

In This Corner...

By Gerry Garrison

On April 4, 1949, the foreign ministers of Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Great Britain, France, Luxembourg, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Norway and the U.S. formally signed the North Atlantic Treaty with the key note #5 stating "an armed attack against one or more of the European signatories or the North American signatories would be considered an attack against all of them." The treaty is based around western democracies opposed to totalitarian regimes.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was meant as a protective force to prevent communism from taking over any of the countries included in the treaty. The North Atlantic Treaty was signed in Washington, D.C., on April 4, 1949 and was ratified by the United States that August.

Why am I giving all of you this information? Because the United States has formally transferred the offensive command to NATO to take over the leadership and continue the no-fly zone order in Libya. According to the US Secretary Hillary Clinton, the

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United States

and NATO allies have agreed on the transition command and control of NATO regarding the ongoing military order in

Libya

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NATO Secretary General Rasmussen, said the alliance could eventually take more responsibility, “but that decision has not been reached yet.” It appeared that some NATO members balked at any involvement in attacks on ground targets. The decision came over the objections of Turkey, Germany and France, which were all opposed for different reasons. The Turks seem to oppose a Western-led attack on a Muslim nation, the Germans tend think the whole thing is a misadventure and the French wanted to lead the war themselves

The fact that President Obama has been more squeamish about: helping the rebels retake the initiative in a war that, early on, seemed destined to drive Qaddafi and his tribe from power, has created conflicting messages from the administration and our alliance partners, On top of this, Obama’s French and British counterparts have been clear-cut about the goal of the military mission: toppling Qaddafi, who has spent 42 years alternately terrorizing and supplying them with oil. This “odyssey” continues to get worse by the day.

There such a lack of lucidity over the objectives of this mission, what our national security interests are, and how it fits into our all-encompassing policy in the Middle East, it is no wonder many of us are confused, since the U.S and NATO members cannot come to an agreement as to what our mission is.

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NATO is in charge. Really? According to all the news sources I have read or heard, they are really not, since the U.S. military is in charge of the mission. The irony about the new NATO arrangement is that President Obama has been a stickler on the point that Operation Odyssey Dawn (a fitting name) was only about enforcing a U.N. resolution that called for the protection of Libya's civilian population, not an effort to depose Qaddafi.

How fitting the name is of the this mission? In Homer's *Odyssey*, main character Odysseus spends 10 years trying to reach Ithaca, encountering sirens and a Cyclops along the way. In President Obama's "odyssey," the U.S. military gets involved in a limited engagement against the "mad dog" of the Middle East – only one that's supposed to settle down in a matter of days. Can you say weeks? But I digress

Obama's Odyssey?

With a name like "odyssey," it's not difficult to make the case it will soon become Obama's Odyssey, if he can't figure out how to back out of this quagmire. The title of what seems to be the United States' third simultaneous war in a Muslim country has the resemblance of something long-drawn-out. This title is beginning to ring true, with NATO taking "partial" control, while the United States is still in charge despite countless concerns about Muammar al-Qaddafi's staying power and the extent to which America would use force to unseat him.

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But according to Mr. Obama, this is not the original intent. The President, along with his advisors, has incessantly stated that the war may end in a stalemate because the American strategic aim is only to protect civilians and that Qaddafi can be dealt with through diplomatic isolation.

So which is it? Protecting civilians or regime change? Talk about mixed messages. There is so much confusion from this administration, it is no wonder the American people want to know what our real mission is here. In the past, it has always been U.S. policy to abstain from engaging in conflicts where U.S. vital national interests are not at stake. Whatever interests many of you may think the U.S. has in Libya, without a doubt, the term "vital" does not even apply.

President Obama – or "Our Son, His Excellency" as his one-time pal Moammar Gadhafi used to call him, has shown he believes UN authority supersedes U.S. constitutional authority and sovereignty. So not consulting with Congress or bypassing the U.S. Constitution is okay? Mr. Obama's advisors say this is "time-limited, scope limited" military action. So was the war in Iraq.

I am sure that is not the case hear ... right?

Republican Leader of the House, John Boehner, who initially thought we were doing the right thing, has some questions concerning this "mission" and its purpose. "American people deserve answers to these questions," Boehner wrote in a letter to the President. "... it is regrettable that no opportunity was afforded to consult with congressional leaders."

Speaker Boehner also called the conflict "war," a term administration officials have painstakingly avoided. The administration describes the U.S. role as "limited". Seriously? Then why are the U.S. military still in charge. I have also heard rumors we may have "boots on the ground". Sound limited to you?

Other members of Congress worry about an operation in Libya that they don't understand. They fear another Somalia, just like that fateful day in downtown Mogadishu nearly 18 years ago. It's all because no one is entirely certain what the U.S. is doing in Libya. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution is clear that only Congress can "declare war." But what's worrisome is which branch has the final say when the nation is "a little bit at war".

Anyone ever heard of "a little bit at war"? With 2,200 Marines from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit are stationed just off the Libyan coast. In the first few days of this conflict alone, we have already lost a plane and spent hundreds of Tomahawk missiles – at \$1 million a pop – is the President ready to commit to this effort to the point that we're willing to sacrifice American lives, in this "little bit" of a war? I am sure the Marines have no desire to be "in the halls of Tripoli". I for one, do not. It is time we stopped committing our troops to the various conflicts around this globe in which we have neither business nor vital interest. If the countries of NATO want to take on Gadhafi, as his oil is in their vital interest, then let them. It is time for us to back away from this conflict and let NATO take over, completely. Do I think that is going to happen? I doubt it.

But what do I know? Just sayin' ... # # #

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Life is short. Forgive quickly. Kiss slowly. Love truly. Laugh uncontrollably, and never regret anything that made you smile.

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Editor's Note: Instead of publishing the following press release from The White House as a separate article, we decided to publish it together with the commentary of Mr. Garrison:

My Fellow Americans:

I'm writing today with an update on the situation in Libya, including the actions we've taken with allies and partners to protect the Libyan people from the brutality of Moammar Qaddafi. For further details, please take a moment to watch this morning's Weekly Address:

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http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2011/03/26/weekly-address-military-mission-libya?utm_source=email103&utm_medium=image&utm_campaign=libya

Sending our brave men and women in uniform into harm's way is not a decision I make lightly. But when someone like Qaddafi threatens a bloodbath that could destabilize an entire region, it is in our national interest to act. In fact, it's our responsibility.

Our mission in Libya is clear and focused – and we are succeeding.

Along with our allies and partners, we are enforcing the mandate of the United Nations Security Council. Working with other countries, we have put in place a no-fly zone and other measures that will help prevent further violence and brutality. Qaddafi's air defenses have been taken out, and his forces are no longer advancing across Libya.

As a consequence of our quick action, the lives of countless innocent civilians have been saved, and a humanitarian catastrophe has been avoided.

The role of American forces in this mission is limited. After providing unique capabilities at the

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beginning, we are now handing over control of the no-fly zone to our NATO allies and partners, including Arab partners like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

The United States has also joined with the international community to deliver urgent humanitarian assistance. We're offering support to the Libyan opposition and have frozen tens of billions of dollars of Qaddafi's assets.

Our message to Qaddafi is clear: attacks against innocent civilians must end, his forces must be pulled back, humanitarian aid must reach Libyans in need, and those responsible for the violence in Libya must be held accountable.

The progress we've made over the past seven days demonstrates how the international community should work, with many nations, not just the United States, bearing the responsibility and cost of upholding international law.

Every American can be proud of the service of our men and women in uniform who have once again stood up for our interests and ideals. And as we move forward, I will continue to keep each of you fully informed on our progress.

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Sincerely,

Barack Obama
President of the United States

P.S. On Monday evening at 7:30 p.m. EDT, I will deliver an address at the National Defense University
in
Washington

,
DC
on the situation in
Libya

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WhiteHouse.gov/live

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