



Libya's Political Crisis: A Legacy of Failed Interventionism

Dina Mansour-Ille

Published as part of debate #3 of the SALAM project, Spring 2024

For over a decade, Libya has been in a state of perpetual political turmoil and crisis. The 2011 NATO intervention, which ended the Gaddafi regime, has sparked continuous debate and controversy as Libya continues to struggle with sub-state conflicts that cross “tribal, regional, political, and even religious lines”.¹ Today, not only is Libya a shadow of the country it once was, but it also stands at a political impasse as it struggles to rebuild state institutions and form a government that guarantees stability, peace, security, and, more importantly, a future for its people.

The military intervention in Libya, led by NATO and its allies in March 2011 in line with United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1973, had a profound impact on Libya's political future. Its aftermath has been marked by armed conflict, chaos, fragmentation, civil strife, and instability. More than a decade later, the military intervention in Libya continues to be heavily debated in public spheres² for not having been driven primarily by humanitarian concerns, but rather by national and geopolitical interests of the intervening powers.³ Evidence suggests that NATO's main aim of the intervention was to overthrow Gaddafi's regime, even if it meant contributing to complete state collapse and potentially causing more harm to civilians.⁴ Its aftermath has posed significant challenges for achieving a stable and sustainable future in Libya, thereby highlighting the complexities and consequences of the militarisation of foreign policy.

1 “Civil Conflict in Libya | Global Conflict Tracker”. Council on Foreign Relations. www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/civil-war-libya.

2 See Corten, O. and Koutroulis, V. (April 2013). “The Illegality of Military Support to Rebels in the Libyan War: Aspects of jus contra bellum and jus in bello”. *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, 18:1, pp. 59–93; Merzan, K. and Miller, E. (July 2017). “Libya: From Intervention to Proxy War”. Atlantic Council: Rafik Hariri Center for Middle East. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/libya-from-intervention-to-proxy-war/>; Nuruzzaman, M. (October 2022). “Responsibility to Protect” and the BRICS: A Decade after the Intervention in Libya, *Global Studies Quarterly*, 2:4; Anabiri, E.C., Mashau, P. (2024). “Responsibility to Protect in Libya or Regime Change? What We Have Learned?” In: Erameh, N.I., Ojajorotu, V. (eds) *Africa's Engagement with the Responsibility to Protect in the 21st Century*. Africa's Global Engagement: Perspectives from Emerging Countries. Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore.

3 Igwe, Stanley C. et al. (2017). “An Assessment of the Motivations for the 2011 NATO Intervention in Libya and Its Implications for Africa” *Canadian Social Science*, 13:4, pp. 1-12.

4 Kuperman, Alan J. (September 2013). “Lessons from Libya: How Not to Intervene”. *Quarterly Journal: International Security*. Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. <https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/Kuperman%20policy%20brief%20published%20version%202.pdf>.



Interventionism and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) in Foreign Policy

Since the establishment of the current international system following the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the concept of state sovereignty has been a fixed attribute of states and central to international relations and governance.⁵ At the heart of this concept is the principle of non-intervention, i.e., the assertion that states are to refrain from intervening in the internal affairs of other states.⁶

The creation of the League of Nations in 1920, in the aftermath of the First World War, and the United Nations, in the aftermath of the Second World War, reaffirmed this principle. Enshrined in the United Nations Charter as one of the basic principles of the UN,⁷ Article 2(4) of the Charter calls on all states to “refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State.”⁸ Yet, the atrocities committed during the Second World War and even more so the post-Cold War era, which saw the rise of intra-state conflicts, have prompted the international community to rethink the once inviolable concept of state sovereignty and introduce the notion of “humanitarian intervention”.⁹ Unsuccessful interventions in both Somalia and Bosnia in 1992 and inaction in Rwanda in 1994, however, demonstrated that despite the desire to protect civilians, political and practical barriers often rendered such interventions with limited to no success.¹⁰

In the Kosovo war, the notion of “humanitarian intervention” was particularly used as the “moral and legal justification” for NATO’s intervention.¹¹ As such, humanitarianism, and the need to protect civilians from state abuse, have become exceptions to the basic principle of non-intervention. The Independent International Commission on Kosovo famously described the NATO intervention as “illegal but legitimate”,¹² and in justifying the intervention, Belgium argued that “NATO...felt obliged to intervene to forestall an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe”.¹³ Questions on the legality, and in turn, the legitimacy of the interventions called for the establishment of an international commission, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), to develop the ground rules for future interventions. In its 2001 report, the ICISS confirmed that the international community has a “responsibility to protect” civilians.¹⁴

5 Igwe, Stanley C. et al. (2017), op. cit.

6 Ibid.

7 International Legal Theory (2001). American Society of International Law Interest Group on the Theory of International Law. 7(1). http://law.ubalt.edu/downloads/law_downloads/ilt_07_2001.pdf.

8 UN Charter. United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Article 2(4). [https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/purposes-and-principles-un-chapter-i-un-charter#:~:text=B.-,Article%202%20\(4\)%20%2D%20Prohibition%20of%20threat%20or%20use%20of,political%20independence%20of%20other%20States](https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/purposes-and-principles-un-chapter-i-un-charter#:~:text=B.-,Article%202%20(4)%20%2D%20Prohibition%20of%20threat%20or%20use%20of,political%20independence%20of%20other%20States).

9 Dietrich, John W. (2013). “R2P and Intervention after Libya”. History and Social Sciences Faculty Journal Articles. Paper 86. https://digitalcommons.bryant.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1078&context=histss_jou.

10 Ibid.

11 International Legal Theory (2001) op. cit.

12 R2P and Intervention after Libya, p 327.

13 Legality of Use of Force (Yugoslavia v. Belgium), Verbatim records CR 99/15 (translation), Belgium, 10 May 1999 in: http://law.ubalt.edu/downloads/law_downloads/ilt_07_2001.pdf.



The “responsibility to protect” doctrine was articulated in the 2005 UN World Summit Outcome Document in paragraphs 138 and 139 as resting on three main pillars: 1) individual states have the primary responsibility to protect their own populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity; 2) the international community, through the UN, has a responsibility to use appropriate peaceful means (diplomatic and humanitarian) to help protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity; and 3) the international community should be prepared to take timely and decisive collective action should peaceful means prove inadequate and should states “manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity”.¹⁵

The Libyan crisis of 2011, as part of the region-wide “Arab Spring” movements, marked the first case where the UN Security Council invoked the R2P concept to authorise the use of military force based on the declared aim of protecting civilians in Libya from imminent violence. Yet, as examined in the next section, not only did the US-led NATO intervention fail, but (as later evidence demonstrated) it was also based on a false narrative regarding the nature of violence committed prior to the intervention and the goals of the intervention itself.¹⁶

NATO’s Failure in Libya: Instability, Proxy War and Perpetual Violence

At the time of the nationwide unrest in early 2011, Libya had one of the highest per capita incomes in the region, enjoyed a 95% literacy rate, and its economy, dominated by a booming oil industry, was performing well compared to its neighbouring countries, which were experiencing economic hardships.¹⁷ Yet, while the oil industry helped Libya overcome the global financial crisis of 2008-09, society was not reaping its benefits due to corruption and structural problems that steadily accumulated until the situation exploded in 2011.¹⁸ Additionally, Libya’s complex tribal dynamics and networks were exploited and co-opted under Gaddafi, favouring some tribes loyal to the regime over others, which exacerbated tribal rivalries and served as fertile ground for future conflicts.¹⁹

14 Kuperman, Alan J. (Summer 2013). “A Model of Humanitarian Intervention: Reassessing NATO’s Libya Campaign”. *International Security* 38:1, pp. 105-136.

15 United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/about-responsibility-to-protect.shtml>. See also Erameh, Nicholas I. and Idachaba, Enemaku U. (2017). “NATO Intervention in Libya and Its Consequences on Global Security”, *Global Journal of Human Social Sciences*. <https://socialscienceresearch.org/index.php/GJHSS/article/view/2342/1-Nato-Intervention-in-Libya> JATS NLM xml.

16 Kuperman, Alan J. (Summer 2013), op. cit.

17 Barmin, Y. (2022) “Revolution in Libya”. In: Goldstone, Jack A., Grinin, L. and Korotaev, A. V. (eds). *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century: The New Waves of Revolutions, and the Causes and Effects of Disruptive Political Change*. Cham: Springer. Switzerland.

18 Ibid. For example, prior to the revolution, it is estimated that around 60% of Libya’s oil revenues went towards public sector wages, unemployment among the youth reached a staggering 30%, and the energy sector, which contributed 65% of Libya’s GDP, employed only 3% of the formal workforce. At same time, critical state-operated services, such as education and healthcare, employed 51% of the workforce, but only contributed 9% to the GDP.

19 Ibid.



Despite Gaddafi's anti-West stance, Libya's geostrategic and political importance enabled him to build strong ties with political leaders in Europe after the UN lifted sanctions on Libya in 2003. Central to Gaddafi's foreign policy with Europe was oil money and migration. In 2007, France announced arms deals worth \$405 million with Libya, and in 2008, Italy signed a 'friendship' agreement with Libya that aimed to restrict the flow of illegal migrants to Europe.²⁰ Despite these ties, however, France and Italy led in unison the 2011 NATO-led military campaign against Gaddafi. In fact, a decade-long corruption investigation into Sarkozy, who took the lead in pushing for a Western decision to lead a military campaign against Gaddafi, revealed that his motivations for military action "included a mix of domestic, international, and personal reasons",²¹ particularly the need to distance himself from the Gaddafi regime and shift "the narrative that he had initially cultivated" – as a close friend of Gaddafi.²²

Beyond the French position, the lead-up to the NATO intervention in Libya based on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 was fraught with controversies.²³ According to Kuperman, the mainstream narrative leading up to the NATO intervention was based on two false premises: 1) that Gaddafi initiated the violence and indiscriminately attacked peaceful protestors; 2) that the NATO intervention mainly aimed at protecting civilians.²⁴ Neither premise proved to be true. Despite claims by most contemporaneous Western media reports at the time, later evidence confirmed that "the threat to civilians was overstated"²⁵ and that Gaddafi did not initiate the violence that ensued at the time of the protests. In fact, the United Nations and Amnesty International documented that in all four cities engulfed in violence at the beginning of the conflict, it was the Libyan protestors who initiated the violence from the outset of the uprisings²⁶ and the UK Parliamentary Inquiry affirmed that the rebels included significant militant Islamist elements.²⁷ Moreover, despite Gaddafi's diatribe on TV threatening his own people, especially in the city of Benghazi,²⁸ the government response initially employed non-lethal force, and even when it resorted to force, it largely focused on belligerent forces and avoided targeting civilians, as evidenced in Misrata, the Libyan city most consumed in violence in the early weeks of the civil war.²⁹ Finally, the Gaddafi regime did not engage in revenge killings against civilians, nor did it commit a "bloodbath" against civilians in Benghazi as reported

20 El-Gamaty, G. (2017). "Italy and France are playing a dangerous game in Libya". Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2017/8/21/italy-and-france-are-playing-a-dangerous-game-in-libya>.

21 Penney, J. (2018). "Why did the US and its allies bomb Libya? Corruption case against Sarkozy sheds new light on ousting of Gaddafi". The Intercept. <https://theintercept.com/2018/04/28/sarkozy-gaddafi-libya-bombing/>.

22 The investigations revealed that Sarkozy received illicit funds (amounting to €50 million) from Gaddafi to finance his winning 2007 presidential campaign. Together with 12 others, Sarkozy has been ordered to go on trial in 2025 on charges of "illegal campaign financing, embezzling, passive corruption and related counts" in the Libyan case. See Corbet, S. (August 2023). "Sarkozy to face trial over alleged Gaddafi funding for 2007 presidential campaign". The Independent. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/sarkozy-trial-france-gaddafi-corruption-b2399451.html>.

23 Zambakari, C. (2016). "The Misguided and Mismanaged Intervention in Libya: Consequences for Peace". *African Security Review* 25:1, pp. 44-62.

24 Kuperman, Alan J. (Summer 2013), op. cit.

25 See the UK Parliamentary Inquiry examining the intervention and collapse of Libya in: House of Commons (2016). "Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options". Foreign Affairs Committee. Third Report of Session 2016-17 (HC 119). <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaff/119/119.pdf>.



in international media at the time, which in turn downplayed (and at times also failed to report) the government's public reassurance regarding not targeting civilians or surrendering rebels.³⁰

While some argued that the NATO intervention in Libya was motivated by strong “political objectives [that] superseded humanitarian considerations” in enforcing the R2P,³¹ others contended that NATO exceeded its mandate by ousting a sitting head of state. They argued that the humanitarian intervention was launched without exhausting other more peaceful, political and diplomatic alternatives. Finally, they stated that the consequences of the intervention left a power vacuum, which allowed for the proliferation of arms and violence by all sorts of radical groups and left the country in a humanitarian crisis.³² These were also the concerns raised by the African Union and BRICS states (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in the lead-up to the intervention. It is worth noting that together with Germany, all BRICS states – except for South Africa³³ – abstained from voting on Resolution 1973. While India's Deputy Ambassador to the UN criticised the haste in adopting a resolution “with relatively little credible sources”³⁴, the Brazilian delegation noted that Brazil is not convinced that “the use of force as provided for in operative paragraph 4 of the present resolution will lead to the realization of our common objective – the immediate end of violence and the protection of civilians.”³⁵ It further added that:

26 Kuperman, Alan J. (September 2013), op. cit. Reports, including by the International Commission of Inquiry on Libya, confirm that the Libyan rebels have engaged in violence and committed atrocities amounting to war crimes, including forcibly expelling the citizens of Tawergha, a town outside Misrata, as punishment for their support of the Gaddafi regime as well as engaging in looting, revenge killing, indiscriminate attacks, beatings, arbitrary arrests and torture while targeting particular groups across Libya, including declaring that the Tawerghans deserved “to be wiped off the face of the planet.” They were also “responsible for widespread pillaging and destruction of public and private property across the country throughout the armed conflict” while completely destroying Tawergha and rendering it uninhabitable. See Dyke, J. (2021). “NATO Killed Civilians in Libya. It's Time to Admit It”. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/20/nato-killed-civilians-in-libya-its-time-to-admit-it/>; Kersten, M. (2012). “The ICC to Investigate Libyan Rebel Crimes? We'll See.” Justice in Conflict. <https://justiceinconflict.org/2012/11/22/the-icc-to-investigate-libyan-rebel-crimes-well-see/>; Chivers, C. J. (2011). “Libyan Rebels Accused of Pillage and Beatings”. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/13/world/africa/13libya.html>; Corten, O. and Koutroulis, V. (April 2013), op. cit.

27 House of Commons (2016), op. cit.

28 In a public TV broadcast, Gaddafi “threatened to hunt his enemies from house to house, room to room, alley to alley.” See Carlstrom, G. (2012). “Gaddafi clung to a fading reality”. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2012/5/21/gaddafi-clung-to-a-fading-reality>.

29 Kuperman, Alan J. (Summer 2013), op. cit; Kuperman, Alan J. (September 2013), op. cit. See also House of Commons (2016), op.cit.

30 Kuperman, Alan J. (Summer 2013), op. cit.

31 Fernandes, T. (October 2013). “Theoretical Approach to Understanding NATO Intervention in Libya”. E-International Relations.

32 Zambakari, C. (2016), op. cit.; Kuperman, Alan J. (September 2013), op. cit.

33 It should be noted, however, that South Africa later became vocally critical of the NATO intervention, where South Africa's President, Jacob Zuma, was noted saying that NATO exceeded its Security Council mandate and that he resents NATO and the West for ignoring the proposed “roadmap” by the African Union as a solution for the Libyan crisis. See Campbell, J. (2015). “South Africa President Jacob Zuma on Libya and the European Migration Crisis”. Council on Foreign Relations. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/south-africa-president-jacob-zuma-libya-and-european-migration-crisis>.

34 Zambakari, C. (2016), op. cit.



Brazil was also concerned that the measures approved today might have the unintended effect of exacerbating the current tensions on the ground and “causing more harm than good to the very same civilians we are committed to protecting”. No military action alone would succeed in ending the conflict. Protecting civilians, ensuring lasting settlement and addressing the legitimate demands of Libyan citizens demanded a political process.³⁶

While some countries may have genuinely intended for the NATO intervention to protect civilians against the potential escalation of violence resulting in mass atrocities, NATO forces’ actions in the first few weeks of the military campaign demonstrated otherwise. Instead of deescalating the conflict, NATO forces sided with the rebels and appeared to prioritise the overthrow of Gaddafi, leading to the mass inflow of weapons into the country and military campaigns inconsistent with the R2P framework. This intervention therefore significantly altered the balance on the ground, prolonging the conflict by seven months, which resulted in at least 7,000 more casualties.³⁷

During this period, NATO reportedly attacked retreating Libyan forces and bombed Gaddafi’s hometown of Sirte without clear justification under the R2P framework. NATO also continued to support the rebels despite their rejection of several opportunities for ceasefire and dialogue. This included Gaddafi’s acceptance of an African Union proposal for an immediate ceasefire and national dialogue and offers for negotiation from the Libyan government.³⁸ While the rebels’ position may have been justifiable, there is no evidence that NATO actively pursued opportunities for dialogue, negotiation and de-escalation or that it sought to use its leverage to encourage peaceful solutions for a more stable and sustainable future.

After the fall of the Gaddafi regime, Libya was left without any international support to address the post-conflict dramatic escalation of violence, leading to increased fragility, instability, and fragmentation.³⁹

It is difficult to predict the outcomes of a scenario in which NATO did not intervene in Libya. The most likely scenario, given the advances by Gaddafi’s forces within the first few weeks of the conflict, is that Gaddafi would have regained control of the country and forced the rebels to lay down their arms. This would not have been a sustainable or democratic solution, but it may have at least ended the conflict after approximately six weeks and spared thousands of civilian fatalities. What’s certain, however, is that the military intervention failed to prevent a humanitarian disaster and instead contributed to Libya’s descent into perpetual violence, fragmentation, and fragility. Furthermore, the power vacuum in Libya allowed extremist groups like the Islamic State to exploit the situation, exacerbating security challenges in the country and the wider region. As such, the Libyan case is a stark reminder that military interventions, even with humanitarian intentions, cannot be completely free from the political interests of intervening powers, but also that

35 Security Council (2011). “Security Council Approves ‘No-Fly Zone’ over Libya, Authorizing ‘All Necessary Measures’ to Protect Civilians, by Vote of 10 in Favour with 5 Abstentions”. United Nations. SC/10200, 6489th Meeting.

36 Ibid.

37 Kuperman, Alan J. (September 2013), op. cit.

38 Kuperman, Alan J. (Summer 2013), op. cit.

39 Ogburn, L. (November 2021). “Libya: State Fragility 10 Years After Intervention”. Fund for Peace. <https://fundforpeace.org/2021/11/02/libya-state-fragility-10-years-after-intervention/>.

non-intervention (as seen in cases like Rwanda or Syria) may also be driven by similar interests.

Concluding Remarks and Lessons from Libya

There is no doubt that Libya's current political crisis is a legacy of the failed application of the R2P principle. The humanitarian grounds used to justify NATO's intervention were flawed and were mainly driven by national political interests by the intervening powers rather than a genuine desire to protect civilians. The parallel case of Syria, which experienced a similar escalation of violence, raises questions as to why the international community responded so quickly and forcefully in the oil-rich nation of Libya while failing to do so in Syria, or other cases, such as Yemen, South Sudan, Myanmar, or Palestine.⁴⁰ Additionally, the intervention significantly exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Libya, reportedly magnified the duration of the civil war by an estimated sixfold, the death toll by at least sevenfold and left the country struggling with an uncertain future.⁴¹ At the same time, it encouraged the militarisation of the uprising in Syria and turned Libya into a hotspot for terrorism and violent extremism that attracted all sorts of radicalised violent groups, which posed a significant security threat to the region over the past decade.

Nevertheless, the NATO experience in Libya provides significant insights for any future humanitarian intervention. The following are four lessons that should guide future decisions to invoke the R2P principle on humanitarian grounds:

- 1) Military interventions, on humanitarian grounds, should without exception be a last resort and should be employed in a limited and discriminate fashion:** In the case of Libya, the evidence demonstrates that the intervention was by no means a last resort. Although Gaddafi accepted the proposal made by the African Union Commission, which included the immediate cessation of all hostilities, military intervention was still prioritised as an option by the intervening powers, sidelining a more comprehensive political solution. This solution could have involved "a negotiated settlement and transitional agreement" potentially culminating in electing a new government.⁴² In fact, by the time NATO intervened in mid-March, the rebels were retreating with Gaddafi regaining control of most cities, which in essence indicated that the conflict was coming to an end after just six weeks and with an estimated death toll of less than 1,000.⁴³ Yet, NATO's intervention provided the rebels with extensive military assistance, including weapons, training and deployment of troops from Qatar, which enabled them to resume their attacks and as a result prolonged the conflict.⁴⁴ NATO is reported to have almost acted like the air force wing of the rebels while conducting indiscriminate mass aerial bombardments of the country and thereby committing the very crimes used to justify such intervention.⁴⁵

40 Khalifa Isaac, S. (2012). "NATO's Intervention in Libya: Assessment and Implications". European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed). <https://www.iemed.org/publication/natos-intervention-in-libya-assessment-and-implications/>.

41 Kuperman, Alan J. (Summer 2013), op. cit.

42 Zambakari, C. (2016), op. cit.

43 Kuperman, Alan J. (September 2013), op. cit.

44 Ibid.

45 Igwe, Stanley C. et al. (2017), op. cit.



- 2) The R2P principle should not be used or perceived to be a foreign policy tool to achieve (geo)political interests:** While the R2P principle originates from a history where inaction resulted in atrocities and war crimes against civilians, its application in Libya, however, demonstrates that the primary aim of the military operation was the ousting of the Gaddafi regime to achieve other political interests of the intervening powers. As noted by Kuperman, “NATO took actions that were unnecessary and inconsistent with protecting civilian, but which fostered regime change.”⁴⁶ Applying the principle of R2P in future humanitarian military interventions should entail disarming any belligerent forces in the country (on both sides), imposing no-fly zones, and only using force discriminately, and where necessary, to push forward an acceptable, sustainable, and peaceful political solution, which could also include regime change or major changes to the existing local political apparatus.
- 3) Conventional wisdom could be based on a flawed narrative:** The NATO intervention in Libya is an example where conventional wisdom proved to be based on a flawed narrative. As such, if a humanitarian intervention ever proves to be necessary in the future, conventional wisdom should be questioned, evaluated, and re-evaluated to ensure that it is based on reliable sources and to balance the potential civilian net costs of an intervention versus a situation of non-intervention.
- 4) The R2P principle does not end with military intervention:** Once the UN-sanctioned military campaign ended in Libya in October 2011, the country was left without any international humanitarian support to deal with the aftermath. Moreover, reports confirm that aerial, drone, and artillery strikes conducted by countries and local militias alike did not cease with the end of the NATO intervention. Instead, they continued “intermittently with scant accountability,” with reports suggesting that more than 4,500 of such strikes have been conducted in Libya since the end of the NATO mission resulting in at least 600 civilian casualties.⁴⁷ As such, the R2P cannot and should not cease with the end of the military intervention. In the post-intervention transitional period, the R2P should extend into putting humanitarian measures in place that would de-escalate conflict, safeguard against future violence, and provide international aid and support to the civilian population. Finally, the intervening powers should serve as mediators between the local competing parties to help find durable political solutions for peace.

The case of Libya highlights the intricacies and repercussions of interventionism and, more broadly, the militarisation of foreign policy. The NATO-led intervention underscores the need to prioritise genuine humanitarian concerns over geopolitical interests, the use of military force as a last resort, the need to critically evaluate intervention narratives, and the importance of extending the R2P principle to provide comprehensive post-intervention support for a lasting peace. As the international community reflects on Libya, it must develop more effective strategies for addressing humanitarian crises while avoiding the pitfalls of interventionism that can worsen conflicts.

⁴⁶ Kuperman, Alan J. (Summer 2013), op. cit.

⁴⁷ “The War in Libya”. New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/future-security/reports/americas-counterterrorism-wars/the-war-in-libya/>.



Dina Mansour-Ille

Dina Mansour-Ille is a Senior Research Editor at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI). She holds a PhD in Politics with a focus on political violence, conflict and social movements. She is an expert on the Middle East and North Africa and her main research areas of expertise are migration, fragility, conflict, radicalisation and violent extremism. Since 2014, she has been an editor-in-chief of Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism (SEN) – an international peer-reviewed journal – and is currently an editorial advisor to the journal.



PRISME

Pathways to Renewed and Inclusive
Security in the Middle East

PRISME Initiative

PRISME aims to redefine the conception of “security” in the Middle East and North Africa, as the starting point for strategic relations between MENA countries and their European and North American partners. It does so in pursuit of effective, collaborative approaches to ensuring a more peaceful and stable future. To this end, PRISME sponsors dialogue and debate between foreign policy professionals across diverse backgrounds and perspectives. These include individuals in governments, thinktanks and academic institutions located in the MENA region, Europe and North America, with a specific focus on engaging young and emerging thinkers and practitioners. Its goal is to re-define security in the Middle East, broadening the definitions of what it looks like, for whom, how it can be achieved, and how outside actors can contribute to it.

SALAM Project

SALAM (Sustaining Alternative Links beyond Arms and the Military) proposes to rethink the centrality of the arms trade in international relations with and among Middle East & North Africa (MENA) countries.

It fosters and amplifies ideas from a network of scholars and practitioners working in and with the Middle East. Issues they will address include the arms trade’s advertised role in cementing bilateral and multilateral ties between North America, Europe and the MENA region; the opportunity costs of over- or sole reliance on weaponry as security; and alternative modes of engagement that might redefine a shared strategic agenda.