

Good Reads: Mali jihadis, and the consequences of military intervention
By Scott Baldauf, The Christian Science Monitor
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Spawn of Qaddafi

For many of the folks who formulate America's foreign policy in the halls of Washington, plotting the downfall of Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi in October 2011 was an easy decision.

Mr. Qaddafi was not much liked by fellow leaders in the Arab League or by fellow leaders of the African Union. This may have been because Qaddafi tended to see himself as the only true leader of both Arab nationalism and of a unified African continent. Qaddafi also funded, armed, and trained numerous rebel groups – from Darfur rebels to Malian Tuaregs – to help destabilize neighbors he either disliked, or simply wanted to overthrow.

One could see how that would get old, fast.

Yet overthrowing Qaddafi, and scattering all those armed, funded, and trained rebel groups to the four winds has also had its consequences – most notably in the West African nation of Mali. In April, Tuareg fighters of the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad and their Islamist allies from Ansar Dine swept through all of the cities of northern Mali and effectively declared their own republic. The weapons they used – with the exception of the ones taken from fleeing Malian soldiers – mainly came from Libya.

In Foreign Affairs, Yahia Zoubir lays out the recent history of Qaddafi's downfall, and what the unintended consequences of military intervention could be for other conflict zones, such as Syria.

Africanistan?

Self-described realists would say, "fair enough, the Libyan intervention was messy," but now that Islamists have taken control of two-thirds of Mali – a vast region of rock and sand in the north that is larger than France – it is time to organize another military intervention to ensure that Mali doesn't become terrorist haven, like Afghanistan, Yemen, or Somalia.

The Islamists, Ansar Dine and Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb, are a dangerous lot, and tens of thousands of Malians have fled to other countries to avoid them. The Islamists have declared sharia law, and set about destroying ancient Tuareg and Arabic monuments, including the tombs of Muslim saints.

But, as Gregory Mann writes in this week's Foreign Policy, there is no evidence that the Islamists have a larger agenda than northern Mali. Foreign intervention, as in Libya, may simply make matters worse.

Ultimately, Malians themselves will have to take the lead in resolving a crisis that has endangered their neighbors. Outside actors can only help all sides seek an honorable way to make the Malian north safe again, partly by working to get Bamako to accept the assistance of its neighbors. At the moment, foreign military intervention, whether it comes from ECOWAS or elsewhere, will be viewed as an invasion in both the south and the north. That has to change, which means that politics has to come first. A political solution will be harder to achieve than a military one, but you get what you pay for.

Jobless in the USA

In the US, it's sometimes hard to understand why so much energy is spent solving problems overseas when there are serious problems – like chronic high unemployment – at home. Some

folks blame US factory owners for shipping all the good jobs overseas, while employers themselves say they simply can't find the qualified people they need.

Economists call this a "skills shortage," but Barbara Kiviat writes in *The Atlantic* magazine that new studies by Manpower, the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, and two top universities show that the problem may not be a lack of skills but rather a different expectation for what those skills are worth.

When firms were asked why they have difficulty hiring, 55% picked "lack of available applicants," but essentially the same percentage, 54%, said candidates are "looking for more pay than is offered" (many more than the 40% selecting lack of "hard" skill). This is an important reminder that the labor market is a market. The U.S. conversation revolves around whether workers have the right skills. Whether firms are willing to pay enough to compensate workers for having acquired those skills is rarely mentioned. When firms post job openings at a certain wage and no one comes forward, we call this a skills mismatch. In a different universe, we might call it a pay mismatch.

Multitasking, a case for intervention

Finally, a few words about multitasking. Clearly, it's the bane of our modern existence, and when your dinner-party guests break out their iPhones to check on the Red Sox score or the spot-price of sorghum, you know you've lost their attention.

But Daniel Gulati, writing in *Harvard Business Review*, argues that while most studies focus on the deleterious effects of multi-tasking on the modern professional – the increased stress, the impact on sleep patterns, poor work quality – the greater effect is on the people around the multitasker: the ignored spouse or child, the fellow diner who must listen to a heated phone negotiation over his tapas.

Here may be the one case where an intervention may be justifiable (although probably not one that requires the use of military drones). Mr. Gulati offers three handy tips for getting the multitasker to put down that mobile device and Just. Pay. Attention: call out the multitasker mid-task; reschedule for an uninterrupted time; or just walk away.

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