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Brussels Forum

Libya: What Now? (PARTIAL TRANSCRIPT)

The Hon. Alexander Graf Lambsdorff: -- of the resolution we know all that but still at the end of the day it was a thing led by Paris. So I would not count, and I'm saying this clearly, you know, sadly, I would not count on European Union's structures to actually deal with a situation like Syria.

I think the obvious national lead on Syria needs to come from Turkey. Turkey is the neighbor, the neighboring country. Turkey has a "zero problems" doctrine with its neighbors. I think you cannot have zero problems with a neighbor that's treating its population the way the Syrians are currently treating their democracy movement, so I would want to see some initiative coming Ankara.

This is a dilemma for Turkey. I mean, let's be very clear, because the zero problems were with the current regime. Now, to find a way to support the democratic

forces in Syria without completely alienating Assad and the Ba'ath Party is going to be very, very tricky. But what I would say for the time being, and as I said, again, I am not happy about this at all, is don't count on the European Union as such to deal with Syria. That's the lesson from Libya.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Okay. Thank you. Two other questions. Sir, you wanted to ask? But very quick because we're --

Mr. David Ignatius: Just a brief point about Syria. I think you're right that the closest neighbor, Turkey, Prime Minister Erdogan has an especially close relationship with Bashar al-Assad and sees Turkey as a strategic dep. Let's imagine a situation in several weeks in which you have 10,000 demonstrators in Latakia in the north or in Hamah, a city that was the stronghold of the Muslim brotherhood who were cornered by Syrian troops, who were in danger of being massacred on the scale that we saw in Hama in 1982.

What does the international community do, then? Have we created with this half in-half out military interventions sanctioned by the U.N. in Libya a doctrine that we will come to the aid of future victims, of Srebrenica-like massacres, because this process is rolling through the Arab world and I really think there has been insufficient given to whether we're establishing a principle. And that's the issue to me that Syria raises. You know, if that came next would our response be conditioned by the vote we just took on Libya.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Yes, please.

Mr. Steve Larrabee: Steve Larrabee, Rand, Let me pick up where David left off, because it seems to me that there's a disconnect and a contradiction between our political goals in Libya, which are, according to the President of the United States and Baroness Ashton, yesterday to get rid of Qaddafi and the means that we are willing to employ so far to do that and the resources and it is quite clear as we've said that the

no-fly zone is not going to get rid of Qaddafi and then you are likely to have, as David suggested, a stalemate.

So how do you get, then, from that particular point where we are today to any kind of post-Qaddafi scenario? Because it's quite clear that Qaddafi himself is not going to just abdicate and get out on his own.

Secondly, just quickly, I don't think that the French role in this has been as positive as you, Mr. Lambsdorff, suggested because, in fact, it's been my view dictated primarily by domestic concerns on Sharkozy's part and there was not very much coordination and consultation in the French role, which has not, I think, set a very good precedent.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Mr. Lambsdorff?

The Hon. Alexander Graf Lambsdorff: Well, let me answer on the French point perhaps first.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Yes. Sorry.

The Hon. Alexander Graf Lambsdorff: The motivation may not be pure, but the result is positive. I mean, that's what I would say. When he's facing an election, he's facing dire polls, so well maybe domestic considerations did play a certain role. And they didn't do everything perfectly. I mean, I think it was just flabbergasting not to invite Turkey to this meeting at the (Inaudible) a major mistake that created lots of problems inside NATO afterwards.

So I'm not saying that their role is perfect or that, you know, every aspect of their motivation is pure, but I think without French lead we wouldn't be discussing a post-Qaddafi Libya today. We would discuss is Benghazi the new Srebrenica. And I think for that alone he deserved credit.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Mr. Bildt.

The Hon. Carl Bildt: I think it has been touched upon that we need to look broad in the picture. As we now go deeper into the Libya operation, which we'll have to do in the more complex phases, we must not lose

sight of the even greater strategic challenges that we have in the region. Syria -- Libya is not necessarily the most significant of the countries in the region, to put it in the mildest possible terms. Qaddafi is a unique person, but Libya not necessarily the center of gravity. Syria controls the Levant. That's Lebanon, that's Iraq, that's the relationship with Israel that is also from the Turkish point of view, exceedingly important, diverse society ruled by a minority, complex history, as we are aware of with lots of violence within memory. Algeria controls the Maghreb. We haven't talked very much of that but, I mean, I need not say more about the significance of Algeria and what might happen there.

And then Bahrain, this small organized, by the standards of the Arab world one of the more decent places, but with the sectarian tension that there's a rise up escalating and then contaminating the entire Gulf region in a sort of sectarian conflicts with the Saudis and the Iranians rightly or wrongly seen as in a

conflict that then extends into Yemen and extends into the more sensitive areas of Saudi Arabia. Those are the true challenges that we might be facing.

On Syria I'll say that I happen to know that the Turks have been there on high political levels since seven weeks ago, saying to President Assad, "These are the things you have to do and you have to do them fast in order to open up." And he has done, if you see what he said in the last few weeks. He has said rather remarkable things if you look at the history. But the question is, is he behind the curve as well? And that might well be the case and what do we do then?

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Thank you. Another question. Sorry. Yes, sir. Yes.

Mr. Steve Erlanger: Yes. Hi. Steve Erlanger from the New York Times. I wanted to ask you, I find David separately, you are two democratic politicians and there's a kind of cynicism in the room which I find quite extraordinary. There's a sort of democratic deficit about this war. There's a no fly zone passed

by the U.N., which the Arab League thought was a no fly zone and probably many publics thought was a no fly zone but suddenly we're at war to the end. The U.N. resolution says quite clearly there's an arms embargo. David Cameron says that there's an arms embargo that covers the whole country. People are talking about sending in arms. People are talking about sending in troops.

Carl said there's supposed to be no troops, but there's a difference, perhaps, between occupation and taking out Qaddafi. I mean, if this is a regime change war, why not say so clearly? And why not put real resources behind it? I thought after Iraq, we kind of learned that you don't slip into major wars without consequences, without thinking them through, without, at least, more discussion with your democracies. The United States changed its position in 27 hours. Lots of people fumbled. I agree it's very nice to save the people of Benghazi. But, as our Belgian friend said, in whose interests for whom, who's our opposition, who

are we supporting, what do they want? The East was the source of a Muslim Brotherhood rebellion against Qaddafi in '93. What do we know, but we're going to war as you say in a country that's not very important?

Ms. Nahida Nakad: (Inaudible)?

Mr. Steve Erlanger: When Egypt is the big enchilada and we see things going on in Syria, then we put the West, really, on the table here, but I don't have the sense we've thought it through very well. Thank you.

Mr. David Ignatius: Well, I think, Steve, you've encapsulated the doubts and anxieties that are felt. Just read the U.S. press. The anxiety about this is stronger in the U.S. right now than in Europe. It wasn't well-thought through. The goals still are not well-stated, how it will end. The crucial question that you want military planners to address is, near as I can tell, undefined. You know, I've thought that the basic lessons about Iraq that you would assume would have been burned into policy makers in the United

States most of all, but everywhere. It's how easily and quickly they're overlooked -- it's just amazing.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: So how far are we ready to go? Mr. Bildt, what do you think?

Hon. Carl Bildt: In Libya?

Ms. Nahida Nakad: In Libya, do we want to -- can we ask Qaddafi? Do we want to do it? How long do we -- can we stand war?

Hon. Carl Bildt: Well, we don't know. But there's an unpredictability to it. When the thing started, the rebellion against Qaddafi I mean, we were sitting here sort of before mention we were having a dinner, which was, I think, centered on other issues, but it got a Libya dimension fairly fast. And it was most of us, including myself, operated on the assumption that it would be over within four or five days, because first Qaddafi was Qaddafi, rather bizarre character to put it in the mildest possible form, so it was difficult to foresee that in this area of sort of massive risings

for values that we believe in, that he was going to survive.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: But what made you think four days? I mean, why four days?

Hon. Carl Bildt: Well, that was the assumption. I have to say, in all honesty, that there were a couple of foreign ministers around the table representing countries much closer to Libya with a history of engagement who waved a warning finger and said this is not going to be easy. There's a history to it. You have to be aware of things, but we believed it was going to be over -- I think the same in the U.S. -- and that it was easy to say Qaddafi has to go immediately because the belief was that he was going to go anyhow, two days from there.

And then we found ourselves in a situation where, instead of leaving, he was actually on the verge of winning to a certain extent. Whether he would be able to conquer Benghazi or not, I think, I leave that for the historians to decide, but then it was necessary to

do something, and the Arab League thought the same. And I think the Arab League -- very many of them, and I would agree with that -- thought that, also, out of consideration for what was going to be the scene into the rest of the Arab world. If Qaddafi would have won or reestablished some sort of control, the Arab spring would have turned into an Arab winter fairly fast all over the place. So it was a decision taken, not explicitly but implicitly, as a signal to the wider region, and, now, we are where we are.

And we need to complete it and make the transition to the post-Qaddafi scenario. Then exactly how that will be managed, we'd need to devote a lot of political attention to that. But, as said, that must not be allowed to consume 100 percent of our energies, intellectual and otherwise, because there are lots of other places in the region where developments are going to be far more significant for the future than in Libya itself.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: We can take one more question, maybe two if they're very, very quick, please.

Matthew Horn: Matthew Horn. I have a quick, quick question. Now, we were in the Balkans together, Minister Bildt, and I look around and we saw all these hot spots in the world. And my question is, you know, if you put 1973 aside, is Libya the new international legal paradigm or is it sui generis? We have Syria. We have the Fifth fleet in Bahrain. I mean, there's problems all over, but yet we chose Libya. We saw (inaudible) together. I mean, there's a lot of problems, yet we chose Libya, but is it the new paradigm or is it sui generis? I mean, that's, I think, the bottom line.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Okay. Yeah, well, maybe. Great. So we get the two together.

Ms. Marta Dassu: Yes. There is a very serious risk of stalemate and partition, but I think you underestimate the risk of a very serious humanitarian crisis because we will have economic sanctions freezing

interaction of supplies. And since we will have a very serious humanitarian crisis, we will be forced to go in the ground, in my view.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Is your question a bit related? Okay. If we can get the third question in, and then we will wrap up with the last thoughts about what we have been saying so far.

Jim Kunder: Jim Kunder, German Marshall Fund. What do you say to the double standard accusation? What's the difference between Libya and Yemen?

Ms. Nahida Nakad: (Inaudible).

The Hon. Alexander Graf Lambsdorff: Let me start. The new paradigm was sui generis. Legally speaking, it's quite remarkable how strongly this new norm of responsibility to protect has figured in the debate, including the Security Council documents. So, legally speaking, there may be a paradigmatic development that's in it. Sui generis? Yes. Because each and every one of these cases is, by definition, sui generis. Libya is a country -- I mean, this is a, you

know, very simple answer -- but, of course, it is sui generis.

And then Libya. What's the difference between Libya and Yemen? Libya is a lot closer to Europe. I mean, that is a very simple fact. It's a lot closer to Europe. It's strategically more important. Migration flows go through Libya. The oil issue is an issue. And, as I said before, Qaddafi is, of course -- he represents something that the German, the French, the Italian publics all understand to be something really undesirable, massively undesirable.

To Steve's point earlier, I would say if Qaddafi had regained control of Benghazi, what would we be discussing now, number one? Number two, is there a status quo ante to which we can go back if Qaddafi stays on? It's going to be a very different status quo than the one we had before after he had modified his political stance following 2004. So, I think, where we are now is where Steve Larrabee put us -- the operational gap. The operational gaps between our

professed goals and the necessity of moving to the post-Qaddafi area, and this operational gap, this is where Carl and his colleagues have to close. This gap needs to be closed by the foreign ministers, by the governments of our -- the states of the coalition.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: David Ignatius and then the last word to Mr. Bildt.

Mr. David Ignatius: Well, I just would note on this question of whether this is sui generis or a new paradigm. One thing that I've seen, looking back over the last several decades, is the power of the weak. That is, weak groups within a country, weak opposition movements in the expectation that if they stand up against authoritarian governments, they will be rescued by the international community. And I, to be honest with you, saw some of this in Bosnia. We saw some of this in Kosovo. I've seen this over and over in Lebanon. There's a tendency to start fights that you can't finish in the expectation that the international

community will be there in some way to rescue or protect you.

And, I think, that's a question people need to have much more clarity about because we're entering a period in which it just -- this wave is cresting across a whole region of the world. And the last thing I would think that Europe and the United Nations as a whole would want to do is make a commitment to intervene everywhere. I mean, that's just -- that would be the antithesis of what this period ought to be about.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: Carl Bildt, can we intervene everywhere? And what can we do?

Hon. Carl Bildt: No, we can't. And this takes us back to discussions quite sometime ago in European history. If you remember -- or I don't remember, but I've read about it -- 1956 Hungarian Revolution, it was alleged -- and there was a vivid debate after the Soviets went in and crushed the Hungarian revolution -- whether the freedom fighters of Budapest had been led to believe by -- I think it was (inaudible) Europe at

the time, which was run by the CIA -- whether they had been led to believe that there would be Western military intervention, that that had led them to do things that had made it easier for the Soviets to actually crush them. I mean, that led to a certain amount of reluctance, perhaps too much of reluctance, afterwards by Western forces to say something concerning what was happening in the Soviet Union because we feared that we would say things that we wouldn't be able to deliver at the end of the day. 1968, Czechoslovakia, if you look at the statements coming out of the Western governments when things happened there, extremely, extremely careful.

Now, we are in a completely different party, concerning the rhetoric that is used. I saw a statement by a rather prominent Western leader, I think, that yesterday, or the day before yesterday, which promised things that are well beyond anything we would even contemplate to deliver in terms of support if things happened.

We need to sort of align. Difficult to do in this al jazeera time because this is -- these are al jazeera revolutions is driven by the media, more al jazeera than Facebook as a matter of fact. We need to sort of align the -- what we say and what we do, and that is not entirely easy.

Final remark from my side, I think Marta Dassu points at something that is easily forgotten. There's a vast humanitarian crisis coming there because the Libyan economy has ceased to exist for practical purposes, and there's six million people there. And not -- they probably have some reserves so they can go on with the money for quite some time, but the bakeries were run by the Egyptians, and most of them have left. And most of the other things were run by the Chinese or the Turks or whatever, and they have also left. And that means that there will be no bread. There will be no other things for a couple of million people, including in areas perhaps controlled by Col. Qaddafi. What do we do then? Something must be done then.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: What can we do? We can't stay there.

Hon. Carl Bildt: Well, we -- the Security Council Resolution, different elements to it, it does talk about delivering humanitarian aid. So then the UN and the different agencies must be mobilized in order to help that, but one of…

Ms. Nahida Nakad: And protected. So there you have ground troops. You can't send…

Hon. Carl Bildt: No. I -- normally, when we have a dialogue, we have a dialogue from the (inaudible) even about this. The UN humanitarian people are extremely keen not to have troops in the vicinity of what they do. They are sort of like the Red Cross. They want to go in and say we are the UN and we are the Red Cross. We are not party to the conflict. We are the humanitarians. So I do think that a humanitarian operation will have to go in with sort of the neutral flag that is the hallmark of humanitarian operations. Be that the ICIC or be that the UN or be that with

(inaudible), but the politics of it might still be rather complicated.

Ms. Nahida Nakad: And try not to get killed. Well, thank you very much. Thanks, everybody. This is a very interesting conversation.

Mr. Craig Kennedy: And thank you. That is a terrific job of moderating. Thank you so much. It was a terrific discussion. We'll be back in 15 minutes to talk about Turkey.