

Plenty of credit to go around in Gadhafi's fall

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Satisfaction is what Canadians can take from this conflict because Canadian diplomacy and Canadian arms were both instrumental in bringing about the outcome. Following the Rwanda genocide and the Srebrenica slaughter in the 1990s, Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy, determined to find a way of reconciling the imperatives of national sovereignty and the protection of human rights, launched the diplomatic process that culminated in the new norm of international relations, the Responsibility to Protect. Ultimately accepted personally by 150 heads of state meeting at the UN in New York in 2005, this norm holds that when a state is unable or unwilling to protect its people from grievous harm or is itself the perpetrator, as in Gadhafi's case, "the principle of non-intervention yields to the international responsibility to protect." In authorizing intervention in Libya, the Security Council acted for the first time in conformity with this norm.

Successful intervention takes military muscle as well as political will, and the disposition and the capacity of the Harper government to contribute militarily to the NATO effort was crucial, as has been the active diplomacy of Foreign Minister John Baird. Canadians can take special satisfaction from the professionalism with which Canadian Lt.-Gen. Charles Bouchard commanded the NATO operation within the constraints of the authorizing UN resolution.

Libya is a famously complicated country with numerous tribal, economic and social divisions, and precious little experience of democracy. If the aspirations of the Libyan people are to be achieved and the country is not to fall back into civil conflict, the international community, including Canada, will need to stay engaged, less as guarantors of security, although that might be necessary for a little while, but in the long, trying process of state-building. Canada - government, civil society and industry - can help with drafting a constitution, "standing up" a Libyan administration and military, advising on the creation of an inclusive, pluralistic parliamentary system, supporting human rights, and generating economic growth so that young Libyans at last have a future. This process will take decades not just years, and should become a priority of Canada's aid program. In the end, there is no guarantee that this all will work. But, in the same circumstances, who would not choose optimism over the despair of rule by a psychopath and his murderous sons?

The larger significance of the liberation of Libya is that times do change and human progress is possible. The international community has the means to level the playing field between citizens and tyrants. Next stop, Syria?

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