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**The Libyan Spring and NATO:  
An opportune responsibility**

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# The Libyan Spring and NATO: An opportune responsibility

Sarah da Mota

## Abstract

In the context of popular demonstrations and political upheavals of the Arab Spring, this paper addresses the 2011 intervention in Libya as a case for deepening the understanding of individual-centred security policies. Drawing on a conceptual and normative approach of R2P and NATO, it seeks to denaturalize the idea that *Operation Unified Protector* is a success in organizational terms, in order to uncover the underlying implications of “efficiency” in running an intervention based on R2P. It argues that there is a dissonance between the normative evolution towards ethics and military deeds which blurs the significance of responsibility. This results in a twisted sense of cosmopolitanism which primarily affects the referent object of security that has been dominant in contemporary interventionism, i.e., the unsecured civilian.

**Keywords:** Libyan spring; NATO; R2P; Humanitarianism.

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## List of abbreviations

AU – African Union  
EU – European Union  
ISAF – International Security Assistance Force  
LAS – League of Arab States  
NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization  
OIC – Organization of the Islamic Conference  
R2P – Responsibility to Protect  
UAV – unmanned aerial vehicles  
UN – United Nations  
UNDP – United Nations Development Program  
UNSC – UN Security Council

## Introduction

I do not have illusions about NATO's role in providing security in the region: NATO cannot solve all the problems and it never intended to do so. After all, Mediterranean partners never expected such a thing from NATO. But we can still provide a substantial added value in the region.[...]

There is a new dynamic in the region. We must seize the opportunity to build on it. The foundations of regional cooperation have to be set today, in order to address the challenges of tomorrow.<sup>1</sup>

On 9 February 2011, at the time of this speech, fifteen days were left before Resolution 1970 (2011) was adopted by the UNSC regarding the Libyan regime's violence towards civilians. This excerpt of Anders Fogh Rasmussen's speech in Israel makes the self-projected role of NATO as a regional actor of security quite clear: it is not one of problem-solving, rather one of "substantial added value" service. Who knew then that NATO would soon have its first opportunity to demonstrate its "added value" in protecting civilians in the region?

In the broader context of the political and popular upheavals spreading from Tunisia to Egypt during the early months of 2011, known as the Arab Spring protests, Libya's crisis emerged in February 2011, when the forty year-old regime of Colonel Qadhafi was confronted to vigorous popular demonstrations and the formation of an armed opposition group, to which it launched a crackdown (Daalder & Stavridis, 2012). At a certain point, violence was to escalate as Qadhafi told the world that any Libyan taking arms against Libya would be executed. To the UN Commissioner for Human Rights, Navi Pillay, the use of violence against demonstrators amounted to a crime against humanity, as other senior UN officials classified the situation as a problem of human protection and Qadhafi's regime as an imminent threat (Bellamy & Williams, 2011: 838-839).

As a response, the UNSC adopted resolutions 1970 on 26 February 2011, and 1973 on 17 March 2011. First, Resolution 1970 (2011) set the political expression of grave international concern towards the situation of the Libyan people, as it recalled Libyan authorities' responsibility to protect its population, and undertook several political

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<sup>1</sup> NATO SG Anders Fogh Rasmussen delivering a speech at the 11<sup>th</sup> Herzliya Conference in Herzliya, Israel, on 9 February 2011 (NATO, 2011a).

concrete measures such as an arms embargo and travel bans on the members of the regime, among others (RES 1970/2011). This only encountered the intransigence of Qadhafi's regime, which rejected the demands, refused humanitarian aid convoys into Misrata and Ajdabiya, two of the most affected areas at the time (Bellamy & Williams, 2011: 840).

Therefore, Resolution 1973 (2011) was determinant in its ultimate decision to call for action under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, authorizing

[M]ember States that have notified the Secretary-General, acting nationally or through regional organizations or arrangements, and acting in cooperation with the Secretary-General, to take all necessary measures, notwithstanding paragraph 9 of resolution 1970 (2011), to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya [...] (RES 1973/2011).

On 31 March 2011, NATO took the military command and control of *Operation Unified Protector*, specifically mandated under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, in relation with resolutions 1970, 1973 and 2009 (2011), aiming at protecting civilians and civilian-populated areas from attack or threat of attack in Libya (NATO, 2011f). As NATO's most recent mission, its involvement may be framed in the continuity of a self-proclaimed concern towards humanitarian causes and the protection of civilian lives, as demonstrated namely in Kosovo in 1999 (Falk, 2002; NATO, 1999; 2000a; 2000b) and Afghanistan in 2003 (NATO, 2004).

Hence, *Operation Unified Protector* might be seen *a priori* as the affirmation of NATO's post-Cold War trend towards humanitarian interventions, guided by ethical and moral objectives, with numerous references to the protection of "civilians" and the "Libyan people" (NATO, 2011c; 2011d; 2011f), provided with a specific mandate to that end. It seems that in the case of Libya NATO's search for relevance went mostly by the geographical expansion of its partnerships with non-NATO members (Jordan, Morocco, UAE, Qatar) so as to increase its importance beyond its borders (Daalder & Stavridis, 2012: 6), along with the defence of values and principles, the affirmation of a code of conduct, oriented by decisions and choices seemingly ethical. With time, despite the critiques and scepticisms (Weisbord, 2010; Whitman, 2000), it appears that

NATO has managed to turn its out-of-area presence into general consensus and naturality.

The existing literature on the intervention in Libya brings two main topics into debate, namely:

1. *NATO's performance* – depicted by enthusiasts as a remarkable success and victory of freedom; a model of functional efficiency regarding the low casualty rates and operational improvement comparatively to Kosovo, the rapidity of the response, the fulfilment of Resolution 1973's primary objective, in saving civilians in Benghazi and Misratah, and destroying Qadhafi's tank and artillery; as the right way to run an intervention based on the R2P doctrine (Barry, 2011; Daalder & Stavridis, 2012; NATO, 2011e; Western & Goldstein, 2011: 56-57). The organizational aspect is also enhanced by the fact that it energized the European side of NATO as it showed its assertiveness and division of labour with the USA (Valasek, 2011).
2. *Assessing the actual state and the future of R2P as the leading principle of humanitarian interventions in terms of:*
  - a. Its improvement. Some authors frame Libya within a “getting better all the time” argument, in that it represents a consecration of a successful humanitarian intervention, which has been gradually improved over the last twenty years, and stands in contrast with past failures in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia (Western & Goldstein, 2011).
  - b. Its evolving dynamic, around the increasing role of regional actors in reinforcing consensus and legitimacy of decision-making (Piiparinen, 2012).
  - c. Its decisiveness to the future of protection politics, as it brings back the UNSC's authority, thus introducing a “new politics of protection” in the decision-making that produced Resolution 1973, which is marked by coerciveness since the host state did not consent, for the first time in the UN record (Bellamy & Williams, 2011; Welsh, 2011)
  - d. Its disruption of the clarity of the liberal model of security and intervention, representing a paradigmatic change in how humanitarian discourses and war operated (Chandler, 2013: 130-131).

This paper is no exception in that it intends to reflect on the later topic with the support of the first, i.e., it focuses on NATO's performance in Libya, analysing its discourses and evolving narrative as an organization, in order to reflect on R2P, what it currently entails, represents and implies. The particular features of the intervention will be analysed, in order to find to which extent we might still think of it within the R2P framework as it has been known so far. It is worth looking into the state of responsibility, not embodied in the R2P doctrine, but into what the deeds tell us about what it means to be responsible for other human lives. Ultimately, what does *Operation Unified Protector* in Libya tell about the current state of R2P as a doctrine for interventionism and about present days' NATO as well?

Our argument is that there is a paradox between political words and military deeds which blurs the significance of responsibility. In fact, there is a dissonance between the conceptual and normative dimension on the one hand, which is characterized by an approach of closeness regarding civilian needs, what enthusiasts see as a comeback of 1990's humanitarianism (Evans, 2011; Sewer, 2011; Robertson, 2011 cit. in Chandler, 2013: 130). On the other hand, on the practical side of it, there is a distancing move away from the Libyan people in the management of the operation, marked by the use of drones and a post-regime disengagement.

In the end, the consequences of that conceptual and praxeological confusion – intended or unintended – might be negative for the same referent object the intervention was initially supposed to relieve, i.e., the innocent and unsecured civilian. This means responsibility is currently being practised as a label for political approval, and its content is not properly directed at the continuum of civilian protection. The security of those individuals remains entangled within a twisted cosmopolitanism.

## **I. Reinforcing the idea of responsibility through a growing sense of cosmopolitanism**

*Operation Unified Protector* in Libya has been commonly seen as the consecration of an evolving politics of protection developing since the end of the Cold War, and as the consecration of international consensus around it, since the UN resolution concerning Libya passed without a single dissenting vote (Western & Goldstein, 2011: 55). As such, this first section highlights how the idea of responsibility came to evolve and establish itself to ultimately influence security policies. The underlying idea of evolution and improvement behind the military intervention in Libya is approached under three perspectives, namely: its normative and conceptual background; its regional framework; and its functional agency.

Drawing on a resumed analysis of the conceptual and normative evolution since the end of the Cold War, this section first sets the normative and conceptual background which allows understanding the intervention in Libya in a more contextualized manner. It will be seen, namely, that there has been a growing cosmopolitan concern towards civilian needs, which denotes a humanizing and individualizing approach of security by the interveners. Second, the regional framework of the intervention demonstrates how the making of an expanded consensus serves to reinforce the legitimacy and neutrality of the decision-maker, which ultimately ends up transmitting – third part of the section – the inherent efficiency of the functional agent in command and control of the military operation. Taken together, these three dimensions help reflecting on the enthusiasm regarding the operation as a success and regarding the adoption of R2P as a ground-breaking step in the moral evolution of interventionism.

### ***A/ Background: affirming “security as ethics” and the individualisation of security***

In the broader context of post-Cold War humanitarianism arising in the 1990's, international security policies have shifted from state-centred approaches to an “individualisation of security”, i.e., a move focusing on individuals as primary referents of security policies. This individualisation of security is a post-Cold War trend of international security depicting the new visibility of a referent object of security other

than the state, namely the individual or the civilian. Thus in 1994 the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report on human development introduced for the first time in the United Nations (UN) system the notion of “human security” (UNDP, 1994). A decade later, through its High Representative Javier Solana, the European Union (EU) requested a special working group a report on a human security doctrine for Europe (Kaldor et al., 2004). Since then, “humanitarianism”, “ethical foreign policy”, “human development” and “human security” have been at the top of international security agendas and policies. The semantic and normative load associated to these notions demonstrates an unprecedented ethical move in International Relations.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, from the 1990’s on, there is an evolution approaching Ken Booth’s idea that the state is not the end of security *per se*, but rather just a means to attain it (Booth, 2007: 228). State becomes limited to being an agent of security, not a subject. Seemingly, as the moral consciousness of the individual value is not captured in the bipolar logic of physical survival and ideological divide anymore, it might have led, after the Cold War, to the pressure over states in undertaking military interventions to protect citizens other than their own from humanitarian disasters (Finnemore, 1996: 153). Consequently, what was to be protected from then on were the human values (Booth, 2007), personified by individuals.

In fact, the scale, the scope and the meaning of humanitarian action significantly expanded during the 1990 decade, with an increasing political and financial intromission of some states into the work of humanitarian actors. Michael Barnett (2005) considers this to be a politicization of humanitarianism and of the civilian object, which may be explained by geopolitical, social, economic and also normative factors of a multipolar world, in opposition with an initially a-politic humanitarianism (Chandler, 2002).

Regardless of the politicization, we are to assume that the normative environment of this evolution is prevailing over other factors, for norms are actually the primary game-changer of international politics (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). As such, the underlying zeitgeist transpires an intensified cosmopolitan thinking. For a more precise insight of

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<sup>2</sup> Those expressions and concepts were indeed very well received and adopted in the codes of conduct of many international organizations, NGO’s, and foreign policies of states like Canada, Japan and Norway – concerning human security in particular – for they are rooted in moral values (Ramel, 2003; Suhrke, 1999), with an undeniable ability to generate important financial support for institutional multiplication, with the creation of new functional entities working for the “human” (Shusterman, 2006).



what cosmopolitanism implies, Anthony Kwame Appiah (2007) defines it as the equivalent of ethics in a globalized world, enclosing two ideas which often clash at each other. The first is that we, as human subjects, have obligations towards persons other than our family and acquaintances; the second is that we value particular human lives, in respect of their legitimate difference (Appiah, 2007: xiii). Cosmopolitanism then arises from a universal concern towards those who are at distance, whom we do not necessarily know or resemble, but with whom we share the same essential and valuable nature.

In political arenas, this new moral commitment towards the protection of individuals is embodied by the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle. R2P was endorsed as a doctrine at the UN World Summit in 2005, unanimously adopted by UN member states thus agreeing with their responsibility to protect their populations from the four most inhumane crimes, namely genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity. In case of manifest failure in doing so, international society would act through various provisions set out in the UN Charter (Bellamy & Williams, 2011: 827; Evans & Sahnoun, 2002; Piiparinen, 2012).

Now, considering how norms and concepts had been evolving since the 1990's, as exposed above, and how humanitarian interventions had already been taking place prior to this "indoctrination"<sup>3</sup>, R2P appears to be more of the same. With a minimal legal significance, since its normative content basically provided circumstances that had already been authorized for more than a decade, but rather a political and rhetorical one (Chesterman, 2011), the "illegal but legitimate" argument had become common ground.

If we were to locate and define this type of normative evolution within Martha Finnemore e Kathryn Sikkink's (1998) three-stage "norm life cycle" – 1. norm emergence; 2. norm cascade or acceptance; 3. internalization – as a model depicting the implantation and influence of a norm, we would say responsibility has been definitely internalized when R2P was formally adopted by international community, and it has been so as a norm of exceptionality in the sense it overcomes illegality for higher moral purposes such as protecting the life of individuals, supposedly. As such, R2P

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Bosnia, Kosovo, Rwanda or Somalia.

reinforced the idea and the narrative of a cosmopolitan responsibility of the states towards their own citizens and other states'. It also internalized the presupposition that in any future occasion in which the R2P principle would be invoked, the UN decision favouring it would be automatically legitimate, neutral, and ethical. The adoption of R2P as a "doctrine" protects in a way UN decisions from the critique of the eventual coerciveness against *de facto* states. This is why some authors find that Libya and Cote d'Ivoire constitute ground-breaking precedents of R2P, for they represent the first application of R2P in coercive campaigns against the consent of functioning states (Bellamy & Williams, 2011: 828; Piiparinen, 2012: 388).

Therefore, although legality is a vital criterion for international order, an ethical assessment based on a selfless cosmopolitanism seems to have taken the toll on it and to be sufficient to determine whether international action might be undertaken or not. Security has been constructed as ethics, appearing now as inherently legitimate and necessary, because it refers to organic living persons, and not to states defined by action-constraining laws.

### ***B/ Expanding consensus: regional embedding and co-responsibility***

Another feature of the intervention in Libya strongly contributing to the reinforcement of the idea of responsibility consists of its regional embedding. Although the role played by regional actors in the implementation of R2P is not new, and has been on the rise (Bellamy & Williams, 2011; Daalder & Stavridis, 2012; Piiparinen, 2012: 388), it is still of significant importance in the case of Libya, because of the actors involved and how they influenced the UNSC's decision-making and by the same way reinforced its legitimacy by representing an expanded consensus.

Very soon in the Libyan turmoil the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) took a side and joined the critiques towards the threatening position assumed by Qaddafi's regime at Libyan citizens. Specific actions were undertaken when, on 22 February 2011, the LAS suspended Libya's participation until the cessation of violence. On 23 February, the AU's Peace and Security Council issued a communiqué condemning the indiscriminate and excessive use of force against peaceful demonstrators (Bellamy & Williams, 2011: 839).

On 26 February 2011, when Resolution 1970 was adopted, it was explicit in

*Welcoming* the condemnation by the Arab League, the African Union, and the Secretary General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference of the serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law that are being committed in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, [...] (RES/SC/1970 2011).

This acknowledgement is important for it implicitly recognizes the weight of the “condemnation” by those organizations in the UN deliberation regarding the measures referred in the resolution. It also strengthens the legitimacy of the decision, as it is sustained by an inherently intercultural and interregional consensus. Alex Bellamy and Paul Williams (2011: 841) find namely the LAS’ close inclusion and decision – traditionally opposed to humanitarian interventions – in calling for a no-fly zone and the establishment of safe areas to protect civilians absolutely decisive, and even consider that without it, the UNSC’s decision of using force in Libya would have been unlikely:

Whatever the reasons behind the LAS decision, it changed the Council’s dynamics: it made opposition to enforcement more difficult; it brought the US on board, adding to the feasibility of the military option; it helped persuade the African Council members; and ultimately it pushed the remaining sceptical members towards abstention (Bellamy and Williams, 2011: 846).

As a matter of fact, the LAS is a clear example of how the idea of responsibility has been internalized and at the same time instrumentalized by international organizations. We find two different angles from which one may look at this relationship between the UNSC and the LAS. On the one hand, it is worth taking a small step back to look into the power effect present in the underlying conditionality of adopting R2P. Interestingly, through a Foucauldian reading of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) reports, Patricia Weber (2009) demonstrates that the Commission erected its doctrine in conformity with the way power is operated in the contemporary western society. Namely, the author stresses among other things, the method of control and supervision envisaged by the Commission in case the state fails at fulfilling its commitments towards development (Weber, 2009: 583). The Commission thus constructs a notion of sovereignty centered on the right of the population to life, establishing a biopolitical system over the duty to prevent, monitor,

control and regulate non western human lives. The sovereignty is substituted by the idea of responsibility, instituting biopower (Weber, 2009: 586-587).

On the other hand, Touko Piiparinen (2012) makes a very interesting contribution through an extensive analysis of the increasing role played by regional and sub-regional organizations in implementing R2P, explaining norm compliance through geographical proximity, among other factors. This perspective is useful, for it demonstrates how eventual power effects of conditionality may be also internalized and instrumentalized by regional organizations in order to promote their strategic interests. The author namely argues that in the case of Libya, the LAS managed to wield a compliance pull on the permanent members of the UNSC by calling directly on their responsibilities towards the deteriorating situation in Libya, and the protection of civilians, inducing them to authorise a timely and decisive action to protect civilians as required by the formal definition of R2P. Piiparinen sees the viewpoint of regional actors as having a decisive influence because of their geopolitical proximity to the conflict zone, functioning as an argumentative leverage in promoting their cause within the negotiations with international actors. He further illustrates his point resorting to the theory of “epistemic communities”, as forums of experts who can exert productive power in international politics, by disseminating new meanings, managing information on conflicts, outlining solutions, which ultimately affects the decisions of official actors on managing those conflicts. In the end, the LAS demonstrated its know-how by framing the Libyan crisis as a matter of protecting civilians, instead of “rebellion” or “civil war”, which would have confined the definition of the situation as an exclusive matter of Libyan internal affairs: “[o]ne in which Gaddafi’s central government was still entitled to the full legal rights of a state sovereign, including the Weberian monopoly of the use of force”. The carefulness towards certain specific words influenced the path to take by the UNSC (Piiparinen, 2012: 396-398).

To sum up, the initial inherent power of conditionality in internalizing R2P from the outside was transformed into knowledge from the inside. It is interesting how the regional dynamic of the process proved that the idea of responsibility has been very well internalized, having been transformed into the main argument of regional actors’ rhetoric. As a result, diverse fields of action such as geopolitics, strategic interest, and power are all linked by one same unifying rhetoric of responsibility. Besides, the

regional consensus and involvement might have at the same time empowered UN's decision and mandate, whilst establishing an extra care in the sense that its action would occur under the close attention of surrounding political actors in the region.

Hence, the normative evolution and affirmation of the idea of responsibility as exposed in this first section showed that every success has its recipe. Highlighting its antecedents and underlying dynamics allowed understanding why the UN mandate aiming at human protection in Libya has been usually considered as a political success and consecration of the legitimacy of R2P.

## **II. Do concerned security actors make military operations more efficient?**

The title of this section is a provocation, as it seeks to understand whether the idea of responsibility as approached so far is necessarily translated into efficiency when it comes to putting it in practice by functional organizations. To which extent does the success and construction of legitimacy in political resolutions necessarily imply a practical success? In fact, while the first section was about the causes and possible effects of the internalization of responsibility as a norm, this second section is about how the internalized norm has worked within the organization in charge of applying it to a practical case. In other words, it is about observing how NATO – in command and control of *Operation Unified Protector* – relates to responsibility.

### ***AI NATO and the protection of individuals: an opportunity for reinforcement***

In the context of the evolution of responsibility, NATO has been central as a security actor putting in practice the normative guidelines associated to it. In its effort of institutional reinvention (Barany & Rauchhaus, 2011; Flockhart, 2012; Gärtner, 2003; Rasmussen, 2001; Sjursen, 2004; Zörgbibe, 2002), post-Cold War NATO has effectively evolved around the normative commitment towards the protection of civilians. Presently, that search goes mostly by defending principles and values, by affirming a code of conduct guided by seemingly ethical decisions and choices. This

reconfiguration of the Alliance around ethics and morality is probably the most decisive in the construction of its narrative as an organization, for it carries the concepts, discourses and ideas decisive to the change it strives to.<sup>4</sup>

The decisive shift has namely occurred with NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 (Falk, 2002; ICISS, 2001; Whitman, 2000), which introduced in the Alliance's discourse the importance of individual security, human security and human rights (NATO, 1999; 2000), as opposed to the predominant idea of security in the Cold War strategy. As it has generally been recognized that the Kosovo bombing campaign was illegal in the light of the UN Charter<sup>5</sup>, NATO members at the time preferred to justify their intervention in moral terms, referring to the exceptionality of the situation and the fact that no precedent was intended to be created (Chesterman, 2011; Whitman, 2000). Thanks to that kind of argumentation, NATO was able to take the toll when it comes to action; as a matter of fact, although the Yugoslavian wars were particularly shocking, the UN deplored the abuses being committed without considering them due motives for military action. UN peacekeeping missions became more recurrent, but were aiming mostly at protecting civil operations – food transport, for example – instead of protecting civilians directly (Shaw, 2005: 18).

Later in 2003, alongside the operational and geographical expansion for a more “global” NATO (Gärtner, 2003), the Alliance's command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan was also to protect the Afghan people from the terrorist threat under a peace enforcement mandate under chapter VII of the UN charter, originally supposed to support a UN force (Cornish, 2004; NATO, 2004; 2012). Globally, NATO's transformations after Cold War converge into the maximization and expansion of its fields of action – at the geographical and operational level. In fact, all these transformations arise from an incessant search for relevance, new tasks and new competences, as they are part of an evolving narrative which is imperative to the continuity of the Alliance, to a viable *raison d'être* (Flockhart: 2012:

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<sup>4</sup> According to Trine Flockhart (2012: 81), narratives describe the history, the purpose and the deeds of a collective entity such as NATO, thus contributing to its unity and facilitating its continuous transformation. The narrative plays also a decisive role in the permanent constitution of identity as well as in the management of knowledge, because it sets a perfect connection between the doing (action and practice) and the being (knowledge and identity) (Ciutã, 2007: 192 *apud* Flockhart, 2012: 80).

<sup>5</sup> Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibits the threat or use of force against member states. There are only two exceptions to this: self-defense and action authorized by the UNSC. Neither applied to Kosovo (Chesterman, 2011).

79; Sjursen, 2004). Mikkel Vedby Rasmussen (2001) has rightly described NATO's evolution as the affirmation of a constructivist policy through which the Alliance has imagined itself as an agent of change in the post-Cold War world.

Now, regarding Libya, NATO could not have been clearer since the beginning about the nature of its commitment. NATO's operational action would last until the following objectives would be achieved: the ending of all attacks and threats against civilians and civilian-populated areas; the withdrawal of all military forces by the regime; the permission by the regime of full and immediate humanitarian access to all people in Libya (NATO, 2011c). Frequently reaffirming the will of a speedy solution to the crisis, so Libyan people can live free of violence and thus determine their own future (NATO, 2011d; 2011e).

Besides, as the Libyan people were explicitly asking for the removal of the Qadhafi regime, NATO had an extra responsibility towards a local emancipatory project, a specific role as practical and technical enabler of more than local opposition (Daalder & Stavridis, 2012), but of a revolutionary experience. Arendtian notions related to the revolution, such as the importance of "experiencing" and "freedom" of a new beginning, appear really pertinent here:

Crucial, then, to any understanding of revolutions in the modern age is that the idea of freedom and experience of a new beginning should coincide. And since the current notion of the Free World is that freedom [...] is the highest criterion for judging the constitutions of political bodies, it is not only our understanding of revolution but our conception of freedom, clearly revolutionary in origin, on which may hinge the extent to which we are prepared to accept or reject this coincidence (Arendt, 2006: 19).

Looking at NATO's contribution, can a revolution be helped from the outside and supplied with the freedom element to protect the revolutionary people? From NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen's standing point, it seems it can:

I am very proud of what we have achieved together with our partners [...]. Our military forces prevented a massacre and saved countless lives. We created the conditions for the people of Libya to determine their own future. Their courage and determination in the cause of freedom is an inspiration to the world. [...]

This is a special moment in history, not only for the people of Libya and the wider region, but also for the NATO Alliance. It shows that freedom is the strongest force in the world” (NATO, 2011e).

So, it is clear in this statement how NATO represents its achievements in protecting the lives of citizens: as enabling the critical condition for the Libyan people to be able to have their own revolution, by providing them the freedom to do so. Therefore, when it secures the space for Libyan democratic politics to happen, NATO is strengthening its narrative as a normative power.<sup>6</sup>

### ***B/ Distancing methods reinforcing ethicality***

NATO’s involvement in Libya thus appears as an apotheosis of both its normative re-orientation and out-of-area expansion, punctuated by surgical efficiency in its functional role at strictly accomplishing the UN mandate for civilian protection. This sub-section reflects on the operational aspects of NATO’s action in Libya, more precisely on how they contribute to the narrative depicted above.

We are fulfilling our mandate. We have made significant and steady progress and saved countless lives as a result. By maintaining a high operational tempo and carrying out precision strikes against legitimate military targets, we have seriously degraded the ability of the Qadhafi regime to attack civilians and relieved the pressure on civilian populated areas such as Misratah. Our operations are being conducted with the utmost care to avoid civilian casualties” (NATO, 2011d).

This excerpt is striking for its discursive efficiency in making the best summary possible of a *responsible* operation. It describes a perfectly clean action, respectful of its political mandate, rapid in progress, efficient in saving lives that would otherwise have been lost, through precision strikes against legitimate military targets, remaining cautious and careful in avoiding civilian casualties – the so-called “unintended consequences”. When it presents itself as responsible, NATO internalizes at the same time the idea of functional efficiency.

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<sup>6</sup> Within international organizations, normative power may be understood as the exercise of an influence over the international scene that is inseparable of its cultural and moral content: “It is a power that empowers a certain set of values [...], giving them validity, strength and influence, and giving those who adopt them access to a certain civilizational substance” (Burgess, 2011: 11-12).



It is interesting how this efficiency may be framed within Martin Shaw's (2005) analysis of "risk-transfer wars", as life-risk minimisers for the Western militaries. This kind of war is dominated by precision armament, control and command technology, informatization and robotization, and defines a set of fifteen rules characterizing the risk-transfer war. In the sole above quoted excerpt, three of these rules are explicitly contained, namely:

1. *"Wars must be strictly time-limited: these are quick fix wars";*
2. *"Wars rely on 'precision' weaponry to sustain their legitimacy";*
3. *"Risks of 'accidental' civilian casualties must be minimized, but small massacres must be regarded as inevitable".*

Now, other of Martin Shaw's rules for "risk-transfer wars" (2005) may be added to that account, as the most evident regarding NATO's performance in Libya:

4. *"Wars must, above all, minimize casualties to Western troops":* quantitatively, NATO's record in Libya is effectively characterized by very low casualty rates. With an estimated civilian death toll of 5-10%, i.e., 25 rebel fighters and no casualty among NATO personnel (Barry, 2011: 7-8), one of the evident reasons why the Operation is portrayed as an unprecedented success.
5. *"Western forces should rely heavily on air power and look to others – as far as possible – to take risks on the ground".* One distinguishing aspect of modern warfare, and *Operation Unified Protector* is no exception to it, is the use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and precision-guided bombs and missiles, as fighter aircraft, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, air-to-air refuellers and attack helicopters constitute the gross of the military capabilities used in Libya (Barry, 2011; NATO, 2011f; Zehfuss, 2011). However, NATO has already a background concerning the "boots off the ground" strategy, namely its air campaign in Kosovo and Afghanistan. Besides, Libyan rebels made it clear that they did not want foreign boots on the ground, so as to mitigate the perceived threat to their sovereignty (Etzioni, 2012: 46-47).

It is worth referring to Maja Zehfuss' (2011) insight on how precision weaponry ultimately produces the idea of ethicality. Zehfuss (2011: 555) namely refers that

developments in weapon technology have been fortunate in making possible for war to reduce collateral damage, in the sense that the precision-guided munitions seem to enable to hit smaller targets. The relatively low number of civilian casualties in UAV operations conducts to the assertion that precision weapons have in some way improved the ethicality or humaneness of warfare. To Zehfuss (2011: 559), it is the focus on precision weapons that is crucial to the representation of Western warfare as ethical and superior.

6. “Longer-term post-war risks must be spread as widely as possible through an international division of labour”: even before the termination of the Operation, post-conflict efforts were remitted in the hands of organizations such as the UN, EU, OIC, AU, LAS: “[w]e encourage these organizations’ efforts in the immediate and longer term post-conflict period” (NATO, 2011d). Later, asked about a continued military presence during the transition, starting 1 November 2011, Rasmussen stated that NATO had “no intention to keep armed forces in...in the neighbourhood of Libya”. So once the operation was closed, it was definitely closed, in a “clear-cut termination” of the operation (NATO, 2011e).

So as to underpin this idea, when questioned about further prosecution of pro-Qadhafi individuals in the post-regime phase, Rasmussen is also clear: the responsibility after 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011 is the Libyan authorities’, which have to deal with the internal Libyan affairs (NATO, 2011e). This is a clear distancing move from a “we are responsible to protect citizens” to a “they” are responsible for the management of the consequences of our protective intervention. This post-operation disengagement testifies a distancing practical management in the sense of David Chandler’s (2013) argument of a “NATO is not responsible towards independent local actors” narrative. Consequently, clear-cut finales blur the original idea of responsibility, in that it gets diffused by a distancing representation of agency, sustained by the regional embedding of co-responsibility, on the one hand, and by the capable agency of liberated Libyans on the other hand. It tells in a way that ultimately there is no one to blame for the long-term outcome of the intervention, but the local agency which may be successful or not in dealing with the post-becoming of their country.

To sum up, this section showed how the intervention in Libya was useful in strengthening NATO's narrative concerning out-of-area interventions, by associating its functional action to an ethic of liberation and local emancipation. The technology inherent to the military capabilities used in Libya also served to reinforce the idea of ethicality as a military deontology respectful of innocent civilians. In fact, the western way of war, characterized by the transfer of risk into the distant enemies (Shaw, 2005) implies a distancing of the same human bodies the interveners claim to protect in their political discourses.

## **Conclusion**

As one of the most recent patterns of interventionism, characterized by the protection of civilians, NATO's intervention in Libya is an important case for deepening our comprehension of how individual-centred military interventions have come to evolve. This paper addressed namely the need to denaturalize the ideas of normalization and success inherent to the intervention in Libya, in order to better understand the substance and the implications of responsibility in adopting individual-centred security policies.

The first section approached the conceptual and normative evolution underlying the affirmation of responsibility as a leading norm in contemporary interventionism. It showed there is actually a precise background anchored in the affirmation of security as ethics and focused on the individualisation of security policies, denoting a wider sense of cosmopolitanism arising since the end of the Cold War. Regarding the intervention in Libya, it also demonstrated how the increasing role of the regional embedding expanded political consensus, thus reinforcing the idea of co-responsibility and legitimacy behind the UNSC resolution to allow the use of force in Libya.

The second section focused on NATO as the actor executing the military issuance of a "responsible mandate". Although the Operation is consistent with the organizational evolution of NATO as being committed to morally justified missions aiming at protecting individuals, the opportunistic factor cannot be dismissed in the interpretation of its performance. In fact, the intervention in Libya proved to be an

important opportunity for the reinforcement of NATO's out-of-area narrative and global representation as a normative power. The specific operational features of this intervention enabled a political distance as well as physical *détachement*, facilitating the clear-cut ending of NATO's involvement and transferring different kinds of risks into the local setting, which ends up by confusing the original significance of responsibility. In spite of that, NATO managed to deepen its narrative, feed its continuous evolution, and maintain its self-identity.

At last, like "human security" for example, it has been difficult to find consensus around a concept such as "responsibility", namely concerning its formal definition, ontological implications, and practical applicability. "Responsibility" lacks objectivity, because it refers to values and as such it is hardly measurable through tangible indicators. Despite the ethical move at protecting *persons*, one cannot actually dismiss the manifest opportunity for reinvention and reinforcement it presents to international organizations such as the UN and NATO. Finally, this sort of amorality (Durodié, 2010; Weber, 2010) is pointing at the apparent humanization of the leading patterns in international security as a paradox, which may be misleading in making an accurate balance of the "Springs" of the world.

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