

The Harper government's messaging in the build-up to the Libyan Intervention: was Canada different than its NATO allies?

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Keywords: Libya; Canada-NATO relations; Arab Spring

Introduction

The intervention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was instrumental in allowing the Libyan uprising to successfully overthrow the Gaddafi regime. The NATO decision to become involved operationally played out swiftly in early 2011. Given this short timeline, the lead NATO countries needed to convince their publics and the world why intervention in Libya was critical. As the entire Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region underwent the transformative change associated with the Arab Spring, NATO governments needed to explain their rationale for military action, particularly in the context of a peaceful transition in Tunisia and Egypt, and the beginnings of protests in Yemen, Bahrain and Syria.

This article focuses on the formative weeks during which the NATO governments had to package – or to “sell”, as Boucher (2009) terms it – their rationale for military intervention. Although this process is significant in all the lead NATO countries, the Canadian case stands out. In the case of NATO intervention in Libya, our findings demonstrate that the Harper government's value-based arguments or packaging for Canadian involvement stand out when compared to the selling operation conducted by the other lead NATO allies: the United States, France, the United Kingdom and Germany. In doing so, the Harper government demonstrated that it could be as robustly normatively driven on an issue-specific basis as its Liberal predecessors.

The image of value orientation was one of the major points of attack by critics of Canadian foreign policy under the Liberal governments of Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin prior to the Harper government victory, first in a Conservative Party minority situation (2006, 2008) and then with a majority (2011). The hallmark of this critique was the view that one of the key lessons from the shocks of the post-9/11 era was a need to strip foreign policy down to its bare essentials. One sign of this type of thinking was the adoption within the Canadian business community of the position that “everything has changed” in the post-9/11 context. Business

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groups therefore advocated an approach that prioritized reassuring the United States of a Canadian buy-in with respect to homeland security.

In the global domain, the critique was even more explicit. Former Canadian ambassador to the United States Allan Gotlieb (2004) decried what he considered the marked shift in Canadian foreign policy towards a romanticism that places values at the top of the agenda, noting that “Canada must adopt a reality-based foreign policy by responding to the imperatives of geography, history and economics”. Military historian Jack Granatstein (2003) argued that Canada should not conflate “its loudly professed values” with its national interest. According to Granatstein, “[m]oral earnestness and the loud preaching of our values. . . will not suffice to protect us in this new century”. Finally, a pivotal figure in the Harper government’s transition team, Derek Burney (2005), weighed in that an obsession with values risked a situation in which Canada was “confined more permanently to the periphery as a dilettante, not to be taken seriously”.

At odds with this critique, albeit in tandem with the projection of a buildup of Canadian “hard” military capacity, the Harper government sold the argument of participating actively in the NATO intervention in Libya almost exclusively on value-based grounds. To be sure, this is not an approach that extended across the spectrum of sensitive policy areas. From the Canada-China rapprochement to the pursuit of the Trans Pacific Partnership, interests trumped other priorities. Such exceptionalism, however, makes the Libyan case more compelling and offers a key example of values re-entering the foreign policy lexicon of the Harper Conservatives (Boucher 2013, p. 63).

Our article is not directed at trying to evaluate the pros and cons of this shift. Rather, it emphasizes that there is far more continuity in Canadian foreign policy than might have been expected, with values remaining an embedded component in Canadian foreign policy making under the Harper government. Adam Chapnick goes so far as to argue that in comparison to the previous Liberal governments, “the Conservative government between 2006 and 2011 was equally, if not more, aggressive in its emphasis on values and principles” (2011–2012, p. 151). If the values put forward seem at first glance very different from those highlighted in prior doctrines including the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) – the foreign policy paradigm of Lloyd Axworthy – the norms, values and principles espoused by the Harper government in its approach to Libya represent a striking illustration of a normative shift in Canadian foreign policy.

Canadian foreign policy in the Harper era

Canadian foreign policy under Prime Minister Stephen Harper has been primarily characterized as a highly constrained, cautious and less-than-ambitious approach to international affairs. For some critics, this has been perceived as Canada punching below its weight, conducting international affairs through a prism that merely follows the American lead, with the policies of Harper, moreover, being in train with a more historical decline in Canada’s position on the world stage (Heinbecker 2010). Criticisms of Canada’s current foreign policy have also been more nuanced. Boucher (2013, p. 54), for instance, argues that the Harper government still embraces internationalism – but that internationalism is different under the Harper government due to practices that emphasize national interests and domestic priorities.

This orientation to foreign policy has been most pronounced in the post-2011 period, driven by the elevation of the Canadian economic position *vis-à-vis* its Group of Eight (G8) counterparts as well as by the re-election of the Harper Conservatives to a majority government position in 2011. These factors have not led to a fundamental restructuring of Canadian foreign policy, but they have injected a greater degree of confidence into the Harper government’s ability, more so than its predecessors, to conduct a more autonomous, Canadian-made, foreign policy. For Kirton (2012, p. 134), such assertiveness confirms that Canada can conduct a

foreign policy driven more by “its own governmental and societal choice and less by classic external, relative capability-grounded constraints”.

Under this new environment, Canadian foreign policy under Harper is not devoid of its inherent (interest-driven) pragmatism, nor is it characterized by universal multilateral arrangements. Rather, it can be described as “pragmatic plurilateralism”, with a different form of “like-mindedness” (Boucher 2013, p. 60). Pragmatic plurilateralism, as a mode of conducting foreign policy, is consistent with the complexity and uncertainty underpinning international politics in the post 9/11, post-Global Financial Crisis era, and aids in understanding the relatively strengthened position of Canada *vis-à-vis* its counterparts over this period. At a time of “vulnerable America”, as Kirton phrases it, this consolidated approach toward foreign policy has arguably created room for value statements to have a greater impact on the world stage through a greater concentration of effort – consistent with an efficient approach to foreign policy.

In his keynote address at the World Economic Forum in 2010, Prime Minister Harper built on the notion of “enlightened sovereignty”. Through this interpretation, enlightened sovereignty refers to the responsibility of countries to be cognizant of their domestic practices and to ensure their consistency with the global good and global norms. Enlightened sovereignty supersedes the realm of economics and finance and is applicable in the arena of politics and security.

Although Harper did not evoke the notion of enlightened sovereignty directly in the context of the Arab Spring, or in Libya in particular, we can see how enlightened sovereignty adds a fine distinction to nuancing the Harper government’s international stance. Indeed, enlightened sovereignty acts as a lens into the response and rationale of the Harper governments’ normative/value-based approach to Libya, and serves as an important point of analysis for juxtaposing conservative foreign policy making toward the Libyan conflict with Axworthy’s human security doctrine/R2P. As Kirton highlights, “[t]he cadence [of Canada’s dual military involvement in Afghanistan and Libya] shows devotion to democracy and to the principle of R2P as a muscular military expression of enlightened sovereignty in the twenty-first century” (2012, p. 138).

Enlightened sovereignty evokes sentiments that appear similar to that of the R2P insofar as intervention was justified on the basis of the Gaddafi regime in order to safeguard its citizens. It was, in essence, the aggressiveness of the actions of the Gaddafi regime and their contravention of wider norms of human rights and dignity that enabled the Harper government to structure its foreign policy response along normatively oriented and value-based lines.

Through this lens, the interests vs. values debate in Canadian foreign policy is conflated with the selective privileging of international organizations. The Libyan case highlights, on the one hand, a consolidation of Canadian security interests toward NATO as opposed to the United Nations (Granatstein 2012). Through this pragmatic approach, Canada has made a point of channeling concrete efforts into organizations it deems to be more significant rather than those it views as being ineffective. The efforts channeled into the NATO-led mission serve as a key example of this reorientation, particularly after Canada’s failed attempt at a temporary seat on the UN Security Council in 2010.

Of course, Canada’s actions during the Arab Spring can be linked to a more generic concern with the global spread of democratic values. Canada’s normative-oriented approach toward the conflict was in line with the claim of “universal human rights”, with the decision to engage in the defense of human rights being employed in a smaller grouping of states, yet sanctioned by the key universal institution: the UN.

In Libya, the Canadian government’s values orientation consolidated and became more focused over time – with an emphasis first on human rights and crimes against humanity, then toward transition to democracy for the Libyan people. Initially, the Libyan intervention was justified as a reaction against the atrocities committed by the Gaddafi regime. Putting an

end to these atrocities defined the initial part of both the Canadian and the wider international community's rationale for intervention. Canada's post-conflict reconstruction approach comprised support of the Libyan transition toward democracy. These efforts were expressed through Canadian participation via the Libyan Contact Group.

A significant emphasis on the humanitarian imperative for the Libyan intervention reveals the inherent similarities of the Harper government's foreign policy approach with the normative orientation of R2P. The nature of the Libya mission – UN-sanctioned and NATO-led in response to the backlash to the Gaddafi regime's crimes against its citizens – created grounds for an intervention by the international community. One key divergence with R2P was that the NATO-led mission sought not only to protect the security of Libyan citizens, but also to carry out a full-scale elimination of the Gaddafi regime (Boreham 2011). This difference also reflects a key nuance of the Libyan conflict – how NATO played a supporting role by facilitating the rebel advance. Another key divergence is in the Harper government's rationale that R2P represents a set of normatively based and value-laden ideals that do not match the Canadian capacity to fulfill its commitments to these principles. This, for Boucher (2013, p. 67), illustrates the Conservatives' "responsibility to think clearly about Canadian interests and to not commit to principles that are still developing". Thus, while Rashid (2013, p. 39) notes that "Canadian voices advocating a mediated resolution to the Libya crisis were strikingly absent" – that, in fact, "[s]uch efforts should have been prioritized throughout the NATO intervention by Canada in support of continuous attempts to achieve a political solution to the crisis" (p. 46) – Canada's decision to intervene militarily in the Libyan crisis must be understood both as a reflection and as the outcome of the Harper government's normative shift towards a value-based foreign policy, one that views key aspects of R2P as incompatible with the current period of Canadian engagement in international affairs. Indeed, even Rashid acknowledges (although rather too strongly) that "the doctrine [of R2P] had been largely secondary in the Conservative government's foreign policy strategy" (2013, p. 47).

The context of the NATO intervention

After the fall of the Ben Ali Tunisian regime and toppling of the Mubarak Egyptian government in January 2011, the Arab Spring gained momentum across many parts of the Arab world. By late February 2011, conflict between the Libyan regime and protesting civilians had reached a climax as the Libyan leader, Muammar Gaddafi, used jetfighters and tanks to crush civilian populations in the city of Benghazi. Gaddafi denounced the civilians' behavior and threatened to kill uprising Benghazi citizens. International condemnation of Gaddafi's regime ensued: the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) formulated a resolution on 26 February 2011 condemning Gaddafi, the Organization of the Islamic Conference censured the Gaddafi regime on 8 March 2011 and the Peace and Security Council of the African Union issued a critical communiqué on 10 March 2011.

Despite international pressure, the Libyan situation continued to deteriorate. The Arab League called for a no-fly zone on 12 March 2011 and the UNSC followed with its resolution 1973 on 17 March 2011 for a no-fly zone and the protection of civilians. With a UNSC resolution in hand, NATO decided to assist in defending Libyan citizens and in effect support the rebels in their overthrowing of the regime.

To illustrate how NATO members packaged the 2011 intervention in Libya and to distinguish these approaches among NATO members, with a particular focus on Canada, we employ a comparative analysis of statements by key officials in alliance countries in the formative weeks before NATO agreed to militarily intervene in the Libyan crisis. Official government websites of key NATO allies and secondary media mentions are compared. We then focus more specifically

on Canadian official statements and reactions with key questions in mind. We find that the Harper government sold the NATO intervention in different terms than did its NATO allies. Unlike the United Kingdom, France and to a lesser extent, Germany, who often referred to international law – not to mention the United States, which often referred to its responsibility to lead – the Harper government often used strong normative language in packaging its rationale for intervention.

The statements of state officials were couched in different terms, and drew on an array of apparent practicalities, as NATO countries offered a diversified rationale for intervention: appeals to international law, self-determination of the Libyan people and protection of democracy and democratic transition. This differentiated approach (albeit with a thin layer of consistency) is perhaps most clearly illustrated by Canadian statements leading to the Libyan crisis.

In reviewing the Canadian position within the context of the reactions of its key NATO allies we can see that the Canadian approach in Libya emulates key characteristics of a shift back to a normative-oriented middle-power approach. This shift is seen particularly through statements designed to assure key allies of Canada's commitment to the NATO-led efforts toward Libya: an approach that balances the United States administration's policy as well as the normative sentiments and highly value-based arguments involved in the invoking of international law by European counterparts.

Comparing the Canadian reaction to key NATO allies

In the eastern city of Benghazi, approximately 800 people gathered outside of a police station to protest against the arrest of a well-known activist. The police crackdown that ensued led to serious injuries of protestors and calls from activists in neighboring cities to go out into the streets and call for the end of the regime. On 17 February, the so-called "Day of Revolt", opposition forces called on supporters to protest the government. Using snipers and helicopters, the Libyan police clashed with protestors, leading to the deaths of at least 15 people in Benghazi and a number of others across the country. This motivated thousands to spill out into the streets of Benghazi the following day to protest the killings. Overwhelmed by the protestors, Libyan police and military withdrew from parts of the city. In an attempt to thwart their success, Libyan security services and the military fired on protestors, killing up to 100 people.

Canada responded quickly in response to these escalating attacks on civilians by the Gaddafi regime. On 19 February 2011, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lawrence Cannon, called on the Libyan government to exercise restraint and to immediately cease its attacks on peaceful demonstrators. He also reiterated the importance of the right to exercise freedom of association and freedom of assembly, and called on the Libyan government to engage in peaceful, open dialogue to answer the legitimate concerns of civil society. Cannon noted, "Canada is . . . deeply concerned about reports of extremely violent attacks on and arrests of peaceful protesters. We regret the loss of life in Libya and call on all parties to refrain from violence" (Cannon 2011a). Canada's response to the first day of serious clashes between protestors and the Libyan government and police was first of its kind among the NATO allies surveyed.

The following day, 20 February, protests in Benghazi escalated again, with thousands demonstrating against the Libyan regime. With the killing of nearly 300 people that day in Benghazi, international and Arab media focussed on the evolving crisis throughout the country. In an unapologetic speech to Arab media, Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif al-Islam, who was once touted as a democratic advocate for his country, lambasted the protestors as foreign agents and vilified the revolution as a foreign conspiracy to topple the government. That night, thousands of protestors clashed with regime troops in Tripoli; nearly 700 people were killed, while other clashes were reported in cities across the country.

On 21 February, Cannon issued a statement in response to the reported violence, warning against non-essential travel to Libya for all Canadians. Although much of this statement emphasized evacuation measures, Cannon (2011b) also made the following remark:

Canada strongly condemns the violent crackdowns on innocent protesters that have resulted in many injured and killed. We call on the Libyan security forces to respect the human rights of demonstrators and uphold their commitment to freedom of speech and the right to assembly. The Libyan authorities must show restraint and stop the use of lethal force against protesters.

That same day in Wakefield, Quebec, Cannon stated, “We support the rule of law; we support freedom We also put forward our considerations in terms of promoting democracy” (quoted in CBC n.d.). As foreign minister, Cannon had made the first public references among NATO powers to a desired end game. These references to “freedom” and “democracy” were reinforced by Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s sharper tone in a Vancouver meeting with the press: “We find the actions of the government firing upon its own citizens to be outrageous and unacceptable We call on the government to cease these actions immediately” (quoted in CBC n.d.).

The only other NATO member leader to publicly comment on the events of 20 February was French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who on 21 February made a statement condemning the use of force against the Libyan people. While he expressed his condolences to the families of the deceased, he stressed the universality of human rights, especially to those wanting to exercise their fundamental right to expression and assembly: “The continuing brutal and bloody crackdown against Libyan civilians is horrifying. France and the French people are following these events with shock and compassion. Such use of force against one’s own people is contemptible” (Sarkozy 2011). Despite international criticism, the violence escalated in Libya with daily protests, killings, and official resignations of Libyan ambassadors to a number of countries.

In response to nationwide protests, Muammar Gaddafi made his first public statement on 22 February to the state controlled press. The verbose speech denied that the way out of the impasse was for him to resign, as had occurred in neighboring Egypt under Hosni Mubarak on 11 February. Gaddafi threatened that protestors and their supporters would be punished by death, adding that it was people’s civilian duty to kill these so-called foreign terrorists. The ensuing onslaught of the police and armed forces had, according to Human Rights Watch, resulted in the death of at least 233 people that evening. Lawrence Cannon followed up on 22 February 2011, stating that “[t]he government of Canada vigorously condemns all use of force against innocent protesters . . . the outrageous abuse of power by security forces must stop” (quoted in Galloway n.d.).

For the next few days, Benghazi rebels assumed *de facto* autonomy and masses gathered in the city center to celebrate their liberated city, even as the Libyan military began to clash with rebel forces in the cities of Misrata and Zawiyah, and calls for suspension of Libya from the UN Human Rights Council mounted in European capitals.

On 24 February, Prime Minister Stephen Harper spoke in depth with United Kingdom Prime Minister David Cameron about the situation in Libya. The two world leaders raised concerns regarding the “grave and disturbing situation unfolding in Libya” and the “deeply disturbing actions of the Gaddafi regime in suppressing and attacking its own citizens.” (Government of Canada, Prime Minister’s Office 2011). They vowed to stay in touch in order to form a diplomatic response to the atrocities. That same day, President Sarkozy made a brief speech to the Council of Ministers regarding the violent crackdown in Libya. He reiterated his stance on open dialogue and the use of restraint, but spent a considerable amount of time asking the European Union to impose sanctions on Libya. Although he strongly encouraged cutting all economic ties with Libya until the matter was resolved, he asked his advisor, Francois Fillon, to propose to France’s European partners that France

[s]wiftly adopt concrete sanctions to ensure that all those involved in the ongoing violence are aware they must accept the consequences of their actions. These measures relate, among other things, to the possibility of bringing them to justice, prohibiting access to EU [European Union] territory and monitoring financial transactions (Presidency of the Republic 2011).

Fillon issued a communiqué on 25 February calling for a meeting between the European Human Rights Commission and its members. He expressed his deep concerns regarding the level of lethal force employed by Gaddafi and emphasized that those responsible for such attacks be held accountable, as these actions constituted crimes against humanity. The communiqué also put forth a resolution to suspend Libya from the United Nations Human Rights Council (Government of Canada, Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada 2011), and marked the beginnings of international criticism of Gaddafi among the NATO capitals.

From Washington, DC, United States President Barack Obama issued a statement that same day regarding the Libyan crisis. Calling for immediate restraint, President Obama stated that the lethal use of force against the civilians violates “international norms and every standard of human decency” and urged the international community to respond immediately (Office of the Press Secretary, The White House 2011a). On 25 February, Obama signed an executive order that proposed sanctions on Libya. In the order, he determined that

the actions of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, his government, and close associates, including extreme measures against the people of Libya, constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States. The order declares a national emergency to deal with this threat. (Office of the Press Secretary, The White House 2011b)

President Obama also made it clear that the United States would work closely with the international community to protect Libyan civilians. He reiterated his stance on the proposed sanctions and stated that:

The Libyan government’s continued violation of human rights, brutalization of its people, and outrageous threats have rightly drawn the strong and broad condemnation of the international community. By any measure, Muammar Gaddafi’s government has violated international norms and common decency and must be held accountable. These sanctions therefore target the Qaddafi government, while protecting the assets that belong to the people of Libya. (Office of the Press Secretary, The White House 2011c)

In his statements, Obama indicated that he perceived the situation in Libya as a gross violation of *international norms*. As he called for immediate use of restraint, he repeatedly asserted that the solution to Libya was a firm international response. In a statement also issued on that date, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States would work with others to provide humanitarian assistance to Libyans in need:

We will continue to look at the full range of options to hold the Libyan government accountable and support the Libyan people Muammar Gaddafi has lost the confidence of his people and he should go without further bloodshed and violence. (quoted in Lynch 2011)

Clinton elaborated: “We want him to leave and we want him to end his regime and call off the mercenaries and those troops that remain loyal to him” (Bureau of Public Affairs, Department of State 2011).

German Federal Minister Guido Westerwelle issued two distinct statements addressing the killings in Libya. The first had a humanitarian tone as the Minister stated that the Federal Foreign Office had made available €166,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC). Two days later, Westerwelle issued another statement that contained heavy undertones of Gaddafi being in gross violation of international law, and his imminent referral to the International Criminal Court.

On 25 February, France's Representative to the United Nations, Gerard Araud, praised the cooperation of the European community in dealing with the situation in Libya. Although his remarks underlined the importance of the United Nations Human Rights Commission's suspension of Libya, Araud also urged the United Nations General Assembly to follow suit. Asked about the possibility of referral to the International Criminal Court, Araud recognized the difficulties of referral of a member that is not a signatory to the Rome statute but also declared that France will do what it can to push the referral through. Araud concluded by stating, quite explicitly, that military intervention in Libya was not an option (Embassy of France 2011).

The United Kingdom also issued a statement on 25 February regarding humanitarian relief efforts, indicating that its Federal Foreign Office had made €166,000 available to the ICRC in conjunction with the Libyan Red Crescent. According to the statement, these "funds will be used to finance medical supplies and equipment, as well as the deployment of ICRC emergency teams in Libya" (Federal Foreign Office 2011). At a UN Human Rights Council Special Session for Libya, United Kingdom Representative to the United Nations Peter Gooderham condemned the atrocities committed by the Gaddafi regime:

The use of military force against civilians and the attacks on funeral processions have caused deep anger throughout the country and across the world. We are also deeply disturbed by reports of Libyan planes being ordered to bomb their own people and by Gaddafi's public threats of violence in order to hold on to power. (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2011)

Gooderham applauded the measures taken by the United Nations to address the issue in Libya and stated that the United Kingdom would join the High Commissioner in calling for an international inquiry into the violence (Foreign and Commonwealth Office 2011). He further maintained that "the United Kingdom will do everything [it] can to make sure those responsible in the Libyan regime are held accountable for their actions", as they violated international human rights principles. In his closing remarks, Gooderham encouraged the members of the Council to support the resolution as the situation in Libya needed a firm and swift response from the international community (Gov.UK, 2011).

Canada supported international efforts to isolate Libya from the UN Human Rights Council. According to Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon, "[i]t would be an affront to the courageous people of Libya for the Qadhafi [sic] regime to continue to have a voice on the Human Rights Council" (Cannon 2011a). He added that

Canada unequivocally supports the demands of the Libyan people for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We continue to call on the Libyan authorities to protect their own people, to stop the violence against peaceful demonstrators and to respect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. (Cannon 2011b)

Germany, on the other hand, was slower to react to events in Libya. It was not until 27 February that Westerwelle praised the UNSC's unanimous decision to impose comprehensive sanctions on Libya. These included an asset freeze, an arms embargo and the referral of severe civilian repression by Gaddafi to the International Criminal Court. Westerwelle maintained that "[t]he referral to the International Criminal Court shows that anyone who commits crimes against his own people will personally be called to account" (Westerwelle 2011a). Twenty-four hours later, he issued a similar statement praising European Union sanctions that included a weapons embargo and a travel ban for the Gaddafi family (Westerwelle 2011b).

Yet, despite international criticism and Libya's suspension from the UN Human Rights Council, Gaddafi continued to blame al-Qaeda and foreign-backed terrorists for the ongoing protests. With relative autonomy in Benghazi, the Libyan opposition movement, the National Transitional Council (NTC), led by former justice minister Mustafa Abudl Jalil, was formed on 27 February. The NTC was joined by various political and diplomatic defections. In the first week of March, Libyan forces continued to battle with rebels in Zawiyah, Misrata, Gharyan, Zliten, Ajdabiya Ghadames, Brega and Ra's Lanuf. The NTC, meanwhile, called for the UN to impose a no-fly zone. A number of governments, including the French and some Arab League countries, supported the no-fly zone idea, but the United States and others backed away from the idea.

Rebels and government forces continued to clash in a number of Libyan cities in the ensuing weeks. Meanwhile, military defections increased throughout the country. During these first weeks of March 2011, NATO watched as rebels appeared to be faltering on the battlefield.

The international community subsequently began to coordinate a UNSC resolution to impose a no-fly zone that included a clause to protect civilians at any cost. The French – and to a lesser extent the British – took on the challenge of coordinating UNSC support for the resolution. French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe lamented the slow process of convincing the United States and others to support the proposed UN resolution. He reflected, “[i]t often happens in our recent history that the weakness of democracies gives dictators free rein”, but added, “[i]t's not too late to break with this rule” (quoted in Erlanger 2011).

President Obama used tough words on 3 March 2011 to induce change:

The violence must stop. Muammar Gaddafi has lost legitimacy to lead, and he must leave. Those who perpetrate violence against the Libyan people will be held accountable. There is a danger of stalemate that over time could be bloody. And that is something that we're obviously considering. So what I want to make sure of is that the United States has full capacity to act potentially rapidly if the situation deteriorated in such a way that you had a humanitarian crisis on our hands or a situation in which civilians were – defenseless civilians were finding themselves trapped and in grave danger. (quoted in PBS Staff 2011).

Prime Minister Cameron similarly added:

I think it is the moment for Europe to understand we should show real ambition about recognising that what's happening in north Africa is a democratic awakening and we should be encouraging these countries down a democratic path . . . It's a moment for Europe to say what we've done in the past hasn't always worked. Now we should be reaching out to these countries, offering them a new partnership, opening up our markets and welcoming their approach of greater democracy, greater freedom, greater human rights. This is a potentially good moment for our world and we should grab it and seize it and try and shape it. (quoted in Watt 2011)

The UNSC approved Resolution 1973 on 17 March 2011. French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe, introducing the UNSC resolution on 18 March, said: “In Libya, for a number of weeks the people's will has been shot down . . . by Colonel Gaddafi who is attacking his own people. We cannot let these warmongers do this, we cannot abandon civilians . . . [w]e should not arrive too late” (quoted in BBC Staff 2011). President Sarkozy strongly supported the rebels: “We will oppose any aggression by Col. Gaddafi against the population of Benghazi. Already our planes are stopping attacks on the town. As of now other French planes are ready to intervene against tanks and armored vehicles threatening unarmed civilians” (quoted in Willsher 2011). He noted the duty of countries to help those wanting to “liberate themselves from servitude”, adding that “Libyans wanting nothing else but the right to decide their own future find themselves in

danger of death. We have a duty to respond to their anguished call” (quoted in Willsher 2011). Finally, Sarkozy noted that:

Today we are intervening in Libya under the UN mandate with our partners and notably our Arab partners. We are doing it to protect the civilian population from the murderous madness of a regime that in killing its own people has lost all legitimacy. (quoted in Macdonald 2011)

British government officials’ reaction to the Gaddafi bombings of civilians and to the justification of UNSC 1973 also made strong references to the resolution’s international underpinnings. Prime Minister Cameron noted that UNSC 1973 “does not provide legal authority for action to bring about Gaddafi’s removal from power by military means . . . it is for the Libyan people to determine their government and their destiny” (quoted in Mulholland 2011). He added,

Gaddafi has had every conceivable opportunity to stop massacring his own people and the time for red lines, threats, last chances is over. Tough action is needed now to ensure that people in Libya can lead their lives without fear and with access to the basic needs of life. That is what the [UN] Security Council requires, that is what we are seeking to deliver So what we are doing is necessary, it is legal and it is right. It is necessary because with others we should be trying to prevent him from using his military against his own people, it is legal because we have the backing of the United Nations Security Council and also of the Arab League and many others, and it is right because I believe we should not stand aside while this dictator murders his own people. (Cameron 2011)

Similar speeches justifying support for UNSC 1973 were heard in Washington, DC, as exemplified by President Obama:

We had a unique ability to stop that violence: an international mandate for action, a broad coalition prepared to join us, the support of Arab countries, and a plea for help from the Libyan people themselves To brush aside America’s responsibility as a leader and – more profoundly – our responsibilities to our fellow human beings under such circumstances would have been a betrayal of who we are. Some nations may be able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries. (Office of the Press Secretary, The White House 2011d)

In announcing the extension of Canada’s mission and mandate in Libya after the overthrow of Gaddafi, Minister of Defense Peter Mackay highlighted democratic transition as the key value underpinning Canadian conflict resolution efforts toward Libya: “Canada’s role in Libya is not yet done. We are committed to supporting the Libyan people as they transition to a democracy – one that respects freedom, human rights and the rule of law” (Parliament of Canada 2011). This privileging of values was stressed by Harper on 18 March 2011, when he stated:

I will just add this: one either believes in freedom or one just says one believes in freedom. The Libyan people have shown by their sacrifice that they believe in it. Assisting them is a moral obligation upon those of us who profess this great ideal. (quoted in LeBlanc 2012)

Conclusion

This article argues that the Harper government packaged the Libyan intervention in normative terms that set it apart from its NATO allies. Using a comparative analysis of key NATO leaders and spokespeople we find a differentiated use of normative terms. The United States focused on its ability and responsibility to lead as well as the need to uphold international norms. European countries emphasized the power of international law. In contrast, Canada’s

Harper government packaged, or attempted to “sell”, the Libyan intervention on normatively oriented and value-based arguments in favor of democracy, freedom and human rights.

Canada’s packaging of a normative-based message stands out compared to its NATO allies, but it also boosts the findings of some Canadian foreign policy scholars who find the Harper government has increasingly moved to value-driven declaratory arguments in its foreign policy. As noted at the outset of this paper, this is markedly different than the interest-based strategy that stood at the core of the foreign policy of the government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper when it came into office. Moreover, this shift in Canadian foreign policy cannot be understood simply as an effort to persuade Canadians at a rhetorical level about the need for military intervention overseas, particularly given the Harper government’s repositioning of its engagement with R2P and, as Rashid (2013, p. 46) rightly observes, “the glaring omission of any Canadian voice for, or significant attempt at, preventative diplomacy and mediation through R2P”.

The puzzle that rises out of the Libyan case, however, is its generic yet unique quality. In terms of the intensity of argument, the arguments that were mobilized in the push towards military intervention by NATO appear to be compelling as an overall guide to Canadian foreign policy: a formative Harper doctrine that

no one [should] ever question whether Canada is prepared to stay the course in defence of what is right. For we believe that in a world where people look for hope and cry out for freedom, those who talk the talk of human rights must from time to time be prepared to likewise walk the walk. (quoted in The Canadian Press 2011).

Yet, from another point of view, the Libyan case could represent a revival of another component of Canadian foreign policy from an earlier (Liberal) era – a move back to the use of a normative approach on selective issues, particularly those deemed to be highly important to elements of Canadian society and for displaying the Canadian brand for the world to see (Axworthy 1992, Cooper 1995). If so, Canadian foreign policy will be marked by a strong sense of duality: a value orientation on significant but niche-specific cases, with an interest-based orientation maintaining a hold on issues that can be considered Canada’s main game in international affairs.

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