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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 04-24-2019			2. REPORT TYPE Master's of Military Studies		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) SEP 2018 - APR 2019	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE American Military Intervention in Libya – "Thought Set Free From Experience"					5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A	
					5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A	
					5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A	
6. AUTHOR(S) Williams, Brian, S, Major, USMC					5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A	
					5e. TASK NUMBER N/A	
					5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068					8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)					10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) Douglas Streusand, Phd	
					11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S) N/A	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release, distribution unlimited.						
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Military Studies.						
14. ABSTRACT Transitology, the process by which Authoritarian regimes transition to democracy, is either enabled or inhibited by various social conditions and by the method by which transition occurs. By analyzing various national conditions such as a country's history of democratic experience and institutions; its use of military and security services; the level of cultural homogeneity in relation to tribal, economic, and religious cleavages; and an evaluation of characteristics associated with a modern society the probability of a successful democratic transition is predictable. Moreover, the method by which a nation transitions also serves as a useful predictive analysis tool for gauging the relative success of democratization. According to the analysis, regime change born out of violence is far more likely to result in another authoritarian government rather than a successful transition to democracy. This study concludes that the absence of						
15. SUBJECT TERMS Libya, Arab Spring; 17 February Revolution; Democracy; Transitology; Arab Exceptionalism; Failed State; Civil War; Foreign Intervention; Coup d'état.						
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON	
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			USMC Command and Staff College	
Unclass	Unclass	Unclass	UU	42	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)	

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2076 South Street
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Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

American Military Intervention in Libya – “Thought Set Free From Experience”

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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AY 2018-19

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Date: 24 April 2019

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Date: 24 April 2019

Executive Summary

Title: American Military Intervention in Libya – “Thought Set Free From Experience”

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Thesis: America's pursuit of liberal democracy through regime change during Libya's 2011 Arab Spring was based on liberal rationalist theory rather than predicated on empirical evidence. Although the rebellion that swept Libya during the Arab Spring successfully deposed its totalitarian regime, the revolution's so-called democratic transition was guaranteed to fail due to the lack of domestic democratic determinants and the transition mode by which regime change occurred.

Discussion: Transitology, the process by which Authoritarian regimes transition to democracy, is either enabled or inhibited by various social conditions and by the method by which transition occurs. By analyzing various national conditions such as a country's history of democratic experience and institutions; its use of military and security services; the level of cultural homogeneity in relation to tribal, economic, and religious cleavages; and an evaluation of characteristics associated with a modern society the probability of a successful democratic transition is predictable. Moreover, the method by which a nation transitions also serves as a useful predictive analysis tool for gauging the relative success of democratization. According to the analysis, regime change born out of violence is far more likely to result in another authoritarian government rather than a successful transition to democracy.

Conclusion: This study concludes that the absence of critical domestic variables conducive for democratization coupled with the violent- foreign intervention transitional mode by which Libya's revolution occurred, predictably prevented all possibility of liberal democracy and all but guaranteed civil war and Libya's resulting failed state.

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Preface

In light of America's resoundingly negative experience with authoritarian regime change and nation-building in the Middle East and central Asia, namely Iraq and Afghanistan from 2001 to the present, America's pro-regime change foreign policy during the Arab Spring across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) was not only self-defeating but significantly detrimental to national, regional and global security objectives. America's inexplicable liberal rationalist theory for supporting the so-called revolution for 'self-determination' throughout the Arab world not only discounted historical precedents as evidenced by *Arab Exceptionalism*, it absurdly discounted the lessons learned from the past 18 years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. While this paper primarily serves to understand the factors that inhibited democratic transition and ultimately led to the Libyan civil war, its broader purpose is to provide both the Department of State and Department of Defense personnel with various mental models that when utilized, will enable the crafting of more effective foreign policy decisions in support of US governance and enable planners to speak truth to power.

Acknowledgements

I would like to personally thank my civilian faculty advisors: Dr. James Joyner, Associate Professor of Strategic Studies; Dr. Richard DiNardo, Professor of National Security Affairs; Dr. Douglas Streusand, Professor of International Relations; and my military faculty advisor, LtCol Eduardo Bitanga II for expanding upon the foundation of my knowledge, challenging everything I thought I knew, and for their constant mentorship and guidance in pursuit of my personal and professional development while at Marine Corps Command and Staff College. I must also recognize my Master of Military Studies (MMS) mentor, Dr. Douglas Streusand for his support and patience throughout this journey of discovery and reflection. I would also like to thank Dr. Craig Hayden, who graciously agreed to provide secondary input as an additional mentor. The staff of the Gray Research Library are also deserving of honorable mention for their support to my academic research and writing; all were tremendously helpful and supportive as I progressed through this Master's program. I want to thank my parents, Michael and Debra Williams, who have supported every endeavor and instilled in me a love of service and of Corps. Lastly, and most importantly, a special thank you to my beautiful wife Maegan, and children Sara, Sofia, Caroline, and Sean, who after 15 years of service most aptly characterized by long periods of physical and / or mental absences on my part, have sacrificed so much in their continued support and love for both me and the United States Marine Corps.

Introduction

“Thought set free from experience is unlimited by the constraints of experience or of probability. If history is not relevant, then the future is free from the past. Therefore, theories cut loose from experience are usually blindly optimistic. They begin not from how things are but how they ought to be, and regularly underestimate the complexities and difficulties concerning how you get there from here.”

Jeane J. Kirkpatrick

In his seminal work *The Third Wave*, political scientist Samuel Huntington aptly synthesizes theory and history to explain the process of transition from non-democratic governments to democratic political systems. In his work, he concludes that the spread of democracy occurred in three distinct waves. The first began in the 1820s and spread across North American and Western Europe ending a century later with twenty-nine new democracies. The second surge in democracy began after the Allied victory of World War II and ended in 1962 with a total of thirty-six democratically governed nations.¹ The third wave, which began in 1974 and ended around 2005 spread democracy across the Iberian peninsula, Latin America, Central Europe, Asia, and Africa ultimately culminating with one hundred twenty-three democratically governed nations.²

Although democracy has exponentially increased and permeated nearly all regions and cultures throughout the world, one region has remained impervious to democratic liberalization, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Huntington observes that the only exception to this rule has been Lebanon which had constituted a consociational (power sharing) democracy amongst the oligarchy when forty-fifty percent of the nation was Christian. Once the Muslim population became the majority, the Lebanese democracy collapsed. He writes, “whatever the

compatibility of Islam and democracy in theory, in practice they have not gone together.”^{i,3} This absence of liberal democracy throughout the Arab world has led some scholars to believe in a phenomenon known as “Arab exceptionalism” which is “the apparent immunity of Arab states from the expansion of democracy that had been so widespread since the 1970s”.^{ii,4}

While Arab Exceptionalism has no universal theory that explains the phenomenon, the inexplicable condition has become widely accepted within the political and social sciences. In December of 2010 however, this decades-old belief finally appeared invalidated as spontaneous mass mobilizations of Arab peoples throughout the MENA rebelled against their despots and sought the overthrow of their regimes in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Yemen, and Syria. The sheer magnitude and speed by which these protests organized caught the world wholly unaware and resulted in the rapid toppling of decades-old leadership in Tunisia and Egypt. These early successes spread hope and enthusiasm to those oppressed within neighboring authoritarian regimes and feelings of optimism and excitement swelled amongst the international community. Many believed these protests for self-determination would mark the next wave of democratization; they could be this generation’s ‘Berlin Wall.’ President Obama expressed similar sentiments in his February 11th 2001 speech wherein he said:

There are very few moments in our lives where we have the privilege to witness history taking place. This is one of those moments. This is one of those times... we saw a new generation emerge -- a generation that uses their own creativity and talent and technology to call for a government that represented their hopes and not their fears; a government that is responsive to their boundless aspirations...we can’t help but hear the echoes of history - echoes from Germans tearing down a wall, Indonesian students taking to the streets, Gandhi leading his people down the path of justice.⁵

ⁱ Huntington’s assessment regarding the compatibility of Islam and democracy is limited to Arab countries. He makes no reference to countries such as Senegal, Bangladesh, Malaysia, or Indonesia where Islam and democracy has thrived.

ⁱⁱ The term Arab Exceptionalism originates in the article, “Arab, Not Muslim, Exceptionalism,” by Alfred Stepan and Graeme B. Robertson. The article states that the Arab Muslim world has been less electorally competitive when compared to the non-Arab Muslim world.

A few weeks later the President would make comparable statements regarding the citizens of Libya, Syria, and Yemen thereby announcing to the world that the U.S. chooses freedom over the geopolitical status quo. Though many believed this event, known as the Arab Spring, marked the beginning of the fourth wave of democracy and the end of Arab exceptionalism, as Jeane Kirkpatrick writes, "theories cut loose from experience are usually blindly optimistic."⁶ Utilizing Libya as a case study, this paper argues that America pursued liberal democracy through regime change during Libya's 2011 Arab Spring based on liberal "rationalist theories" rather than empirical evidence.^{iii,7} Although the rebellion that swept Libya during the Arab Spring successfully deposed its totalitarian regime, the revolution's so-called democratic transition was guaranteed to fail due to the lack of domestic democratic determinants and the transition mode by which regime change occurred.

Overview of the Conflict

On 17 February 2011, protesters in the Libyan city of Benghazi held anti-government rallies to condemn the government's unlawful arrest of Fethi Tarbel, a notable human rights lawyer and a staunch critic of the Libyan government. In addition to their condemnation of this false imprisonment, the protestors demanded that the nation's leader, Muammar Qaddafi, surrender power and release the other political dissidents unjustly held captive in the nation's infamous Abu Salim prison. This facility stood as a physical example of the Libyan police state, and the constant reminder of the regime's history of gross violations against basic human rights as exemplified by the 1996 government sanctioned massacre wherein more than sixteen hundred

ⁱⁱⁱ In this context, "rationalism" is defined using Jeane Kirkpatrick's definition in *Dictators and Double Standards*, wherein she states the "failure to distinguish between the domains of thought and experience, of rhetoric and politics, is of course, the very essence of rationalism." Jeane Kirkpatrick, *Dictators and Double Standards*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982), 11.

Islamists from the city of Benghazi were secretly executed and subsequently disappeared from the incarceration facility.

In response to the protests, the Libyan government, which had a predilection for viciously suppressing opposition forces, employed its security services against the peaceful, unarmed demonstrators resulting in numerous injuries and serving to exacerbate the nature of the conflict further. Enraged by the government's continued violence against its people and emboldened by the success of popular protests against authoritarian regimes across the Middle East and North Africa, protests in Benghazi intensified forcing security forces to abandon the city.⁸ As news of the popular uprising spread throughout the country, other anti-government demonstrations spontaneously erupted throughout all of the nation's major cities to include its capital, Tripoli. In response to the overwhelming civil unrest, the Qaddafi regime immediately cracked down on the demonstrations by authorizing the indiscriminate use of lethal force and employing its tanks, attack aircraft, and African mercenaries against the civilian population.

Within days of the initial demonstrations, Libyan security forces killed more than three hundred protestors by Libyan security forces. On 22 February 2011, Qaddafi publicly addressed the Libyan people claiming that the insurrection was a deliberate joint al-Qaeda and Colonialist plot to enslave the Libyan people and pilfer the nation's riches and abundant oil reserves. In his televised remarks he defiantly refused all calls to relinquish power and ordered further violence by instructing his security forces and the tribes loyal to him to go house to house crushing the "rats" and "cockroaches" because "those that don't love me don't deserve to live."⁹

This rhetoric, as well as his references to replicating China's 1989 government crackdown in Tiananmen Square, drew immediate international condemnation from human rights organizations and foreign leaders and it was reminiscent of the language used by Hutu radicals

before their 1994 extermination of the Tutsi in Rwanda. The unprecedented escalation of state-sanctioned violence and rhetoric not only alarmed members of the United Nations, but it also caused many Libyan military and justice officials to resign and defect to the opposition forces thereby fracturing the Qaddafi regime.

The most significant of these defections was that of General Abd al-Fattah Yunis, Qaddafi's interior minister. His distinguished reputation and command over the Libyan Armed forces in the east inspired others to follow suit which instantly created a haven within the eastern third of the country. This provided material resources and, more critically, the time necessary for the organization and mobilization of opposition forces.¹⁰ Recognizing the fragility of the Qaddafi regime, other Libyan security services either abandoned their posts, which allowed civilian demonstrators to acquire weapons from the abundant arms depots throughout the country, or joined the opposition in a civil war against their government. By 23 February 2011, the once peaceful demonstration had effectively expelled Qaddafi loyalists from the eastern half of the country as well as the western cities of Nafusa, Nalut, and Zintan and escalated into an all-out armed rebellion.¹¹

Shortly after the onset of the nation's first civil war, an opposition government consisting of "notable families, lawyers, academics, young activists, serving diplomats, former ministers and security chiefs, government reformers, and diaspora leaders" formed in Benghazi.¹² This organization, known as the National Transition Council (NTC), declared themselves as the de facto governing body of the revolution claiming responsibility for both international representation of the Libyan opposition forces and the leadership presiding over military action.¹³ Although the NTC received "severe criticisms as to how it organized itself, the opaque manner in which it took decisions, and the way it engaged with external patrons and managed

domestic affairs” it met the basic threshold for legitimacy and was never challenged for the leadership of the revolution from its inception to the fall of Tripoli.¹⁴

Although Qaddafi initially found himself on the strategic defensive stemming from the mass uprisings and defections of key leaders, he rapidly consolidated support in and around Tripoli and conducted offensives to regain key territory and infrastructure such as the oil export terminal seized by rebels along the coast of the Gulf of Sidra. Employing both his air and ground forces, by 17 March 2011, Qaddafi loyalists had regained control over most of the eastern region and were positioned to assault the last remaining rebel strongholds of Benghazi and Tobruk. Concerned that the Qaddafi regime had regained military advantage over the opposition forces and would therefore likely commit atrocities to retain power, members of the United Nations (UN) Security Council (specifically the United States, France, and United Kingdom, with the approval of the Arab League,) voted ten to zero (with abstentions from Germany, India, Brazil, China, and Russia) to impose a ‘no fly zone’ over Libya citing humanitarian concerns and evoking the newly codified responsibility to protect doctrine under UN Resolution 1973. This resolution authorized:

The Member States... to take all necessary measures, notwithstanding paragraph 9 of the resolution 1970 (2011), to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory.¹⁵

Though the resolution did not explicitly authorize regime change, as that would have resulted in vetoes by China and Russia, the ambiguous wording of the resolution allowed interpretation. For example, as written the resolution required UN military action against all belligerents endangering civilians; however, in practice the UN only employed the mandate employed against armed forces serving Qaddafi, thereby leaving opposition groups to operate indiscriminately and with a decisive advantage. As such, despite numerous statements such as

President Obama's 23 March speech wherein he emphatically stated, "the U.S. was not pursuing regime change," the US, France, and British were able to operate in a manner that reflected their collective belief that "Qaddafi's continued rule was unacceptable."¹⁶

Although Qaddafi reportedly called for an immediate cease-fire, the posturing of Qaddafi forces and reports of continued fighting in Benghazi resulted in cruise missile and air strike attacks by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Not only did these initial attacks effectively destroy the armored units surrounding Benghazi, the Qaddafi air force, air defense systems, and command and control structures positioned throughout the country, more significantly, they fundamentally changed the nature of the conflict from that of intrastate civil war to interstate regime change. Over the next seven months, international military intervention would provide opposition forces both the capacity and capability to continue their assault on pro-regime loyalists until Qaddafi was successfully captured and killed on October 20th 2011, thus ending his forty-two year reign.¹⁷

Although the thought of a Libya without Qaddafi was exhilarating, the pitfalls of transition and the associated consequences of forcible regime change rapidly materialized as the optimism and enthusiasm of the time gave way to angst over increasing violence that foreshadowed the coming second civil war. In the absence of Moammar Qaddafi, the once united rebellion precipitously devolved into warring factions divided across tribal, religious, parochial, and economic affiliations, in the pursuit of power and resources left in the wake of the failed regime. As a consequence, eight years later Libya remains a failed state consisting of rival secular and Islamist governments, local militias aligned along tribal and parochial origins, opportunistic trans-national criminal organizations, and jihadist organizations all of which are competing for power and resources at the national and international level.

The Determinants of Democratic Success

In ‘*The Newer Democracies: From the Time of Triumph to the Time of Troubles*’ Robert A. Dahl states that the prospects for greater democratization are dependent on key variables or conditions which either favor or hinder the democratic transition of a given nation. In his findings, these so-called democratic determinants are: a history of democratic beliefs and culture; the frequency of military oppression, coups and military dictatorships; a moderate homogenous society; and societal and economic characteristics associated with modernity.^{iv,18} Although Dahl states that no one of these conditions is sufficient to ensure the establishment of democratic political institutions, his research determines that the “odds are extremely high that a country will be democratic if all are present, and negligible if all are lacking.”¹⁹ Analysis of Libya and its 17 February Revolution using Dahl’s theoretical framework demonstrates that the revolution was anything but fertile territory for democratization.

Democratic Heritage Enables Successful Transition

Dahl’s first indicator of democratic potential, the presence of pre-existing democratic beliefs or culture, states that countries which have a history of democratic governance and an engaged citizenry have a higher probability of returning to a democratic form of government than a nation lacking in experience and culture. This theory finds consensus amongst numerous transitology theorists such as Hans Binnendijk who states, “democracies tend to emerge after a transition from autocracy if the nation has a democratic heritage,”²⁰ and Samuel Huntington who identified the “absence of experience with democracy by most countries that remained authoritarian”²¹ as a

^{iv} Robert Dahl’s work “Newer Democracies,” also identifies the presence or acts by a foreign power hostile to democratization as a fifth conditional determinant for democracy. However, this determinant was omitted as the scope of this section only focuses on predictive social determinants that can be measured prior to a transition.

significant obstacle to democratization. Yi Feng and Paul Zak further support this conclusion in “*Determinants of Democratic Transitions*” who state that on average, a country with prior democratic experience in the past is about five times more likely to have made a full democratic transition.²² In Dahl’s view, democratic experience is the “selection of top officials in free and fair elections, extensive freedom of expression, wide access to alternative and independent sources of information, rights to form relatively independent associations and organizations, including political parties entitled to compete in elections, and an inclusive electorate.”²³

Utilizing the above parameters to qualify democracy, to say that Libya lacked a democratic heritage would be an understatement. For more than a century various forms of non-democratic governments have ruled the nation. From 1912 through 1943, present-day Libya consisted of two distinct colonies: Italian Cyrenaica and Italian Tripolitania, both of which were ruled by Italian governors and commonly referred to as Italian North Africa. During World War II, the British and French subsequently colonized the region from 1943 through 1951 with British administration over Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and French control of the Fezzan. On November 21st of 1949, the United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution mandating Libyan independence; thus on December 24, 1951, the United Kingdom of Libya, led by King Idris I the Emir of Cyrenaica, was established.²⁴ This constitutional and hereditary monarchy would survive for little more than 17 years when on 1 September 1969, a group of young Army officers, led by Muammar Qaddafi, executed a bloodless coup d’état by seizing strategic buildings in Libya’s capital city of Benghazi.^v Declaring himself Commander-in-Chief of the

^v The term constitutional monarchy is only accurate as to say the UN developed a constitution for the new kingdom. In practice the monarchy held considerable power within the government and severely restricted opposition. After the nation’s first general election in February of 1952, political parties were banned and opposition members were exiled.

Armed Forces and de facto leader of Libya, Colonel Qaddafi and his supporting Free Officers “abolished the monarchy and proclaimed the new Libyan Arab Republic.”²⁵

Qaddafi’s initial government modeled the “anti-colonialist, nationalist and socialist tenets that were ‘en vogue’ at the time and that formed the ideological backbone of Hafez al Assad’s Syria and Gamal Abdel Nasser’s Egypt.”²⁶ However, as the dream of pan-Arab unity slowly crumbled, in 1976 Qaddafi articulated a new philosophy for governance referred to as the *Jamahiriya* or rule of the masses. This theory of government, which is articulated in his multi-volume *Green Book*, ostensibly established direct rule of the masses via “a collection of republics, comprising people’s congresses at the local and national level.”²⁷ Although the system of Peoples Committees and the indirectly elected General People’s Congress theoretically hold power, in execution those organizations served a classic patrimonial structure wherein a “system of tribal and family loyalties that favored some groups and deliberately marginalized others” ensured Qaddafi’s continued dominance over the nation.²⁸ Furthermore, according to Qaddafi, all versions of Western democracy are “dictatorial systems ... that falsify genuine democracy” because the electoral process is a “struggle for power between instruments of governing.”²⁹ He further states that “political struggle that results in the victory of a candidate with 51% of the votes leads to a dictatorial governing body disguised as a false democracy, since 49% of the electorate is ruled by an instrument of governing they did not vote for, but had imposed upon them.”³⁰

Given this viewpoint, it is no wonder then that during his nearly forty-two years of undisputed rule, Qaddafi never held elections of any kind and prohibited all opposition to the principles of the Green Book. Anything that resembled the organization of political parties or popular assembly was punishable by long prison sentences and the occasional public execution.³¹ In

Dispatches from the Arab Spring, Anjali Kamat and Ahmad Shokr state, “for decades, Qaddafi had denied Libyans the right to assume any independent control over their own lives. By criminalizing freedom of expression and freedom of association, he not only restricted dissent but also, more importantly, foreclosed the possibility for any kind of democratic politics.”³²

Under Qaddafi's totalitarian rule, security services oppressed other institutions that Dahl correlate with modern democracy, such as the freedom of the press and freedom of information. Similarly, in *Transitions to Democracy: A Comparative Perspective*, Kathryn Stone and Michael McFaul’s research identifies free and independent media and information technology as necessary “domestic factors present in many successful transitions and absent in [all of] the failed ones” thereby further corroborating the connection between freedom of expression and successful transition.³³ As described in the 2011 Freedom House report on Libya, the media was a mouthpiece for the government due to the climate of fear and self-censorship established by the routine harassment and imprisonment of journalists critical to the regime. Furthermore, the report states that the country had a monopoly over information as the only internet service provider was government controlled which resulted in the monitoring of anti-government content and the censorship of independent news websites.³⁴

Based on the above it is no surprise that when Freedom House comparatively assessed Libya against other nations across the globe it received a “Not Free Status” having been assigned the worst possible score in all categories measured.³⁵ While Qaddafi preached democracy for the people and by the people as evidenced by the above, Libya was an authoritarian security state that employed a pervasive military and security apparatus that severely repressed the most basic democratic freedoms. As such, by 2011 approximately eighty percent of the nation had lived

entirely under Qaddafi's four-decade reign and had no experience of democratic rule and thus no cultural or institutional foundation to guide the nation's transition toward democracy.³⁶

Military Restraint a Critical Ingredient in Democratization

The second domestic determinant that Dahl directly correlates with a higher probability of democratic transition involves the frequency of military or police crackdowns against government opposition, military coups, and military dictatorships. Based upon his research, Dahl concludes that nations which violently employ police and military forces as the "ostensible guarantors of public order" on a routine basis or have historically transitioned via coup d'états have a higher probability of failing to transition to democracy.³⁷ Huntington agrees with Dahl stating, "the leaders of authoritarian regimes can successfully use violence to sustain their rule; their radical opponents may successfully use violence to overthrow those regimes. The former action prevents democracy from coming into being; the latter kills it at birth."³⁸ Stoner's observations further reinforce this correlation in *Transitions to Democracy* wherein her analysis of fifteen different government transitions determined that the single commonality between each of the failed democratic transitions was the use of deadly force by the military.³⁹

As previously mentioned, the Libyan Arab Republic formed during the military coup of 1969 and as such established a historical foundation of violence that lends credence to Dahl's second determinant. Furthermore, as Huntington suggests, "governments produced by violence rule by violence;" it is therefore hardly surprising that countless examples of military and police oppression occurred during the entirety of Qaddafi's rule.⁴⁰ According to Kamat and Shokr, "from the mid-1970s, Qaddafi's security forces targeted anyone who criticized or could potentially oppose his rule, including hundreds of leftists, Islamists, professors, lawyers, doctors, students, and journalists who opposed laws banning political parties or independent unions and

restrictions on free speech.”⁴¹ As one of the tools of oppression, the government employed Revolutionary Committees comprised of paramilitary security forces formed from young loyalists charged with monitoring and safeguarding the revolution and for maintaining the security state and punishing all dissidents.

The broadcasts of public executions on national television and the assassinations of political dissidents in exile further reinforced Qaddafi’s campaign of fear.⁴² In 1996 the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), an armed Islamist group which consisted of former Mujahideen who had fought in Afghanistan, attempted to assassinate Qaddafi which resulted in fierce battles in the mountains of eastern Libya and the cities of Dernah and Benghazi. During this confrontation and the resulting house to house raids of LIFG strongholds, Qaddafi’s security forces arrested and then massacred more than twelve hundred Libyans belonging to or suspected of being affiliated with the terrorist group at Abu Salim Prison.⁴³

Moreover, “in addition to the swift security response, the regime punished local populations for their resistance through a policy of deliberate impoverishment.”⁴⁴ Qaddafi security forces showed their brutality again in Benghazi on February 17th, 2006, when they killed at least ten unarmed civilians during anti-government protests.⁴⁵ Five years later to the day, government forces used live ammunition against civilians in Benghazi, Tobruk, and Dernah during Libya’s Arab Spring. On this occasion, the peaceful marches quickly expanded beyond a few cities and devolved into armed insurrection. As posited by Dahl, Stoner, and Huntington, the nation's security forces proclivity towards violence would serve as yet another inhibitor to democratic transition.

Cultural Cleavages– The Impact of Tribalism and Culture on Democracy

Dahl's third domestic factor is the presence of a moderate homogenous society. Based on Dahl's research, the "likelihood of democratic stability" is improved by the absence of cross-cutting cleavages.⁴⁶ Dahl defines moderate homogeneity as the "lack of sharply differentiated, ingrown subcultures focused on religion, ethnic groupings, race, language or ideology."⁴⁷

Although ninety-seven percent of Libyans are Arab-Berber Muslims, Libyan society remains essentially tribal and is "among the most conservative and tribal societies in the Arab world, with ethical ideals and driving principles of the centuries-old Arab-Berber-African-desert way of life still strongly prevailing in everyday life."⁴⁸ As such, despite modernization and globalization which has impacted Libyan daily life, the tribal structures and processes are the prevailing basis of legitimacy and political authority within Libyan culture. Youssef Sawani, a Libyan political scientist, asserted in 2012 that "tribalism in culture and the tribe as an institution will continue to exert influence on socio-political interactions and on individual and group identities in Libyan society."⁴⁹

Yahir Zourbir and Erzsebet Rozsa estimate that Libya is home to nearly one hundred forty tribes that form approximately thirty large tribal confederations, which are "a loose, confederation-like structure of several tribes, sub-tribes, clans, and families, each of which has local leaders and local concerns."⁵⁰ According to Sawani, Qaddafi "relied on tribal alliances in the administration of power and this recourse always had a role in stirring up tribal and regional sensitivities."⁵¹ Perceptively, Qaddafi utilized this tribal system to build and consolidate his power through patrimonial practices by instituting leadership committees headed by each of the tribal leaders. This strategy served two purposes: 1) it encouraged tribes to want to ally themselves with the political authority and 2) it defeated the actual power of the tribal system.

Qaddafi provided favors and key political positions to the largest tribes, the Warfalla and Magariha, and of course his tribe, the Qadafa, to consolidate his power base.⁵² Qaddafi frequently shuffled around ministerial positions and heads of public companies to assert financial control over senior tribal leaders and their families.⁵³

According to Dahl's theory, Libya's numerous tribal divisions and government measures to exacerbate them should inhibit democratization. During the overthrow of Qaddafi and since, tribalism has dominated Libyan politics as "factional orientations and narrow regionalism" emerged.⁵⁴ According to Sawani, "the revolt against Qaddafi's regime generated types of local and tribal fanaticisms, especially in the regions or cities that had some prominence in undertaking the revolution" as evidenced by the requests for key government positions by Misratans or demands for the relocation of the nation's capital to Benghazi.⁵⁵ Other examples of tribal fissures include calls for the dismissal of a central authority and the implementation of federalism by the tribes of the Eastern Province; the assassinations of tribal leaders such as Brigadier General Abd al-Fattah Yunis; the seizure of critical ports, airports, and petroleum infrastructure by tribal militias; the murder and intimidation of black Libyans in Tawergah by Misratans; and the intimidation of other minority tribes in the Western Mountains.⁵⁶

Religion also plays a dominant role in the probability of democratization. During periods of political upheaval and transition within the Arab world, Islam, specifically the varying differences in interpretation, routinely manifests as a highly charged fault line when discerning what role it will assume in the nation's new political system. While Islam in and of itself is not necessarily incompatible with democracy, the Islamic fundamentalist view which derives government legitimacy from religious doctrine and experts is the antithesis to democratic political principles.⁵⁷ Huntington notes that when transition opportunities in authoritarian

Islamic societies occur, political parties “explicitly campaigning for democratic politics were relatively weak, and the most powerful opposition tended to come from Islamic fundamentalist.”⁵⁸ Thus violent conflict amongst moderate Muslims who seek to balance the interpretations and practice of Islam within the modern geo-political system and that of the Islamists who believe in strict adherence to Islamic texts (e.g. implementation of *Shari’a* law and government policy dictated by the ulama) have historically come to the forefront of political debate as evidenced by past authoritarian transitions in Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, Iraq, and Afghanistan.⁵⁹ Given the numerous historical examples of conflict between secularist and Islamists which have predominantly resulted in non-democratic governments, one could safely presume that this too would be the case in post-Qaddafi Libya.

Since the introduction of Islam in North Africa, Libya has remained a strictly Sunni Muslim population. Any attempts to introduce or convert its peoples to different interpretations of Islam such as Shi’ism or other *madhhabs* have historically failed; the only exception being the Amazighs, a small minority restricted to the Western Mountain, who follow the Ibadi *madhhab*.⁶⁰ Consensus on the Maliki madhhab did not imply consensus on the political role of Islam.

In the absence of a strong central government which had closely monitored and severely oppressed Islamist groups, such as the Islamic Group for Combat (LIGC) an Al-Qaeda affiliate, Islamist thinking has taken root. Sawani writes, “the fall of the regime unleashed ideological currents deriving from particular and contrasting views of Islam, life, and politics. Thus, the ability of Libyans to hold on to their moderate Islam will be subject to a serious test as they contemplate the positions to take towards extremist trends.”⁶¹ As in past examples of transitions of Arab governments, Libya has served to reinforce the normal pattern described by Huntington:

Islamist groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, have achieved greater political power through better organization and messaging while the secular liberal, nationalist, and leftist groups have failed to organize a cohesive strategy for the implementation of democracy, thus significantly reducing the probability of democratization.⁶²

Tribalism and religion, unsurprisingly proved to have a profound effect on the democratic outcome of Libya. Before the October 20th capture and execution of Muammar Qaddafi, the revolution had a singular fault line, those who supported the Qaddafi regime and those who opposed it. However, once Qaddafi, the single unifying factor that had mobilized the masses to common action was no longer present, the temporary alliances rapidly broke down along tribal, religious, and economic divisions as competing groups attempted to fill the power vacuum left in the wake of his regime. Frederic Wehrey expertly captures the deeply ingrained distinctions that divided the revolutionaries from the start when he wrote:

“the fault lines were many: between communities enriched by Qaddafi’s rule and those marginalized by it; between Libyans who returned after decades abroad and those who stayed; between technocrats who had accommodated the regime and worked to reform it, and Islamist who languished in its prisons; between defected army generals and younger civilian fighters; between women who challenged the old patriarchy and conservatives who sought to enforce it.”⁶³

Eight years after the conflict began, Libya has become a failed state. Fractured between two governments divided along religious and tribal lines and with nearly two thousand militias with shifting allegiances, hope for the consolidation of democracy is fleeting. In spite of America’s failures to understand the tribal and religious terrain in Iraq and Afghanistan, Derek Chollet, a senior member of the State and Defense departments under the Obama Administration, admits that “we did not fully understand Libya and only slowly perceived its endemic dysfunction...We had not grasped how weak its institutions were or appreciated the internal disunity.”⁶⁴

Modern Society – Fertile Territory for Democracy

The fourth domestic indicator that Dahl attributes to greater democratic probability is a modern society which he defines as, “societies and economies that encourage social and organizational pluralism; market economies; historically high levels of wealth and income, consumption, literacy, and education; and increasing rather than static or declining standards of living.”⁶⁵ Gary Stradiotto and Sujian Guo further support this research when they cite improved education, rising standards of living, and the growth of the middle class as primary reasons individuals support democratic institutions.⁶⁶ Stoner adds to this understanding as her studies revealed that countries with strong represented civil society organizations most often achieved successful transitions while those that lacked institutions intertwined within the fabric of society failed.⁶⁷

Applying this logic to Libya before and or during the revolution would have shown that Libya lacks many of these modern societal characteristics due to the nation’s tribal structure and its reliance on its primary economic revenue source – oil. The abundance of oil in Libya has made the development of sound political and economic institutions unnecessary, an example of what social scientists call the resource curse. Countries that have significant natural resource wealth, such as Libya, tend to have more conflict, corruption, and poverty thereby achieving less economic success.⁶⁸ According to Sawani, oil provided the Qaddafi regime the wealth to purchase political authority rather than achieve legitimacy through an electoral social contract with those governed. He writes, “the abundance of petrodollars enabled the state to practice subjugation in all its forms without the need to impose taxes...[and] oil wealth liberated the government from any need to conciliate the people politically or to accommodate democratically their demands.”⁶⁹

As a consequence, Libya's economy lacked sufficient diversification to provide opportunities to the masses and only served to concentrate wealth and power in the hands of a small oligarchy.⁷⁰ This corrupt system permitted selective modernization without requiring change in the social system. Ultimately it reinforced a bifurcated class system which consisted of the upper echelons of civil society, known as the *khassa* (the privileged), and the group everyone else fell into, referred to as the *'amma* (the commoners).⁷¹ This gross class divide detracted from the establishment of a civil society which Qaddafi referred to as "a bourgeois invention of the West with no place in Libya."⁷² These government policies resulted in uneven regional development due to insufficient funding for infrastructure, education, and health care. Although Libya advertises social indicators commonly associated with modernity, such as adult literacy (89%) and gross national income per capita (\$12,000), the unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities stagnated the development of a middle class and resulted in "one of the highest unemployment rates in the region, a staggering 20-30%."⁷³

Tribalism also impacted the modernization of Libya. According to Sawani, when tribes fail to develop into institutions that work seamlessly within the modern framework and central bureaucracy of state, the probability of building a strong civil society is diminished.⁷⁴ Tribalism is firmly inculcated in Libyan society, as was previously mentioned, it directly inhibits modernization. According to Sawani, "[Libya's] persistence of tribal loyalty impinged on the entire process of modernization, and the power of tribal loyalty factored in obstructing the transition of society to the stage of modernity."⁷⁵

Therefore, as evidenced by the above, Libya's dearth of modern institutions and characteristics, as defined by transitology theorists Dahl and Stoner, decreases the probability of democratization within Libya during a period of regime change.

Modes of Transition As Key Indicators of Democratic Outcome

Although societal variables significantly affect the likelihood of democratic outcomes, successful transitions are also influenced by the method through which transition occurs. In *Transitional Modes of Democratization and Democratic Outcomes* theorists, Stradiotto and Guo present a theory of how transition processes affect the probability of democratic outcomes. Through their analysis of regime change in fifty-seven countries from 1973 to 1995, they conclude that different transitional modes correspond with greater or lesser democratic success because “transitions are both defining and formative events that have lasting consequences on the quality and duration of democracy.”⁷⁶ The authors conclude that the interaction of two main variables 1) the relative balance of power between the incumbents and opposition, and 2) the smoothness (level of violence) determine the outcome of the transition. The authors say that “smooth [peaceful] transitions result in higher levels of democracy... [while] rapid [violent] transitions associate with lower levels of democracy during the post-transitional phase and are more likely to revert to authoritarian rule than are peaceful transitions.”⁷⁷

In situations where incumbents and opposition groups are relatively equal in power, the transition generally follows a negotiated or bargaining model. In contrast, when there is a disparity in levels of power, the transition tends to be violent.⁷⁸ Utilizing this relative balance of power variable, the authors create four transition categories: conversion and cooperative transitions which are generally relatively peaceful, and collapse and foreign intervention transitions which tend to be violent.⁷⁹

Democracy through Peace

According to Stradiotto and Guo, peaceful transitions have a higher probability of achieving a democratic outcome because both the incumbent and opposition parties have agreed to forgo threatening each other's interests. By establishing a series of agreements between the military and civil leadership, rival political parties, and social contracts with the people regarding the distribution of benefits, the existing government undergoes reform rather than complete reconstruction (which is the natural result of violent transition) thus providing a more significant opportunity for institutional democratic deepening.⁸⁰ While both conversion and cooperative transitions statistically achieve greater democratic success, cooperative transitions are the most likely to produce democracies.

In regime conversion, incumbent elites lead the transition due to the inability of the opposition to gain the upper hand in the balance of power. In these cases, history has demonstrated that most reformatations and electoral rule changes are designed to benefit the old regime in the new democracy. Although some electoral reformation ostensibly occur, in a conversion transition, meaningful changes that benefit the opposition are rarely implemented. Consequently, Stradiotto and Guo observe that "this suppression of competition under incumbent-led pacts is detrimental to the survival of the new democracy... If opposition groups fail to affect change under the reformed system, they may feel that complete removal of the regime is their only remaining option."⁸¹ This distinguishing characteristic thus becomes a critical determinant in democratic success or failure.

Conversely, in cooperative transitions change occurs from within and outside of existing institutions through cooperation between the opposition and the incumbents. The opposition typically dislodges the elites from their base of power by mobilizing the masses, thus forcing the

old regime to negotiate a transition. However, it is important to note that the incumbent elites will only participate in a negotiated settlement if they feel that their interests are safe in the 'new order.' Furthermore, the opposition's focus on maintaining the greatest stability allows for reformation of existing institutions and allows the old regime to compete within the new political system.

While the cooperative model falls under 'peaceful' transition, it is also important to note that the process may manifest itself in a series of protests and government oppression resembling "strikes, protests, and demonstration on the one hand, and [limited] repression, police violence, and martial laws on the other."⁸² The authors conclude that cooperative regime transition is the most likely form of transition to achieve democratization and maintain that form of government for the longest duration.⁸³ The violence of the government response to the mass demonstration of 17 February and the armed uprising showed that the Libyan transition would conform to neither the conversion nor the cooperative modes.

Transition through Violence

Violent transitions are dangerous because their rapid nature typically results in the destruction of existing government institutions. According to the study, "while the collapse itself occurs quickly, the rebuilding of the state is a lengthy process carried out in an uncertain environment characterized by intense power struggles. The result is a higher occurrence of authoritarian reversion."⁸⁴ The study further suggests that incumbents and or opposition groups that rely heavily upon violence ultimately inculcate violence within the norms and institutions of the post-transitional government. As a result, these forms of transition (i.e., collapse and foreign intervention) are the least probable of achieving democratic outcomes.⁸⁵ Transitions that follow the collapse model are driven from the bottom up and occur when opposition groups gain enough

strength to violently overthrow or supplant the incumbent authoritarian regimes. In these cases, opposition forces which consist of either the mobilized civilian masses or rogue military/police forces quickly gain strength until the balance of power shifts and the government elites are replaced or the system collapses.

Furthermore, Stradiotto concludes that “in collapse, opposition groups unite in their desire to bring about the fall of the authoritarian regime and often appear divided after the fall in the struggle over the distribution of power and the creation of the new regime.”⁸⁶ Thus, the collective absence of democratic institutions within the *Jamahiriya* in the previous section, the probability of factionalism amongst the revolutionaries in the post-Qaddafi era, and the violent beginning of the transition should have led one to conclude that Libya’s transition was unlikely to produce a democracy. In “Libya’s Uncertain Revolution,” Dirk Vandewalle succinctly captures the many challenges facing democratic consolidation stating that there is no definitive path for:

creating an institutionalized state in a country where state institutions were deliberately neglected for several decades and are still subject to suspicion; incorporating citizens further into a national identity that has not been clearly defined beyond some references to Islam; ...mak[ing] Libyans meaningful participants in the country’s political and economic life and to wean them away from a patronage system that had, in return for some of the riches of an oil state, demanded political quiescence.⁸⁷

Although, at the beginning of the Libyan revolution, it appeared that the regime would collapse, it would not have fallen without foreign intervention. After March 19th, 2011, Libya’s transition fits the *Foreign Intervention* mode. Nearly all analysis of the Libyan revolution finds consensus in the fact that the successful ousting of Muammar Qaddafi could not have occurred without foreign military intervention. Zoubir and Rozsa state “although the rebels undeniably played an important role in fighting the regime, their efforts would have come to naught had it

not been for NATO's special operations forces on the ground targeting airstrikes, their training of the Libyan rebels, their management of the logistics, and leading Libyan insurgents in battle."⁸⁸ Similarly, Frederic Wehrey also states that "[w]ithout NATO, the ability of the Libyan uprising to successfully topple Muammar Al-Qaddafi was in serious doubt."⁸⁹

Stradiotto defines transition through foreign intervention as involvement that occurs when opposition groups lack the strength to independently remove the authoritarian regime thereby necessitating military interference by an external actor. Since this transition model employs violence as a tool, it has the same inherent problems associated with the collapse model with additional complications due to foreign participation in regime change. According to the study, the additional consequence of foreign involvement typically results in a greater power struggle due to increased civil unrest and legitimacy problems stemming from the 'un-natural' balance of power between the incumbents and opposition and within the opposition itself. The study also states "in the case of regime collapse, rulers who are forcibly removed from power often face death, exile, or incarceration (e.g., execution of Hussein, or incarceration of Noriega from Panama since his removal from power in 1990)."⁹⁰

This extreme punishment of the regime leadership and their associated elites tend to aggravate factional tensions between loyalists and revolutionaries further. Moreover, the artificial empowerment of the opposition often results in the unequal distribution of powers amongst the sub-groups by foreign entities unintentionally exacerbating underlying social tensions and thereby causing divisions and greater instability.⁹¹ Stradiotto cites how the United States' intervention in Haiti and elsewhere in Iraq and Afghanistan has inflamed ethnic and tribal tensions, destabilized the historical balance of power, and ultimately delegitimized the very government installed by the foreign power.⁹²

Predictably, foreign intervention within Libya has had a similar result. Although the United Nation's forces did not occupy Libya as in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan, instead preferring an option that "avoids a nation-building imbroglio," its support to various anti-Qaddafi forces and its active targeting of Qaddafi loyalists (in violation of the UN Mandate) prevented any chance of de-escalating the conflict while unintentionally intensifying sub-national tensions that would later manifest in the post-Qaddafi era.⁹³ According to Zoubir and Rozsa, "the arming of one side in the conflict against loyalist forces intensified the civil war and dissuaded the rebels from seeking a negotiated settlement, as was encouraged by the African Union... and others who opposed NATO's military intervention."⁹⁴

Mullerson further supports this theory of civil war escalation wherein he writes, "if the opposition feels that their uncompromising, maximalist demands have found external support, they become even more intransigent, even more uncompromising."⁹⁵ Mullerson goes on to say, "[this] uncompromising insistence on a regime change intensifies the conflict and leads to an even greater loss of life" thereby supporting Stradiotto's conclusion that foreign intervention tends to be more problematic than beneficial.⁹⁶ Zoubir and Rozsa further support this assertion when discussing Libya's mode of regime change, stating "the conditions that led to it (foreign-supported insurgency), coupled with the manner with which Qaddafi and his loyalists were massacred, may have already created the bases for endemic, protracted conflict in Libya, thus jeopardizing national unity and the construction of a democratic order."⁹⁷ Therefore, as demonstrated by the above, democratic transition via foreign intervention is less likely to achieve a democratic outcome due to the violent nature of the regime's collapse and the tendency to aggravate factional cleavages aligned against sub-national and supra-national identities.

Conclusion

In May of 2011, President Obama gave an impassioned speech espousing the momentous achievements of the Arab Spring. In his remarks, he lavished platitudes upon the populous movements claiming they had achieved more in a handful of weeks through peaceful demonstrations than terrorists had achieved in decades of murder and had therefore forever changed the course of human history. In his comments, he captured the optimism and hope of the moment when he stated:

For all the challenges that lie ahead, we see many reasons to be hopeful. In Egypt, we see it in the efforts of young people who led protests. In Syria, we see it in the courage of those who brave bullets while chanting, ‘peaceful,’ ‘peaceful.’ In Benghazi, a city threatened with destruction, we see it in the courthouse square where people gather to celebrate the freedoms that they had never known. Across the region, those rights that we take for granted are being claimed with joy by those who are prying loose the grip of an iron fist.⁹⁸

However, as demonstrated by the past eight years, the hopes of the Obama administration would prove fleeting. As Dereck Chollet states, “in May of 2011, these examples symbolized potential, and our cautious optimism seemed reasonable. Yet it was in these three places most of all – Libya, Egypt, and Syria – where our hopes for the Arab Spring cratered.”⁹⁹ After the seemingly successful democratic election of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the Egyptian military facilitated a coup d’état and imposed an authoritarian government that affords fewer freedoms than either of the previous two regimes. In Syria, the Arab Spring revolution devolved into a civil and proxy war that has decimated every aspect of the nation and further destabilized the region. When asked what his single greatest regret was during his presidency, Barack Obama cited his failing to plan for the day after Muammar Qaddafi as his “worst mistake” the intervention “didn’t work.”¹⁰⁰

Although hindsight is inevitably twenty-twenty, the unfounded optimism surrounding Libya's 17 February Revolution serves as a classic example of rational liberal thought failure. As demonstrated by the analytical frameworks provided by the aforementioned transitology theorists, Libya lacked all the necessary societal determinants for democratization at the start of the revolution. The nation's complete dearth of democratic experience offered no foundation to guide its transition. Moreover, the lack of trusted government and social institutions typically provided by the legitimate military, educational, financial, or political organizations further compounded the probability of transitional failure as the absence of these modern characteristics inhibited democratic reform.

The numerous pre-existing cultural cleavages exacerbated by deep seeded tribal tensions, secular and Islamist identities, and economic disenfranchisement would significantly fracture the nation along parochial and fraternal lines and thus prevent the establishment of a cohesive national identity in the post-Qaddafi era. Furthermore, the mode by which Libya attempted transition through armed rebellion and subsequent foreign military intervention would further complicate a situation that was already incompatible for a democratic transition. Mullerson comments "[t]he United States.... and its closes allies have had quite a disruptive effect through their misconceived and incompetent attempts to promote democratic values in regions where there were no fertile grounds for such values to take root."¹⁰¹

As Jeane Kirkpatrick concluded nearly four decades ago in her commentary regarding the dangers and unintended consequences of overthrowing dictators, "the American effort to impose liberalization and democratization on a government confronted with violent internal opposition not only failed, but actually assisted the coming to power of new regimes in which ordinary people enjoy fewer freedoms and less personal security than under the previous autocracy."¹⁰²

Such was the case in Libya, wherein the hope of a fourth wave of democracy and a newly established democratic Libya was severely misplaced. As this study concludes, the absence of critical domestic variables conducive for democratization coupled with the violent- foreign intervention transitional mode by which Libya's revolution occurred, predictably prevented all possibility of liberal democracy and all but guaranteed civil war and Libya's resulting failed state.

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- ⁸³ Stradiotto, "Transitional Modes of Democratization," 15.
- ⁸⁴ Stradiotto, "Transitional Modes of Democratization," 12.
- ⁸⁵ Stradiotto, "Transitional Modes of Democratization," 12.
- ⁸⁶ Stradiotto, "Transitional Modes of Democratization," 11-12.
- ⁸⁷ Dirk Vandewalle, "Libya's Uncertain Revolution," *The Libyan Revolution and its Aftermath*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 29.
- ⁸⁸ Zoubir, "The End of the Libyan Dictatorship," 1274.
- ⁸⁹ Wherey, "NATO's Intervention," 105.
- ⁹⁰ Stradiotto, "Transitional Modes of Democratization," 19.
- ⁹¹ Stradiotto, "Transitional Modes of Democratization," 12.
- ⁹² Stradiotto, "Transitional Modes of Democratization," 12-13.
- ⁹³ Wherey, "Why Libya's Transition to Democracy failed," https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/02/17/why-libyas-transition-failed/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.aa03fc955dd0.
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- ⁹⁵ Rein Mullerson, *Regime Change: From Democratic Peace Theories to Forcible Regime Change*, (Brill, 2013), 197: ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usmcu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1124369>.
- ⁹⁶ Mullerson, *Regime Change*, 199.
- ⁹⁷ Zoubir, "The End of the Libyan Dictatorship," 1274.
- ⁹⁸ Barack Obama, "A moment of opportunity," (Speech, Office of the State Department, May 19, 2011), <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-barack-obama-prepared-delivery-moment-opportunity>.
- ⁹⁹ Chollet, *The Long Game*, 95.
- ¹⁰⁰ The Guardian, Obama Interview, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/apr/12/barack-obama-says-libya-was-worst-mistake-of-his-presidency>
- ¹⁰¹ Mullerson, *Regime Change*, 211.
- ¹⁰² Jeane Kirkpatrick, "Dictatorships Double Standards." *Commentary (Pre-1986)*, (November 1979(Vol 68, Iss 5, 34. <https://search-proquest-com.lomc.idm.oclc.org/docview/199566537?accountid=14746>.

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