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The Lingering Repercussions of NATO's Stupid War in Libya

By John Glaser

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From the beginning, Antiwar.com warned of the inevitable blowback that would result from the US-NATO war in Libya. Eager to prove itself on the side of Arab Spring protests, America chose sides in a civil war on trumped up pretenses of humanitarian intervention. Helping to overthrow Muammar Gadhafi, a dispensable ally at the time, ended up bolstering the power and influence of dangerous armed Islamist groups and destabilizing much of North Africa, most notably spawning a coup in Mali ^[1].

A new piece from the *Guardian* ^[2] reports that, as Walter Russell Mead summarizes it ^[3], “The Mali War was blowback from the Libya War; now we have blowback from the Mali War... in Libya.”

The impetus for this uprising [in Mali] came from ethnic Tuareg soldiers who had fought alongside Muammar Gaddafi and fled south when his regime fell. They were later augmented by jihadists from Libya and across north Africa, who triggered international condemnation for their destruction of ancient Sufi Muslim shrines in Timbuktu. The fear across the Maghreb is that the French operation that has pushed them out of the northern cities has inadvertently compounded problems elsewhere in north Africa as jihadist units disperse.

“If you squeeze a balloon in one part, it bulges out in another,” said Bill Lawrence, of International Crisis Group, a political consultancy. “There’s no question that the French actions in Mali had the effect of squeezing that balloon towards Algeria and Libya.”

So the US-NATO war in Libya bolstered Islamist militias and scattered jihadists around to neighboring countries, and now it's coming full circle back to Libya. As usual, US interventionism generates unintended consequences which are then used to justify more interventionism.

But the truth is, things never fully quieted down in Libya. The current government, hailed by Barack Obama as on the path to secularism and democracy, has allied with jihadist groups like Ansar al-Sharia ^[4], one of many that refuse to disarm and recognize the government (or whatever you call it).

"This leaves us wondering exactly how all those clever humanitarians in the White House run the numbers these days," Mead writes. "Do they calculate that our Libyan excursion saved more lives than have been lost in the subsequent chaos in not one but now several northern African countries? We certainly hope that whatever accounting they use is very clever, because from our back-of-the-envelope arithmetic, there has been zero benefit to the national interest from this poorly judged, poorly prepared, poorly handled war."

Beyond having no benefit to the "national interest ^[5]," this convoluted mess has been a net loss for US interests and for the well-being of most in the region.

[1] spawning a coup in Mali: <http://news.antiwar.com/2012/03/26/mali-coup-has-us-interventionism-written-all-over-it/>

[2] new piece from the *Guardian*: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/apr/28/libya-mali-islamist-violence-tripoli>

[3] summarizes it: <http://blogs.the-american-interest.com/wrm/2013/04/29/the-libyan-afterparty-comes-back-to-libya/>

[4] allied with jihadist groups like Ansar al-Sharia: <http://antiwar.com/blog/2013/03/11/libyan-govt-aiding-and-abetting-ansar-al-sharia/>

[5] national interest: https://www.google.com/url?q=http://antiwar.com/blog/2012/11/06/why-national-security-threats-threaten-the-government-and-not-you/&sa=U&ei=MYN-UcCMNdKC2gW6_4HwCg&ved=0CAwQFjAC&client=internal-uds-cse&usg=AFQjCNHoe_AHHIHcYO53w563IaITgf3VCg