and was educated at Queen's University, where he received an Honours B.A. and M.A. He is married to Joan (Peden) and has four sons.

There is a groundswell of demands for a “No-fly” zone, or some form of military intervention by the West, to contain or squelch efforts by Col. Gadhafi to massacre his own people. The emotions and humanitarian instincts urging action are understandable, but so are arguments advocating prudence.

Senator John Kerry – who seems to be auditioning, at times, for a future role as Secretary of State – and Senator John McCain, among others, are staunchly advocating intervention. They argue that this is the only way to prevent the further slaughter of innocents and to help fulfill the US’ fundamental objective of support for liberty and security. However, Richard Lugar, the venerable Republican minority leader of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee is counselling caution. Lugar has stated, “I believe it is a civil war and the US should not intervene in a civil war. After the war, the US and other nations will have to make determinations as to how we treat whoever the winners may be.” Lugar added that those concerned now about civilian casualties would only be more concerned when increased military action, abetted by the US, causes greater damage to civilians.

Within the US Administration itself, opinion seems sharply divided, notably between the hawkish Secretary Clinton and a much more restrained Defence Secretary, Robert Gates, who is obviously wary about the unknown consequences of a reflex “act of war”. President Obama may be caught, as well, between images of Reagan (“strong”) and Carter (“weak”) and conflicting perceptions about the seemingly simple, albeit simplistic, choice between action and non-action. The hard reality, as echoed by those preferring caution, is that, given the US’ grim fiscal situation and its ongoing involvement in two major military engagements in Muslim countries, it has little capacity to sustain yet another costly and vaguely defined military adventure in the region.

Richard Haass, President of the Council on Foreign Relations, contends persuasively that, unlike Egypt and Saudi Arabia, the US has no overriding strategic reason to get involved in Libya. Besides, argues Haass, a “No-Fly” zone would “not be decisive given that aircraft and helicopters are not central to the regime’s military advantages. The only way to level the playing field would be to put trainers, advisers and special forces on the ground.” Even when a “No-Fly” zone was deployed in Iraq after Saddam Hussein began to attack his own people, much more was needed to evict him from power. Furthermore, argues Haass, neither the US, nor anyone else, really knows much about who the West would be supporting militarily in Libya, let alone where that support would lead.

Among the Europeans, French President Sarkozy and UK Prime Minister Cameron are leading the charge for intervention. It is not known to what extent his view may be influenced by visions of Margaret Thatcher and the Falklands or by the significant interests in Libya of British oil giant BP. But, like the US, the UK’s fiscal situation is hardly conducive to another costly military commitment. The initial foray into Benghazi by the UK Special Forces certainly did not elicit much support from the Revolutionary Council.

Despite its Responsibility to Protect mandate, the UN seems to be dithering, once again, in the face of the latest flash point of internal conflict. It is apparent that neither Russia nor China have any desire to endorse military intervention in Libya.

That leaves NATO purportedly in the vanguard, with the precedents of Kosovo very much in vogue. But Lewis MacKenzie has scotched the relevance of that example, saying that the “No-Fly” zone against Serbia went “well beyond closing the airspace over Serbia’s air defences but quickly escalated to an all-out bombing campaign ... oil refineries, bridges, etc.”

There is every reason for the West to deplore Gadhafi's conduct and deploy economic sanctions and arms embargoes against his regime and contemplate, as well, prosecution by the International Court of Justice. It is also highly desirable to find effective ways of deploying humanitarian assistance to those trying to overthrow Gadhafi including, if requested, military and logistic equipment.

But, if more is to be done overtly on the military front, it would seem more logical and more appropriate to look to the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic States and/or the Organization of African Unity to take the lead. Why not? Egypt, despite its current turmoil, certainly has the military muscle and is right next door. Saudi Arabia has the money. Nigeria has both. Why should the onus fall exclusively on the West to "do something", especially when the consequences of doing something belies easy analysis. As history eloquently illustrates, getting in is just the easy part.

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