

2011 Foreign Military Intervention in Libya

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Despite the strong opposition of the African Union (AU) not to let any foreign force to intervene in the internal affairs of Libya, NATO is conducting a threatening military operation to the dismay of African leadership and the AU. Ironically, one of the reasons many people supported the call for a No-fly Zone over Libya was the fear that if Gaddafi managed to crush the Libyan people's uprising and remain in power, it would send a wrong message to other Arab and African dictators. International law, particularly the Charter of the United Nations, respecting the sovereignty of nation states, and non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, is as much a product of prudence as it is of moral and ethical considerations. However, through the AU's Constitutive act of 2000, African leaders recognized the responsibility of the organization to intervene as the last resort in the internal affairs of member states to protect citizens during humanitarian crises observing the "responsibility to protect" (R2P) principle. African leaders have thus moved to accepting the new principle of "sovereignty as responsibility".

Military interventions in Africa, often justified as humanitarian interventions, have commonly been used by foreign powers particularly during the Cold War era to pursue their parochial national interests, prop up local despots and perpetuate "spheres of influence". There is thus a basis for concern by some African governments that the principle of the "responsibility to protect" is yet another means of powerful countries to interfere with the domestic affairs of weaker countries. Deep concerns have also been expressed in Africa that interference in the internal affairs of African countries will continue to grow, and that countries with weak government structures are more vulnerable. African governments could come under even greater influence of external actors economically and the plunder of Africa's natural resources, particularly oil, could increase. Despite its official UN-granted legality, the credibility and legitimacy of Western military action is suspect. Once Africa lose the authority to find "African solutions to African problems" opportunities are presented to powerful outside powers, with their own interests and agendas to intervene. This paper will explore the dialectics, dilemmas and dangers of increasing foreign military intervention in Africa in the light of 2011 foreign military intervention in Libya.

