

## US Interest in Military Intervention in Libya

### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to determine the national interests of the United States in NATO's Military Intervention in Libya in 2011. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method. The results of the study show that America has political motives in the event. The conclusion of the study is that in the intervention, although there has been a change of leadership in NATO, the US still plays an important role in the war. By involving other countries through multilateralism efforts, America can achieve its interests while sharing the burden borne in the war.*

**Keywords:** national interest, military intervention, Libya

### INTRODUCTION

In early 2011, there was significant political unrest in North Africa and the Middle East that resulted in revolution. The Libyan people began demonstrating in front of the police headquarters in Benghazi on February 15, 2011 which then grew bigger with protesters taking over the streets and seizing weapons from the main security headquarters (Apriadi Tamburaka, 2011). On February 24, protesters took over the city of Tobruk as a whole. At that time the Libyan people were divided into two groups. The first was the forces loyal to the Gaddafi government and the second was the opposition mobilized by the Libyan National Transitional Council. Then there was a conflict between the two groups which was not balanced with the helplessness of the opposition in the face of Gaddafi's airstrikes. The UN finally got involved in resolving the problem in Libya by issuing UNSC Resolution 1973, which authorized UN members to take necessary measures to protect Libyan civilians from violence carried out by the Moammar Gaddafi government forces. To realize this instrument, a no-fly zone

was then created over Libyan territory to protect civilians and rebels from airstrikes carried out by the Libyan government. NATO received the mandate on March 17, 2011 and then on March 19, 2011, Operation Odyssey Dawn began involving war machine attacks, surface-to-air missiles, and the destruction of Libya's air defense network and attacking pro-Gaddafi forces that threatened civilians. A number of countries that participated in this operation included the US, UK, France, Spain, Denmark, Norway, Canada, Belgium, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar.

NATO's (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) intervention was greatly influenced by the development of the political crisis in Libya and the UN mandate. The new orientation of NATO policy after the Cold War determined how the organization worked. At the NATO conference in Istanbul in 2004, NATO tried to encourage collaboration with countries in Central Asia and the Middle East with the aim of increasing stability outside Europe and changing the Eurocentric perspective by including the South and Central Asian regions to the Middle East and North Africa,

NATO's military intervention in Libya emphasized the alliance's hard power strategy to maintain stability in the Middle East (Rebecca R Moore, 2007). As a member of NATO, the United States participated in this intervention. Initially, the United States was involved in the intervention in Libya by sending aircraft to attack various locations in Libya but then limited its involvement. NATO then took over the leadership role in this intervention. On March 31, 2011 the United States then focused its operations on various programs including search and rescue, airlift, aircraft refueling, electronic attacks and surveillance and reconnaissance.

During the operation, NATO officially merged all remaining air operations in Libya under its control and command known as Operation Unified Deterrence. Air operations in this location included operations to protect civilians and no-fly zones. One of the US actions related to Libya was to support NATO in Operation Mutual Protection. American personnel from the United States Army Africa (USARAF) were sent to the headquarters of operation odyssey dawn aboard the USS Mount Whitney on March 31, 2011. With the withdrawal of its air force from the intervention in Libya, the United States

wanted to change the way they viewed their foreign policy from direct involvement in this mission. The United States can achieve a number of its foreign policy interests and goals with this policy. Factors related to the national interests of the United States and the international structure involved in this intervention are the reasons why this case is interesting to discuss. The purpose of this study is to determine the causes of the US's less dominant role in NATO's military intervention in Libya in 2011. Obama's leadership in the United States has a different way to achieve national goals. During NATO's military intervention in Libya from March 19 to October 31, 2011, the US considered its national interests. This study is important because it provides a new perspective on new ways to achieve US national interests and contributes to international relations research

### **Military Intervention**

According to Bikhu Parekh (Chang, 2011) intervention is an attempt to interfere in the affairs of another state with the aim of ending physical suffering caused by the disintegration or abuse of power of a state and helping to create an environment in which civil government structures can emerge and function. Thus, it can be justified to promote the prevention of physical suffering or death due to abuse of power. Therefore, the military action in question is a humanitarian intervention in a situation where a repressive government causes suffering or internal conflict with violations of the civil and political rights of citizens. Intervention must be carried out multilaterally and recognized by all parties involved (Finnemore, 2004). External interventions are legitimated on humanitarian grounds or the desire to prevent killing, suffering and massive transboundary flows (Eniayjuni, 2011). They are also carried out in accordance with accepted international standards. Therefore, the use of force across state borders by groups of states and regional organizations with justification and reasons for carrying out their actions to restore peace and security and end suffering and human rights violations through multilateral assistance without the consent of the intervening state. (J. Trent and M. Rahman, 2007)

### **Rational Choice Theory**

According to Viotti Kauppi, the rational theory model used in international policy-making serves as the basis for choices, policies, and actions taken by policy makers to achieve the ultimate goal in the most effective and efficient manner. This model is not value-free because it depends on how policy makers view the goals they want to achieve and the methods they consider most effective in achieving them (Paul R. Viotti dan Mark V. Kauppi, 1993).

In rational choice theory, policy makers make decisions that benefit themselves. This theory is based on the idea that every action has fundamentally considered the advantages and disadvantages before deciding on a policy (John Scott, 2000). National interests are referred to as state rationality so that decision makers choose policies based on their interests and their perceptions of national interests. In understanding international actions or phenomena, rational choice theory assumes that individuals involved in decision-making see the need for context in policy-making.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research use qualitative research which are carried out in a procedure where the indicators to be used have been systematically determined before data collection. This research will basically test hypotheses based on concepts. Thus, the thought process used is a deductive thought process, which runs as follows

Observation → Hypothesis → Data collection → Hypothesis Testing →  
Conclusion

The Analysis Level Model at the country level and the concept of military intervention in this study serve as "tools" to understand the phenomena to be studied. The conclusion or answer to this study will be attempted as a reflection of the understanding of the concept used. However, the measurements to be used in this study are not with numbers, but rather refer to

the accuracy of the description of each variable and the accuracy of the relationship between one variable and another (Prasetya Irawan, 2006).

This research do not use statistical and mathematical methods. Data collection techniques in this study is carried out using documentation and literature study methods to collect information in written materials. Documents in this case refer to texts or anything that is written, visually visible or spoken through a communication medium (Lawrence Neuman, 2004). Primary document studies are obtained from the official website of the United States government. While secondary document data comes from books, journals, or research results from valid sources, which are related to the research topic.

This study uses the assumption of classical realism. Classical realism states that the state is a unitary and rational actor. The state-centric approach that used in this study is based on the idea that the state is the most important actor in world politics, and tas a rational actor, the state will try to achieve its national interests through available means. Departing from the assumptions and theoretical framework used previously, this study will focus on the use of the concept of air war on the non-dominant US involvement in the NATO military intervention carried out in Libya on March 19 - October 31, 2011. In the military intervention, the national interest motives that the US tried to achieve will also be explained which caused the US to be non-dominant in the case.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In NATO's military intervention in Libya, there was a transfer of leadership from the US to NATO. This transfer of leadership occurred in the unified protector operation with NATO directly in control of the intervention that occurred. This intervention was still followed by the US, although its role was only a supporting role. The US provided a number of its aircraft and warships to be used by NATO in carrying out the military intervention. The US's continued role in the second phase of this intervention was because the US's capabilities were much stronger than those of other member countries.

Overall, in this intervention, air strikes and sea strikes were carried out. Air strikes were carried out by deploying fighter planes to attack a number of targets in Libya while sea strikes were carried out by imposing an arms embargo on ports in Libya. In carrying out its actions, NATO also involved a number of Arab countries such as Qatar and the UAE in enforcing the no-fly zone.

NATO also recognized the NTC as the official representative of Libya replacing the Gaddafi regime. In enforcing the mandate given by the UN, NATO was considered to have exceeded the limits given by the UN, namely the recognition of the NTC as the official representative of the government.

Until March 31, 2011, the United States held full command in the air war in Libya. The targets of attacks directed by the United States based on the center of gravity above include (Clayton K.S. Chun, 2001):

### **Infrastructure**

On March 19, 2011, US cruise missiles struck the Misrata airport and flight academy as part of an effort to destroy Libya's air defenses. On March 22, Admiral Locklear stated that intelligence had found that Gaddafi forces were attacking civilians in Misrata and that the coalition was considering all options to protect civilians inside the city. The US then successfully enforced a no-fly zone and began targeting regime ground forces. Three B-2 Spirit stealth bombers then flew from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri dropping explosives on Ghardabiya Air Base south of Sirte (Anthony Bell & David Witter, 2011). The B2s targeted several air shelters housing Su-22s and MIG-23/27s, Libya's best fighters, striking 45 targets with 2,000-pound JDAMs (John A Tirpak, 2011). Following the successful B-2 raid, two B-1 bombers flying from Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota launched two major bombing raids on Gaddafi's military infrastructure, including air defenses, fighter aircraft, command and control centers, vehicle depots, and ammunition depots, hitting approximately 150 military targets.

## **Leadership**

In order to destroy Libya's air bases and air defense systems throughout the country, US cruise missiles struck the Misrata flight academy and airport on March 19, 2011. On March 22, Admiral Locklear stated that intelligence had established that Gaddafi's forces were attacking civilians in Misrata, and the coalition was considering any means to protect them. On March 19, 2011, three B-2 Spirit stealth bombers flew from Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri and dropped explosives on the Ghardabiya air base south of Sirte. The B2s targeted several air shelters housing Su-22s and MIG-23/27s, Libya's best fighters, striking 45 targets with 2,000-pound JDAMs. The attack on Ghardabiya was supplemented by several Tomahawk cruise missiles fired from US ships offshore, hitting several shelters. After the successful B-2 raid, two B-1 bombers flew from Ellsworth Air Force Base in South Dakota and conducted two major bombing raids on Gaddafi's military infrastructure. In three raids, about 150 military targets were destroyed.

To help the rebels advance on Tripoli in early August, NATO stepped up its bombing campaign. The United States conducted 83 airstrikes between April 1 and August 10, an average of three per day, according to the U.S. Department of Defense. In addition, six U.S. Predator fighter jets flew over the capital and surrounding areas for several weeks to find hidden government assets and strike known targets. During the previous period, drones had conducted 17 strikes.

The United States launched 124 Tomahawk Land Attack Cruise Missiles (TLAM) from U.S. warships and submarines. The first missile targets were anti-aircraft bases and integrated air defense radar systems around the capital Tripoli.

The strikes were intended to prevent regime forces from attacking Libyan citizens and opposition groups and to reduce the regime's ability to interfere with the U.N. resolution's designated overflight zone. According to the US Department of Defense, the airstrikes have reduced Libya's surface-to-air missile capabilities, warning radars, SA-6 and SA-8 systems, and thousands of SA-7 missile launchers. Operation Odyssey Dawn, led by AFRICOM along with

Joint Task Force Odyssey Dawn, was designed to provide operational tactics and control for the enforcement of UNSC resolution 1973( Africa Research Bulletin: Political and Social Cultural Series, 18 April 2011).

According to the US Department of Defense, 336 coalition forces had flown into Libya by March 23, 2011, with 212 flown by the US and 124 by other coalition partners (David D. Kirkpatrick and John F Burns, 2011) On March 23, 2011, reports from the United States stated that the Libyan air force had been effectively destroyed. In support of Operation Odyssey Dawn, B-1B Lancer bombers were launched from the 28th Bomb Wing at Ellsworth, South Dakota, on March 27, 2011, to strike targets in Libya from the US mainland. The United States deployed AC-130U stealth aircraft and A-10 Thunderbolt IIs as combat support and rescue aircraft. During the initial phase of the intervention, which lasted from March 19 to 31, the United States provided the majority of military assets, firepower, logistical support, and command and control. During the two weeks, the US flew 1206 strikes (63%) of the total 1990 strikes on Libya and conducted 463 (49%) of the total 952 coalition strikes. At the peak of Operation Odyssey Dawn, about 150 of the 175 US aircraft and 12 ships had been involved, which was more than half of the total 350 aircraft and 20 warships. The United States carried out strikes on infrastructure, ground forces, and organic essentials, during the military intervention.

In order to accelerate the implementation of the no-fly zone in Libya, attacks on infrastructure were carried out to destroy the country's air defences(Pak K Lee & Lai Ha Chan, 2016). In addition, attacks on aircraft shelters were carried out so that Libyan air forces could not attack the rebels. In order to implement UNSC resolution no. 1973, attacks on ports and other organic resources were carried out to be effective in protecting civilians from Gaddafi's military threat. Thanks to significant economic and military factors, the United States had a very large capacity to carry out strikes. In this operation, the US had a fairly large military force compared to other NATO member countries. Although the US dominated the number of strikes during Operation Odyssey Dawn, the US only attacked 3 points of gravity. After NATO took over



the operation, they attacked targets in Libya, including infrastructure, ground forces, organic elements and leadership.

### **Reasons for US Involvement in NATO Military Intervention in Libya 2011**

The United States and NATO used the UNSC mandate no. 1973 when conducting military intervention in Libya under the pretext of protecting civilians from the military threat of Gaddafi. However, the operations carried out by the US and its allies exceeded the mandate after the intervention. President Obama himself stated that America's involvement in the military intervention in Libya was aimed at bringing down Gaddafi. Previously, America had frozen Gaddafi's assets and mobilized sanctions against Libya. In addition to the seizure of Gaddafi's assets worth US\$.32 billion at the International Court, Libya's frozen assets amounted to \$150 billion, \$100 billion of which were in countries that participated in the NATO aggression against Libya. The United Nations Security Council, consisting of five permanent members and ten non-permanent members, then determined Moamar Gaddafi as a war criminal because he was considered to have killed his own people en masse using direct and indirect force. There are 28 hierarchies of international crimes, one of which is genocide (mass murder), according to the decision of the International Court.

Muammar Gaddafi is considered to have used brutal and sadistic force against civilians (known as genocide) during the Libyan Revolution. The United States and its allies used the determination of Gaddafi as a war criminal and human rights violator to obtain a UNSC resolution. In carrying out military intervention in Libya, NATO easily gained global support because of the historical attitude of violence he had committed against his opponents. As part of the Arab Spring wave that swept through Middle Eastern countries, opposition movements within Libya began to emerge demanding freedom of speech and democracy. In addition, this demand demanded a change of government. The people welcomed the regime change offered because the interests of the people met the interests of Britain and France who wanted to exploit Libyan oil (Rakhmadi, 2012).

During the initial stage of the intervention, Operation Odyssey Dawn, was carried out by the US, and lasted until March 31, 2011. After that, NATO took over the attack, and the US only assisted with existing warships and fighter planes to carry out air strikes. In this intervention, sea and air attacks were only carried out, without land attacks.

The absence of sending troops to carry out land attacks was due to a number of reasons. Some of them are:

- Sending military equipment and war advisors to strengthen the rebels' position so that they can launch attacks on the regime's position in Tripoli. By becoming stronger and more trained in warfare, the rebels will be more effective in attacking the defenses of the Gaddafi regime. This is shown by the delivery of military equipment by Britain, which includes 1000 sets of armor and 100 satellite phones. Meanwhile, an arms embargo was imposed on Gaddafi, while the embargo on the NTC was not complete. NATO ships acted firmly against Gaddafi while the NTC received weapons that were left behind. Arms assistance from France and Qatar also helped the rebels become stronger. In addition, the geographical conditions of Libya, which is a desert with cities in the middle, make this area an ideal place for conflict between the government and the rebels. NATO airstrikes also helped the rebels by targeting government equipment and cars.

- The US government faced significant economic and political challenges as a result of their prolonged involvement in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore the US was reluctant to continue the war in Libya. Although the US led the attack in the early stages of the intervention, it was done because of US capabilities, and NATO would later take over command. One of the factors that pushed the United States to transfer leadership to NATO was strong opposition from the Republican Party, which was very dominant in Congress after the Democrats' landslide defeat in the 2009 midterm elections. In addition, the United States also faced the costs of an economic crisis that had not really recovered and unemployment was still high.

- US and NATO intelligence operations to build and train anti-government forces. US President Barack Obama ordered the deployment of military forces to Libya before this operation began. Bob Baer, a former CIA

agent in the Middle East, said that the special team was sent via Egypt to see the formation of military units in Libya. The US government tried to apply a strategy similar to Afghanistan and Iraq to be applied in Libya. CIA espionage agents were placed in Libya to train forces opposing the Gaddafi regime. Their placement there helped gather information to smooth the air strikes on military centers

## **CONCLUSION**

The non-dominant role of the US in the military intervention in Libya is shown by the transfer of leadership from the country in operation odyssey dawn to NATO in operation unified protector. In this military intervention, the US did not only use military instruments to overthrow Gaddafi. However, the country also used other instruments to achieve its goals (Rakhmadi, 2012).

In the political field, the US tried to convince countries in the world to stop Gaddafi's repressive efforts against his people. At the UN, the US tried to persuade the Security Council countries to issue a resolution to protect civilians from Gaddafi's military threats. Finally, after protracted negotiations, the UNSC issued a resolution aimed at protecting civilians with all necessary measures. As the implementer, NATO plus a number of Arab countries were appointed to intervene.

Initially, the mandate given to NATO was only to protect civilians. However, the US and its allies then carried out air strikes against Gaddafi's ground forces and recognized the NTC as the legitimate government of Libya. Since the beginning of the intervention, many parties have considered that NATO's mission in Libya was unclear because there was no standard time setting in carrying out the operation. The involvement of several Arab countries in this intervention together with NATO is considered to provide stronger legitimacy in carrying out the attack.

The US became the leader in the first phase because the US was considered to have greater capabilities than other NATO members in carrying out the attack. The role of the US then became merely a supporting role but still played a significant role by providing a number of warships and fighter planes

for NATO in carrying out the attack. In addition, the US supplied the bomb supplies used by NATO in carrying out the attack on Libya.

In the economic field, the involvement of NATO in carrying out the intervention in Libya will reduce the budget burden faced by the US. Moreover, the US has not yet recovered from the crisis and with this involvement there will be a significant reduction in costs. In the operation in Libya which lasted for seven and a half months, the US only spent around 1 billion US\$ compared to the operation in Iraq and Afghanistan for years which spent around 1.3 trillion US\$. The absence of ground troops in Libya could be replaced by arming the rebels so that they could suppress Gaddafi's loyalist forces.

The involvement of the US in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan does not allow the US to engage in a prolonged war by sending ground troops to Libya. To paralyze the Libyan economy, the US and NATO countries froze Gaddafi's assets in several European countries.

Counter intelligence operations carried out by the US and NATO succeeded in identifying Gaddafi's defense points, making it easier for rebel forces to advance into Tripoli. In addition, the US and NATO helped the rebels attack by directing air strikes at Gaddafi's armored forces and heavy weapons, so that over time Gaddafi became weak. An arms embargo was imposed on Gaddafi, while it was not imposed on the NTC. Weapons shipments were also carried out by asking for assistance from Qatar and France.

In the social sector, with the determination of Gaddafi as a war criminal by the International Court of Justice, it was easier for the US to gain support from international parties in launching an intervention in the country. Along with the Arab Spring wave that occurred in the Middle East, the US wanted to improve its image by helping democratization efforts in Libya. The shift in the US's role to a supporting role in this intervention still allowed the US to be involved by lending its ships and fighter jets. Even after the war, the US did not simply let go of reconstruction efforts in Libya by holding a conference to help recovery efforts in Libya. Together with other NATO members who are also members of the G8, the US offered Libya a loan. With successful reconstruction in Libya, the US's efforts to restore its influence will be helped.

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