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## Liberal Interventionism After Libya: Re-establishing Credibility and Deterrence

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By John Collins.

If one phrase were to sum up the [situation](#) within Libya right now, it would be: 'it's too early to tell.' Prognostications, although often interesting, thought provoking and even occasionally useful as [planning tools](#), are (at best) educated guesswork. Nevertheless, leaving aside the likely path forward for post-Gadhafi Libya for a moment, there is another area that Gadhafi's overthrow will have far reaching consequences for: [liberal interventionism](#) and its deterrent capability.

Arguably one of the numerous justifications for the Iraq War, and the Bush Doctrine, was that the establishment of 'preventative war' as a policy option would have a deterrent effect on other so called 'rogue regimes' and pressure them to change or risk invasion. However, the subsequent Iraq invasion, civil war and [planning debacle](#) had two unintended effects. The first was that states like Iran and North Korea drew a different set of lessons. Instead of seeing Iraq's perceived WMD program as the cause for the invasion, they viewed Iraq's lack of a credible nuclear deterrent as enabling it. Arguably this view served as a spur to escalate their own WMD programs in the hope of quickly establishing a nuclear deterrent that could neutralise the American threat.

The second consequence reinforced the first. The apparent [incapacity](#) of the West to forestall civil war and the emergence of an insurgency fatally [undermined](#) the threat that the US and its allies would be willing to stage similar actions in the future. Military interventionism, and by extension Liberal interventionism, seemed dead.

Then came the recent events in Libya. Ironically, having shed its nuclear weapons program in 2003, Libya was viewed as perhaps the only successful [example](#) of a rogue state being peaceably pulled into the Western sphere after the Iraq invasion. Now, NATO's success at helping to topple the Gadhafi regime, at a minimal cost in terms of Western treasure and blood, has likely helped kick the '[Iraq Syndrome](#)' to some degree – at the very least as far as liberal interventionism is concerned. States like Syria and Iran now face the prospect that the West, acting under some of the criteria loosely termed the [Obama Doctrine](#), may be willing to help their populations effect regime change in a similar manner.

The security that the Iraq War failures brought these regimes has now been diminished and they are arguably in a far more tenuous position than they were before Tripoli fell. As a corollary of this, the West's leverage over these states has also increased. Undoubtedly the appetite for any new large-scale ground offensives is still almost non-existent, but more minimal forms of intervention should appear to be back on the table and altogether credible. As with events in post-Gadhafi Libya, it is too early to tell. However, given how bleak the prospects were for both Libya under Gadhafi and western military power before the uprisings, it is [hard to envision](#) how the future could be any worse than the years that preceded.

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