

WATCHDOG OR LAPDOG? THE ROLE OF U.S. MEDIA IN THE INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION IN LIBYA

Maggie Moore
Syracuse University

ABSTRACT

Do media influence government or does government influence media? This paper seeks to answer this question by examining the recent international humanitarian military intervention in Libya in 2011 to see what, if any, effect media played in the decision-making process. To determine which player, U.S. government or U.S. media, was the opinion leader persuading the other to support humanitarian military intervention, the author chronologically compared articles written in major U.S. newspapers and U.S. government statements. The author concludes that neither the U.S. government nor the U.S. media played the primary role in the case. Rather, opinion leaders were the most persuasive, but U.S. media played an essential supporting role.

INTRODUCTION

A central tenet of democracy is that it reflects the will of the people it governs. In a representative democracy, the constituent opinions inform political representatives, who act on their behalf. This requires an engaged public. However, frequently citizens lack informed opinions on foreign policy because international relations do not usually have a personal, immediate impact on them. When citizens cannot rely on personal experience, the media plays a critical role in informing citizens, shaping public opinion, and indirectly influencing foreign policy decisions.

As the globalized world becomes increasingly interdependent, it becomes essential for democratic nations to have thoughtful foreign policies supported by knowledgeable citizens. As a result, media's role in shaping public opinion on international affairs is important for governments to understand.

With the rise of international organizations following World War II, governments accepted a collective responsibility to prevent wars, including civil wars, to protect vulnerable citizens from violence. Additionally, inaction in Srebrenica and Rwanda bolstered the resolve of U.N. members, particularly the United States and Western European nations, to protect others by highlighting the devastation on the collective moral conscience and the high cost of repairing communities and countries when there is a failure to act.

Humanitarian military intervention is “the use of military force by one or more states within the jurisdiction of another, without its permission, to protect innocent people from violence by the target state’s government.”¹ The justification for such intervention is one of moral consciousness because “when a government turns savagely upon its own people it becomes the responsibility of any state capable of stopping the slaughter to try to do so.”² By international agreement, the right to take such action has existed for quite some time: Articles 39, 41, and 42 of Chapter 8 in the United Nation’s Charter grants its Security Council the authority to “take action by air, sea and land in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.”³ By joining the United Nations, all member countries recognize the organization’s authority for humanitarian military intervention.

More recently, the United Nations clarified when and where its members would intervene. In 2005, the United Nations adopted a resolution on the “Responsibility to Protect,” which sought to prevent genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing.⁴ Before adopting the Responsibility to Protect doctrine, the threshold for intervention was so high that it became “a catch-22: by the time it is clear that a genocide is occurring, it is often too late to stop the killing.”⁵ The new Responsibility to Protect doctrine seeks to prevent rather than react to genocide and other atrocities, as long as there is international consensus for action and the proposed action is feasible.

The humanitarian military intervention in Libya marks the first instance that the U.N. used the Responsibility to Protect doctrine to justify international actions against a sovereign nation. Understanding how international actors reached a consensus, particularly what role the media played in increasing public awareness and demand for action, will be important for advocates of future interventions, especially those who advocate for intervention in the civil war in Syria.

There are two prevailing and opposing theories regarding media’s role in shaping public opinion. One theory posits that media could serve as a “watchdog” and hold government officials accountable for their actions by informing the public. The countervailing idea holds that the media is the “lapdog” of government and only repeats the government’s opinion, inadvertently serving as its mouthpiece. Do media influence government or does government influence media?

This paper answers this question by examining the international humanitarian military intervention in Libya in 2011 to see what, if any, effect U.S. media played in the U.S. government decision-making process.

BACKGROUND

Before the military intervention, relations between the U.S. and Libya were best defined as “wary but distant with almost no direct mutual interests at stake.”⁶ During the 1980s, Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi sanctioned the bombing of a Pan Am plane over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people; the bombing of a disco in Germany; and began a nuclear program while making threats against Western countries.⁷ All of these events led President Reagan to call Gadhafi “the mad dog of the Middle East” and U.S.-Libyan relations were extremely limited for the next two decades.⁸ In the early 2000s, Gadhafi accepted blame for the terrorist acts and terminated his weapons of mass destruction programs, enabling the U.S. to tolerate his leadership.

On February 15, 2011, following the arrest of human rights attorney Fathi Terbil who represented the families of the 1,200 Abu Salim prisoners allegedly massacred in 1996, Libyans began protesting.⁹ Terbil was

1 Robert A. Pape, “When Duty Calls: A Pragmatic Standard of Humanitarian Intervention,” *International Security* 37, no. 1, (2012): 44.

2 Amos N. Guiora, “Intervention in Libya, Yes; Intervention in Syria, No: Deciphering the Obama Administration,” *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 44, no. 1 (2011): 257.

3 M. Hakimi, H. Koh, H. Hassouna, C. Powell, M. O’Connell, and A. Aujali, “Revolution and Intervention in the Middle East,” *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, American Society of International Law*, 105, 555.

4 Jim Murphy, Dan Smith and Michael Harvey, “Crossing the Line,” *Public Policy Research* 18, no. 1 (2011): 11.

5 Pape, “When Duty Calls,” 42.

6 Guiora, “Intervention in Libya, Yes; Intervention in Syria, No: Deciphering the Obama Administration,” 265.

7 Dirk Vandewalle, “The Many Qaddafis,” *New York Times*, February 24, 2011.

8 Vandewalle, “The Many Qaddafis”; Sergey Kostyaev, “Regime Change and Arab Countries’ Lobbying in the United States,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 1 (2013): 65.

9 Najla Abdurrahman, “What if Libya Staged a Revolution and Nobody Came?” *Foreign Policy*, February 17, 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/02/17/what_if_libya_staged_a_revolution_and_nobody_came.

released unharmed, but the protests evolved into an anti-government movement similar to the ones involving their Tunisian and Egyptian neighbors around the same time.¹⁰ Unlike Mubarak and Ben Ali, Gadhafi responded immediately with disproportionate military force and threatened to show no mercy. He vowed to kill all protesters by “going house to house” and fighting until his last drop of blood.¹¹ Gadhafi’s son threatened “rivers of blood” if the nation abandoned his father.¹² Gadhafi also described protesters as rats, cockroaches, and drug abusers.¹³ His word choice in referring to his enemies as “cockroaches” was eerily similar to the Hutu radio broadcasts against the Tutsis in Rwanda during the country’s 1994 genocide.¹⁴

In the words of Catherine Powell, “the Libyan people appealed to the world to help stop the brutal attacks on them, and the world listened.”¹⁵ Over the next week, numerous international organizations issued statements condemning the violence by the Libyan government, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the African Union, and the United Nations.¹⁶ Beyond this, the Arab League and the United Nations suspended Libya’s membership¹⁷ and the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1970, which imposed an arms embargo, froze assets, and prohibited travel by government officials.¹⁸

As the violence escalated, so did the international response. The U.S. Senate, the OIC, and the Arab League all called for a no-fly zone.¹⁹ In an unprecedented use of the U.N. Responsibility to Protect doctrine, the Security Council issued Resolution 1973 on March 17, 2011, which established a no-fly zone over Libya and authorized member states “to take all necessary measures” to protect the Libyan people.²⁰ The next day, President Obama spoke to the American public to explain why the United States was participating in a military intervention. He said:²¹

Left unchecked, we have every reason to believe that Qaddafi would commit atrocities against his people. Many thousands could die. A humanitarian crisis would ensue. The entire region could be destabilized, endangering many of our allies and partners. The calls of the Libyan people for help would go unanswered. The democratic values that we stand for would be overrun. Moreover, the words of the international community would be rendered hollow.

By the time fall arrived, there was a new government in Libya, Gadhafi had been killed, the U.N. embargoes were lifted, the U.S. had spent one billion dollars on the intervention, and NATO had flown more than 22,000 missions.²²

10 Ibid.

11 Kareem Fahim and David D. Kirkpatrick, “Qaddafi’s Grip on the Capital Tightens as Revolt Grows,” *New York Times*, February 23, 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/23/world/africa/23libya.html>.

12 David D. Kirkpatrick and Mona El Naggar, “Qaddafi’s forces strike with fury as unrest grows,” *New York Times*, February 22, 2011.

13 Vandewalle, “The Many Qaddafis.”

14 Ibid.

15 Hakimi, et. al, “Revolution and Intervention in the Middle East.”

16 “Resolution 2009 (2011),” U.N. Security Council, 6620 Meeting, September 16, 2011.

17 Paul D. Williams, “The Road to Humanitarian War in Libya,” *Global Responsibility to Protect* 3, no. 2 (2011): 248-251.

18 “Resolution 1970 (2011),” U.N. Security Council, 6491th Meeting, February 26, 2011.

19 “Condemning Violations of Human Rights in Libya,” U.S. Senate Resolution 85, 112th Congress, March 1, 2011; Organization of Islamic Cooperation, “Ihsanoglu Support No-Fly Decision At OIC Meeting On Libya, Calls For An Islamic Humanitarian Programme In And Outside Libya,” March 8, 2011, http://www.oicoci.org/oicv2/topic/?t_id=5031&ref=2111&lan=en.

20 “Resolution 1973 (2011),” U.N. Security Council, 6498 Meeting, March 17, 2011.

21 Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Situation in Libya,” March 18, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/03/18/remarks-president-situation-libya>.

22 “Resolution 2009 (2011),” U.N. Security Council; Michael Hastings, “Inside Obama’s War Room: U.S. Humanitarian Intervention in Libya,” *Rolling Stone* no. 1142, (October 2011): 47-52, 86, 88-89; David Kirkpatrick and Suliman Ali Zway, “Spy chief for Qaddafi is extradited to Libya,” *New York Times*, September 6, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/06/world/africa/senussi-qaddafi-spy-chief-is-extradited-to-libya.html>.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the two opposing hypotheses, this case study examined the humanitarian intervention in Libya by posing the following research questions:

RQ1: Who was first to call the American people to action, the U.S. media, or President Obama?

This question is relevant because an actor that speaks first has greater access to the spotlight and a leadership role, galvanizing following supporters. Speaking first also prevents the perception of bandwagon participation that can stigmatize latecomers or taint neutrality in a moment of moral crisis.

RQ2: Who spoke most persuasively to convince the American public that a humanitarian military intervention was necessary?

Although who called for the intervention first is an important question to answer, who convinced the American public is the crucial question because persuasion of the public would identify who set the agenda, both for the news and at the policy table. Furthermore, this information is crucial to future advocates of interventions because they need to know who to convince that their cause is worthy of engagement.

The answers to these research questions determine if media influenced government or if government influenced media in the U.S. involvement in Libya.

LITERARY REVIEW

CNN Effect

The world has become more globalized and interdependent. With this shrinking world based on new technology — including social media, satellite television, and 24-hour news broadcasting — the time between an event occurring and the demand for the government to make a statement or policy decision has collapsed.

An oft-cited example of decision-making before the 24-hour news cycle is the Cuban missile crisis. President Kennedy had six days to speak to advisors, deliberate, and decide a course of action before the media reported the incident to the American public.²³ When the Benghazi crisis occurred in Libya on September 11, 2012, President Obama had less than 24 hours to learn the facts and make a public statement.²⁴ The instantaneous, continuous, and global media coverage influencing public opinion, “demanding instant responses from government officials, [and] shaping and reshaping foreign policy” without careful consideration is called the CNN effect.²⁵

Stephen Livingston suggests that the media can impact foreign policy as an accelerant, an impediment, or as an agenda-setter.²⁶ Media serve as an accelerant, condensing the time in which decision makers can form their responses and serving as a “force multiplier” by increasing the communication among decision makers.²⁷ Though accelerating responses means that progress is made, Frizis points out that actions spurred by media are not necessarily preferred because it sensationalizes foreign affairs and “impairs the quality of both the gathering of intelligence and of the actual response formation.”²⁸

23 Srivastava, S. “The Role of the Media in Foreign Policy: A Decision-Making,” (Presented at the 7th AMSAR Conference on Roles of Media during Political Crisis, Bangkok, Thailand, May 20, 2009): 2.

24 Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on the Deaths of U.S. Embassy Staff in Libya” September 12, 2012. <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/12/remarks-president-deaths-us-embassy-staff-libya%20>

25 Warren P. Strobel, “The CNN Effect,” *The American Journalism Review Supplement* 33, (1996).

26 Steven Livingston, “Clarifying the CNN Effect: An Examinaton of Media Effects According to Type of Military Intervention,” Research paper, Harvard University, 1997.

27 Ibid.

28 Iakov Frizis, “The Impact of Media on Foreign Policy,” *e-International Relations*, May 10, 2013, <http://www.e-ir.info/2013/05/10/the-impact-of-media-on-foreign-policy/>.

As an impediment, media act as an “emotional inhibitor,” undermining government by covering events with a negative view, such as daily body counts during the Vietnam War or by reporting information that can hurt operational security.²⁹

Finally, and most relevant to this case study, media can serve as an agenda-setter. Agenda-setting is the act of increasing the public’s awareness, or as Cohen succinctly puts it, “telling its readers what to think about.”³⁰ Cohen argues that calling attention to something is not the same as controlling what the public thinks, but it does create a scenario in which the public demands a government response that might not have occurred otherwise. If the CNN effect occurred, spurring the U.S. government to intervene in Libya, the media’s role was that of raising the public’s awareness through extensive and persuasive coverage. The public, made aware of Libya’s plight, would then call upon government to act, thus making media the agenda-setter.

Manufactured Consent

The opposing theory to the CNN effect is the manufacturing consent theory, which argues that the government influences media.³¹ This theory assumes that the public is generally uninformed about foreign affairs, leaving U.S. presidents and other government officials to frame international issues and dictate policies. Based on this assumption, the theory posits that media pander to the decision makers and policy implementers because they are in positions of power.³² As a result, media conform to government agendas and serve as government’s lapdog rather than a watchdog.³³

Additionally, Baum and Potter believe that when the public supports government, the media joins the “rally-round-the-flag.”³⁴ The rally-round-the-flag effect occurs when patriotic fervor unites Congress and the public behind the president in times of crisis.³⁵ When this occurs, it creates an environment either in which the public is unwilling to listen to alternate opinions or when journalists self-censor.³⁶ The rally-round-the-flag effect is further compounded in a media-rich environment in which readers can self-select publications that align with and reinforce their personal opinions. When such an environment is created, media are mobilized as tools to validate government policies rather than question them because the public will not tolerate dissenting voices.

Robinson goes even further by citing, as an example of the CNN effect, the intervention on behalf of the starving population in Somalia in the 1990s – “an illusion of a news-driven media intervention.”³⁷ He believes that government officials, having already decided on intervention, used media to generate popular support for the initiative.³⁸ In this sense, the theory of manufactured consent does not negate the power of the media’s influence on public opinion. Rather, the theory diverges from the CNN effect by implicating that entities other than media are responsible for framing the information and setting the agenda.³⁹

29 Ibid.

30 Bernard Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

31 Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998).

32 Matthew A. Baum and Philip B. K. Potter, “The Relationships between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 11, (2008): 39-65; Nikos Panagiotou, “The role of Mass Media in Foreign Policy: The case of Greek press,” (Presented at the Second Hellenic Observatory PhD Symposium on Modern Greece, London, United Kingdom, June 10, 2005).

33 Srivastava, “The Role of Media in Foreign Policy,” 3; Abbas Malek and Krista E. Wiegand, “News Media and Foreign Policy: an Integrated Review,” in *News Media and Foreign Relations: A Multifaceted Perspective*, Abbas Malek, ed. (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1996): 3-29; Catherine A. Luther and Michael Schaller, “Press Images, National Identity, and Foreign Policy: A Case study of US-Japan Relations from 1955-1995,” *Pacific Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2003): 464-5.

34 Baum and Potter, “The Relationships between Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy.”

35 John E. Mueller, “Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson,” *American Political Science Review* 64, no 1. (1970): 18-34, retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1955610>.

36 William D. Baker and John R. O’Neal, “Patriotism or Opinion Leadership?: the Nature and Origins of the ‘Rally ‘Round the Flag’ Effect,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 5 (10, 2001): 661-687; Terrence L. Chapman and Dan Reiter, “The United Nations Security Council and the Rally ‘Round the Flag Effect,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48, no. 6 (12, 2004): 886-909.

37 Piers Robinson, “Operation Restore Hope and the Illusion of News Media Driven Intervention,” *Political Studies* 49, no. 5 (2001): 941.

38 Shahira Fahmy, Wayne Wanta and Erik C. Nisbet, “Mediated Public Diplomacy: Satellite TV news in the Arab World and Perception Effects,” *International Communication Gazette* 74, no. 8, (2012): 728-749.

39 Steven Livingston and Todd Eachus, “Humanitarian Crises and U.S. Foreign Policy: Somalia and the CNN Effect Reconsidered,” *Political Communication* 12, no. 4 (1995): 413-429.

METHODOLOGY

How did President Obama's response go from "gravely concerned" on February 21, 2011, to "We cannot stand idly by when a tyrant tells his people that there will be no mercy... where innocent men and women face brutality and death at the hands of their own government." on March 19, 2011?⁴⁰

To determine which player, government or media, was the dominant opinion leader that persuaded the other to support humanitarian military intervention, the author chronologically compared articles written in four major U.S. newspapers and statements made by the Obama administration. Specifically, the author analyzed public documents from February 11, 2011, when the Libyan uprising began, to March 19, 2011, when President Obama delivered a prime-time radio address announcing that the U.S. was intervening in Libya as part of an international coalition. This month was the period of persuasion of the American public, and Obama's speech marked the end of influence and the beginning of action.

The newspapers – *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, and *The Wall Street Journal* – were chosen because of their high circulation and, thus, their ability to inform and persuade the highest number of people. Relevant articles from these papers were found on a database using the keyword "Libya" and the specified date range. Additionally, the author collected official presidential statements from the White House online pressroom.

News coverage was then categorized into three groups: news stories, editorials, and op-eds. News stories reveal the media's viewpoint by framing the issue and selecting quotes in a way that expresses a particular argument. Although media alleged to report just the facts, coverage of an issue skews frequently toward a particular policy. According to the Pew Research Center, 58 percent of Americans believe that media is biased.⁴¹ Editorials, unlike news articles, openly take a position on an issue for the publication. Similar to editorials, op-eds take a stance on an issue, but they cannot be attributed to media because authors are unaffiliated with the publication. Typically, op-eds are written by academics, politicians, and issue advocates who serve as guest contributors – "experts who express their opinion about a salient issue within their field of expertise."⁴² Since op-eds could come from the Obama administration as well, these articles were carefully examined and sorted into persuasion by the U.S. government and opinion leaders.

Persuasion was determined in two ways. Editorials, op-eds, and presidential statements were contextually analyzed to determine whether the article explicitly called for a no-fly zone. News articles were examined based on the sources they quoted and whether those secondary sources called for a no-fly zone.

There are four disadvantages to this research method: The first two address data sample limitations and the later address methodological limitations. First, by not including international press coverage, the author risks ignoring the influence of international opinions, such as regional media like Al Jazeera, non-American English speaking outlets, and international government officials who may have influenced the American public and President Obama. However, international news coverage is not the primary source of information for American audiences. Political science scholar Robert Entman says that Americans "discount, mistrust or ignore" foreign sources because American culture is internally focused.⁴³ Additionally, Mermin notes that a foreign publication's word choice or how an argument is phrased might be off-putting to Americans.⁴⁴

Second, this method limits itself to print productions, excluding broadcast materials, to limit the volume of news coverage and due to limited access to video footage. However, the research is still valid despite these weaknesses because print is still the predominant form of communicating a thorough, thoughtful argument. Additionally, the research will still capture the timing for comparison of statements made by government officials and journalists.

40 Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Situation in Libya."

41 "Amid Criticism, Support for Media's 'Watchdog' Role Stands Out," Pew Research Center, August 8, 2013, <http://www.people-press.org/files/legacy-pdf/8-8-2013%20Media%20Attitudes%20Release.pdf>.

42 Guy J. Golan, "The Gates of op-ed Diplomacy: Newspaper framing the 2011 Egyptian Revolution," *The International Communication Gazette* 75, no.4 (2013): 360.

43 Robert M. Entman, *Projections of Power: Framing News, Public Opinion, and U.S. Foreign Policy*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

44 Jonathan Mermin, *Debating War and Peace: Media Coverage of U.S. Intervention in the Post-Vietnam Era*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

Third, the method of analyzing persuasion is a qualitative one that lacks a code and coder reliability. As such, this research could be biased, unconsciously skewed by the author's opinion, and is not easily replicated. Finally, single case studies are usually too small in scope, making it hard to determine causation conclusively.

Data collection techniques

For this case study, the author determined if the empirical data gathered matched one of the two predicted outcomes, based on the theories and concepts in the literature review, using a technique called pattern matching.⁴⁵ If the pattern coincided with one of the two predicted results, this case study validates that theory.

RESULTS

Between February 15, 2011, and March 20, 2011, *The New York Times* published 324 articles on Libya, *The Wall Street Journal* published 277, *The Washington Post* had 254, and *USA Today* had a mere 51. For the first three papers, the average was 10 relevant articles a day. Initially, the articles focused on Gadhafi, evacuating international civilians, and reporting the on-the-ground events. Later, the focus shifted to how the international community should respond, Libyan refugees, and the impact the civil war was having on gas prices. In addition to factually reporting the events, all papers wrote extensively in editorials and featured articles by key opinion leaders in an effort to inform and persuade readers.

Calls for Action

The first research question asked, "Who was first to call the American people to action, the U.S. government or the U.S. media?"

Based on the data collected, the first true cry for intervention was neither from the government nor media, but from a defected Libyan official. On February 19, four days after the protests began, *The New York Times* quoted from an opposition leader exiled in Oslo who lamented, "The international community is watching, why isn't anyone helping us?"⁴⁶ The first call for a no-fly zone also came from a Libyan, Omar al Dabashi, who resigned as the country's U.N. delegate once the violence began. He said that Gadhafi "declared a genocide against his own people" and called for a no-fly zone to prevent Gadhafi from "importing mercenaries."⁴⁷ While this quote was printed in the news, it cannot be attributed to the media's point of view or persuasion because it was newsworthy rather than a skewed point of view, a distinction addressed shortly in this paper.

The Obama administration

The initial response from the Obama administration once the violence started was limited, with only seven official statements from Obama himself, and vague. U.S. Department of State spokesman P.J. Crowley said that the U.S. government was "gravely concerned" with the violence and asked "the governments of Bahrain, Libya, and Yemen" to "show restraint in responding to peaceful protests."⁴⁸ By then the international community had already aggressively condemned Gadhafi. For example, British Foreign Minister William Hague described what was occurring as "unacceptable" and "horrifying."⁴⁹ Obama made a public remark on February 23, when he used language similar to his peers saying, "The suffering and bloodshed is outrageous and unacceptable."⁵⁰ Despite calling for Gadhafi to step down, freezing \$30 billion in Libyan assets, and moving naval ships to the area, Obama and his administration did not publicly call for a no-fly zone until after the U.N. resolution authorized such actions on March 18, 2011.⁵¹

45 Robert K. Yin, *Case study research: Design and methods*, 5th edition. (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2003).

46 Anthony Shadid, "Clashes in Libya Worsen as Army Crushes Dissent," *New York Times*, February 19, 2011.

47 Margaret Coker, Charles Levinson, and Tahani Kerrar-Lewslly, "Gadhafi Battles to Hang On --- Libya Regime Fires on Protestors in Capital; Nation Fractures; Diplomats Break Ties," *Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2011; "Liberating Libya," *Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2011.

48 Eric Schmitt, "U.S. 'gravely concerned' over violence in Libya," *New York Times*, February 21, 2011.

49 Paul Wolfowitz, "The U.S. Can Help Libyans Defeat Gadhafi," *Wall Street Journal*, February 22, 2011.

50 Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Libya," February 23, 2011, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/23/remarks-president-libya>.

51 Karen DeYoung and Colum Lynch, "Obama ratchets up the pressure on Gaddafi," *Washington Post*, February 26, 2011; Kareem Fahim and David D. Kirkpatrick, "Qaddafi's Forces are Hitting Back at Libyan Rebels," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2011; Karen DeYoung and Joby Warrick, "U.S., allies step up pressure on Libya," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2011.

The Media

On the other hand, a newspaper called for military intervention rather swiftly in an editorial in *The Wall Street Journal*. In a February 22 piece called "Liberating Libya", the paper said:⁵²

Tell the Libyan armed forces that the West will bomb their airfields if they continue to slaughter their people. Arming the demonstrators also cannot be ruled out. Now that the Libyan people are rising against him, they deserve urgent and tangible American support.

Similarly, *The Washington Post* published an editorial that called for "not just condemnation but action by the outside world."⁵³ *The New York Times* followed suit and published an editorial the next day called "Libya's Butcher," which called for the international community to condemn and punish Gadhafi.⁵⁴

In the contest of who called for intervention first, the most persuasive would be the Libyan opinion leader Dabashi. This is to be expected because those with strong ties to the affected population have the strongest desire to see a crisis end. Between media and government, media were the first to call for action. The media were not only the first to call for a no-fly zone, but there also was a significant gap as Obama and his administration did not publically support intervention until one month later.

Persuasion

The second research question asked: "Who spoke most persuasively to convince the American public that a humanitarian military intervention was necessary?"

The Obama Administration

Obama and his administration cited several reasons for not being advocates for intervention. Initially, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated that the United States refrained from action because "the safety and well-being of Americans [was] our highest priority."⁵⁵ However, even after Americans were evacuated from Libya, Obama was hesitant to take a leadership role. According to news coverage, Obama was loath to make bold statements or actions because he wanted to avoid undermining the uprising's legitimacy. He also wanted to avoid the perception that "the United States would once again be meddling in the Middle East" after inheriting wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁵⁶ In order to avoid the labels "neo-colonial" or "empire" and to avoid the mistakes of the Bush administration, President Obama was adamant that the international community act in unison and have approval from the United Nations.⁵⁷

In fact, the strongest advocates against intervention were U.S. military leaders, both active and retired. On March 2, Secretary of Defense Robert Gates testified before members of Congress and urged caution, saying that the operation would be costly, complex, and draw resources from ongoing operations in Afghanistan.⁵⁸ He later clarified his statement, "This is not a question of whether we or our allies can do this. We can do it. The question is whether it's a wise thing to do."⁵⁹ Finally, Gates argued that the operation would not be a neutral operation, since "a no-fly zone begins with an attack on Libya to destroy the air defenses."⁶⁰ Others within the defense community concurred by stating that it involved more than "telling people not to fly airplanes" and discussed the

52 "Liberating Libya."

53 "Atrocities in Libya," *Washington Post*, February 22, 2011.

54 "Libya's Butcher," *New York Times*, February 23, 2011.

55 Mark Landler, "U.S. Condemns Libyan Tumult but Makes No Threats," *New York Times*, February 23, 2011.

56 Landler, "U.S. Condemns Libyan Tumult but Makes No Threats"; Scott Wilson and Edward Cody, "Obama Joins E.U. in Cautious Support for Libyan Rebels," *Washington Post*, March 12, 2011; Mark Landler and Thom Shanker, "Warships Move In as U.S. Readies a Range of Options for Qaddafi's Ouster," *New York Times*, March 1, 2011; David E. Sanger and Thom Shanker, "Discord Grows On the Politics of Intervention," *New York Times*, March 8, 2011; Scott Wilson and Joby Warrick, "Obama appeals directly to top Libyan officials," *Washington Post*, March 8, 2011.

57 "Engineering Passivity," *Washington Post*, March 10, 2011.

58 Karen DeYoung and Craig Whitlock, "U.S. Defense Leaders Warn of Risks in Enforcing No-Fly Zone," *Washington Post*, March 2, 2011.

59 Peter Finn and Scott Wilson, "Gates: 'We have the resources' if Obama orders a no-fly zone," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2011.

60 David E. Sanger and Thom Shanker, "Gates Warns of the Risks of Imposing a No-Flight Zone Over Libya," *New York Times*, March 3, 2011.

fact that no-fly zones might not be as effective as the advocates would claim.⁶¹ Additionally, other members of the Obama administration, including White House Chief of Staff William Daley and U.S. Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daalder, dampened the calls for no-fly zones by stating it's more than "just a video game" and "it is not going to be the solution to every problem."⁶²

The initial reluctance to take a position and, later, the contradictory opinions regarding intervention meant that the Obama administration could not convince the American public because it did not take a firm stance on the issue.

The Media

Media, on the other hand, were vocal from the start in favor of helping the Libyan people by any means necessary. The press persuaded the American public in three ways: the volume of coverage, framing (rhetoric and quotes used), and, most directly, editorials.

As stated before, the volume of articles published by the four newspapers during that month was extremely high. By bringing the issue to the public's attention by setting the agenda of media coverage, the media played a role in the government's policy-making. By framing the Libyan crisis, the media subtly shaped the American public's opinion.

Indirectly, the media persuaded the American public to be in favor of intervention because of how they framed the conflict and whose opinion they quoted. Describing Gadhafi as "quixotic," "erratic," a "butcher," "strongman," and a "dictator," the media painted the picture of an archetypical villain.⁶³ They also described his actions as "genocide," "a bloodbath," and "murder."⁶⁴

The media featured quotes from Libyans as reliable authorities, to support arguments made in the editorials. In an early news article from *The New York Times*, Libya's newly resigned ambassador to the United Nations, Abdurrahman Shalgham, compared Gadhafi with Pol Pot and Hitler.⁶⁵ When Shalgham spoke to the United Nations Security Council, *The Washington Post* said he "wept as he pleaded for international intervention saying, 'Gaddafi is telling his people either I rule over you or I will kill you'."⁶⁶ Later, when momentum for intervention was stalling, numerous news articles featured quotes from Libyans calling for help and voicing their frustration at the international community.⁶⁷ One particularly powerful article quoted a rebel stating:⁶⁸

These politicians are liars. They just talk and talk, but they do nothing. Where is America? Where are the Europeans? Even the Arabs, they are all just the same. They keep quiet. They just watch us as we die. I don't have help except my God. The hands of the international community are covered in blood.

61 Elisabeth Bumiller, "Gates Plays Down Idea of U.S. Force in Libya," *New York Times*, March 2, 2011.

62 Joseph Berger, "U.S. Senators Call for No-Flight Zone Over Libya," *New York Times*, March 7, 2011.

63 Abdurrahman, "What if Libya Staged a Revolution?"; Richard Cohen, "Gaddafi's killer instinct," *Washington Post*, March 15, 2011; Fahim and Kirkpatrick, "Qaddafi's Grip on the Capital Tightens"; Jamie M. Fly, "A Moral Obligation to Intervene," *USA Today*, March 4, 2011; Hastings, "Inside Obama's War Room"; Kirkpatrick and El Naggari, "Qaddafi's forces strike with fury as unrest grows"; "Libya's Butcher"; "Stopping Qaddafi," *New York Times*, February 25, 2011; "Qaddafi's Crimes and Fantasies," *New York Times*, March 1, 2011; "Atrocities in Libya"; Paul Wolfowitz, "The Case for Backing Libya's Rebels," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2011.

64 Ibid.

65 David Kirkpatrick and Kareem Fahim, "Qaddafi forces violently quell capital protest" *New York Times*, February 26, 2011.

66 "A Passive President," *Washington Post*, February 27, 2011.

67 Leila Fadel and Steve Hendrix, "Libya's Rebels Hold Back Gaddafi forces," *Washington Post*, March 3, 2011; Charles Levinson, Sam Dagher and Margaret Coker, "Middle East: They Just Kept Bombing and Bombing," *Wall Street Journal*, March 11, 2011; Anthony Shadid, "Momentum Shifts as Libyan Rebels Flee an Oil Town," *New York Times*, March 11, 2011; Yaroslav Trofimov, Joe Lauria and Jay Solomon "World News: Gadhafi Closes In, as Allies Huddle --- Regime Presses Rebels Near Their Stronghold, as U.N. Again Debates No-Fly Zone; U.S. Appoints Liaison to Opposition," *Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 2011; Sudarsan Raghavan, "Gaddafi's forces pound key city," *Washington Post*, March 16, 2011.

68 Raghavan, "Gaddafi's forces pound key city."

Rarely did the newspapers feature quotes from Gadhafi himself or his government, other than to illustrate their desire for violent control. By only telling one side of Libya's story, the media acted in a biased manner rather than an impartial report of facts. News coverage skewed the information in such a way as to prevent any rational person from supporting Gadhafi's regime.

Not so subtly, the editorials advocated for action and admonished the Obama administration for failing to call for action. With the exception of *USA Today*, which lauded Obama's decision to seek international support and proceed slowly, the editorials reflected a desire for American leadership.⁶⁹ Describing Obama's desire for consensus as "prudence to the point of procrastination" editorials pleaded for action before it was too late to be of assistance.⁷⁰ In a particularly hostile editorial, *The Wall Street Journal* lamented:⁷¹

Ghadafi can also only prevail at this stage through a murderous campaign that will make U.S. passivity complicit in a bloodbath. They have internalized their own critique of the Bush Administration to such a degree that they are paralyzed to act even against a dictator as reviled and blood-stained as Gadhafi, and even though it would not require the deployment of U.S. troops. Mr. Obama won't lead the world because he truly seems to believe that U.S. leadership is morally suspect.

In addition to calling Obama a bystander to history, many editorials recalled past mistakes of American presidents that led to deaths of innocents and foretold similar fates because of Obama's lack of leadership:⁷²

When the U.S. fails to lead, the world reverts to its default mode as a diplomatic Tower of Babel. Everyone discusses "options" and "contingencies" but no one has the will to act, while the predators march. When the U.S. chooses to act like everyone else, the result is Rwanda, Darfur and now Libya.

Finally, publications also noted that failing to take action teaches "dictators, and the populations they oppress, that you can get away with large-scale mayhem if you avoid YouTube" and that "the U.S. is a feeble friend and an ineffectual foe, paralyzed by its own ambivalence."⁷³

In the bluntest advocacy of American exceptionalism, Richard Cohen wrote in *The Washington Post*, "It's the United States that matters. We have the bucks. We have the expertise. We have the military. We lead, they follow. This may not be as it ought to be. It is, however, how it is."⁷⁴ With such powerfully compelling reasons to help Libya, the media helped persuade the American public to demand action.

Opinion Leaders

Though Obama and his administration clearly did not corral the American public into supporting the humanitarian intervention, the data revealed that the media were not the sole influencer of public opinion. Key opinion leaders, both domestic and international, used op-eds as a platform to speak to the public.

Domestically, the Senate, liberal humanitarians, and hawkish neoconservatives alike called for action. Democratic Reps. Jim McDermott, Mike Honda, Jim McGovern, and Keith Ellison were the first Congress members

69 "No-fly zone in Libya carries more risks than rewards," *USA Today*, March 4, 2011; "Turtle Bay to the Rescue," *Wall Street Journal*, February 23, 2011; "Last on Libya," *Washington Post*, February 24, 2011; "Stopping Qaddafi"; "Outflanked by France," *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 2011; "The Reluctant American," *Wall Street Journal*, March 1, 2011; Fly, "A Moral Obligation to Intervene"; Charles Krauthammer, "From Baghdad to Benghazi," *Washington Post*, March 4, 2011.

70 Cohen, "Gaddafi's Killer Instinct;" Daniel Henninger, "Is U.S. Democracy Just Talk?" *Wall Street Journal*, March 10, 2011; "Engineering Passivity."

71 "Obama's Libyan Abdication," *Wall Street Journal*, March 7, 2011.

72 "The Obama Doctrine," *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2011; Ahmad Chalabi, "The Libyan Uprising: Lessons from Iraq" *Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 28, 2011; Fly, "A Moral Obligation to Intervene;" Daniel Henninger, "The Collapse of Internationalism," *Wall Street Journal* March 17, 2011.

73 Eliot Cohen, "Washington's Dithering on Libya," *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2011.

74 Cohen, "Gaddafi's Killer Instinct."

to call for a no-fly zone in a joint statement.⁷⁵ Former presidential nominees and Sens. John Kerry, John McCain, and Joe Lieberman were the most public advocates for the no-fly zone.⁷⁶ As Sen. McCain stated, “We can’t risk allowing Qaddafi to massacre people from the air.”⁷⁷ On March 1, 2011, the Senate passed a resolution condemning the attack on civilians in Libya and, among other things, urged “the United Nations Security Council to take such further action as may be necessary to protect civilians in Libya from attack, including the possible imposition of a no-fly zone over Libyan territory.”⁷⁸

Liberal humanists saw action as a moral imperative – obligated to prevent mass killings – and advocated for action based on the U.N. Responsibility to Protect doctrine. Called “humanitarian Vulcans” by Michael Hastings, these opinion leaders included Obama’s advisers, including U.N. Ambassador Susan Rice and National Security Council staffer Samantha Power, who were worried that inaction would make America morally complicit.⁷⁹ The strongest advocate of humanitarian intervention was Anne-Marie Slaughter, former director of policy planning at the Department of State. She penned the op-ed “Fiddling While Libya Burns” and persuasively stated, “The international community cannot stand by and watch the massacre of Libyan protesters. In Rwanda we watched. In Kosovo we acted.”⁸⁰

Meanwhile, neoconservatives were concerned about global security. On February 25, 2011, 41 conservative foreign policy analysts, including Robert Kagan, “released a letter urging the president to act more forcefully.”⁸¹ Additionally, Paul Wolfowitz and Elliott Abrams, neoconservatives and architects of former President George W. Bush’s foreign policy with no affiliation to the Obama administration, published numerous op-eds. In one piece, Wolfowitz stated, “One has to be morally blind not to be moved by the spectacle of brave Libyans standing up to Moammar Gadhafi’s tanks and bombs and mercenaries.”⁸²

CONCLUSIONS

As a whole, the press and the opinion leaders featured in the news were in favor of stopping Gadhafi and aiding the rebels and civilians. Media were essential in convincing the Obama administration to join the bandwagon and support humanitarian military intervention.

Despite the evidence that media persuaded the Obama administration to take action because media stirred up public opinion, a direct impact was not proven. There is a possible correlation, but not causation, because too many other voices, international and domestic opinion leaders in particular, could have persuaded the public or the Obama administration to act.

Based on the multitude of voices, the author rejects the premise of the original dual hypothesis that the public support was chiefly corralled by either the U.S. government or the U.S. media. Because more than one actor influenced the decision to act, the author proposes Jacobsen’s hypothesis that the CNN effect is not, by itself, sufficient to cause interventions.⁸³ Jacobsen cites four criteria in addition to the CNN effect required for actions such as those in Libya to take place: humanitarian need, domestic support, national interests, and feasibility of success.⁸⁴ He stresses that this last category entails not only a victorious outcome, but also a quick one with minimal casualties.⁸⁵ Based on the data collected, all metrics were met in the case of Libya and this hypothesis is better suited than either the CNN effect or the theory of manufactured consent.

75 Felicia Sonmez, “U.S. Lawmakers Step Up Criticism of Libya’s Gaddafi,” *Washington Post*, February 23, 2011.

76 Joby Warrick, “Clinton Preps to Put More Pressure on Gaddafi,” *Washington Post*, February 28, 2011; John F. Kerry, “Libya: An Iraq Redux?” *Washington Post*, March 11, 2011.

77 Berger, “U.S. Senators Call for No-Flight Zone.”

78 Senate Resolution 85, “Condemning Violations of Human Rights in Libya,” 2011.

79 Hastings, “Inside Obama’s War Room;” Adam Entous, Jay Solomon and Alistair MacDonald, “World News: Europe Pressure, Arab Support Helped Turn U.S.” *Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2011; Scott Wilson and Joby Warrick, “Obama’s Shift Toward Military Action,” *Washington Post*, March 19, 2011.

80 Anne-Marie Slaughter, “Fiddling While Libya Burns,” *New York Times*, March 13, 2011.

81 Jonathan Weisman, “Middle East: Delay in Washington’s Response Draws New Round of Criticism,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 26, 2011.

82 Wolfowitz, “The Case for Backing Libya’s Rebels.”

83 Peter Jacobsen, “National Interest, Humanitarianism or CNN: What Triggers UN Peace Enforcement After the Cold War?” *Journal of Peace Research* 33, no. 2 (1996): 205-15.

84 Ibid.

85 Peter Jacobsen, “Focus on the CNN Effect Misses the Point: The Real Media Impact on Conflict Management is Invisible and Indirect,” *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 2 (2000): 131-143.

Limitations and Future Research

As stated in the methodology section, limiting the collected data to four major newspapers limited the information collected and may have skewed the results. These publications were chosen based on circulation, but future research might replicate this study and include other newspapers, television broadcasts, radio, social media, and other forms of media to verify the conclusion reached in this publication.

Data was further restricted because this paper only chronicled public documents, while international foreign policy decisions are secretive, behind-closed-door negotiations among members of the U.N. Security Council, including the U. S., and other international actors, including the Arab League, the African Union, the European Union, and NATO. It is possible that peer pressure and a worldwide call to action dictated Obama's decision to act. Results supporting the role of media and opinion leaders by op-eds would be more conclusive if future studies were able to investigate and rule out the influence of traditional diplomacy as the primary motive for intervention.

Finally, single case studies are small in scope, making it hard to conclusively determine causation. It would be interesting to compare the media coverage of the same event in other countries, such as France and the United Kingdom, which were outspoken advocates of the intervention in the the U.N., or Russia, which was not. Alternatively, a multiple case study that examined other Arab Spring uprisings that did not involve interventions would be helpful to see if media coverage of those events were significantly different from Libya in volume of coverage or advocacy. If media coverage differed, it would reinforce this paper's results.

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