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- Thesis

BRITISH PRESS OPINION OF THE
2011 INTERVENTION IN LIBYA

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1. Introduction

In 2011 a coalition of states began a military intervention in Libya. The coalition consisted primarily of NATO members, but also included several Arab countries. The justification for the intervention was the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1973 which allowed the intervening forces to “take all necessary measures” to protect civilians, but also prohibited an occupying force, meaning the interveners had to focus primarily on an air campaign and the implementation of a no-fly zone.¹ Humanitarian intervention is a major issue in international relations and one which represents a clash between two core ideas, the sovereignty of states and the desire to uphold human rights. Unsurprisingly it is a controversial topic which has a long and complex history.

The 2011 intervention in Libya was, at first, cited by many as a model example of how to run an intervention.² Whilst it was still controversial, there were plenty of observers who described the intervention as the right thing to do and in the immediate aftermath labelled it as a success. It had wide support from the international community and its supporters were quick to proclaim it as an example of how to get intervention right. They claimed that it had saved lives and been carried out in the correct manner, setting an example for the use of the new Responsibility to Protect (R2P) norm in international relations. However, Libya has since slid into chaos. The aftermath of the intervention and the deterioration of the situation in Libya has left many questions. Was the intervention morally justified? Did NATO overstep its mandate? What does this mean for R2P and future humanitarian interventions? People are now seemingly far more critical of the intervention and what they perceive as its failings, including leaders who were involved in pushing for and running it.

In this thesis, I want to look at the discourse surrounding the intervention, to determine how opinions have varied and whether they have indeed shifted as strongly

¹ UN website: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm>

² Daalder and Stavridis, “NATO’s Victory in Libya the Right Way to Run an Intervention” pgs. 2-3

as they seem to have from positive to negative. Specifically, I want to look at the public discourse in one country that was heavily involved in pushing for and then carrying out the intervention, the UK. I will analyse the British press's coverage of the intervention and how this may have changed over time in terms of the level of support being shown. The press and the rest of the media play a significant role in shaping the discourse surrounding any event and I think it is worthwhile analysing what they say and how this might have changed.

2. Literature Review

A great deal has been written about the intervention in Libya, by academics, the press and politicians. There is also plenty of work on the broader topic of the Arab Spring, which the uprising and then intervention in Libya was a part of. Since it is also a very recent event more and more is being written every day. Here I will briefly review some of the literature on the Libyan intervention and the various reactions to it. I will also cover some of the literature regarding press coverage and the role of the media in global affairs that I feel might be relevant to my proposed research.

There was a considerable level of support for the intervention, especially in its immediate aftermath. In an article in *Foreign Affairs* from March 2012 Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis declared that "Nato's operation in Libya has rightly been hailed as a model intervention."³ Their article focuses on the role of NATO members during the intervention (unsurprising as they were both representatives of NATO at the time) and speaks in glowing terms of its success. They argue the intervention achieved its primary aim of protecting civilians as well as helped provide "time and space" for Gaddafi to be overthrown by local forces. People outside of NATO have also praised the intervention, in an article in *Foreign Policy* Marc Lynch states –

³ Daalder and Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya the Right Way to Run an Intervention," pg. 2

*"The NATO intervention did save Libya's protestors from a near-certain bloodbath in Benghazi. It did help Libyans free themselves from what was an extremely nasty, violent, and repressive regime."*⁴

However, there have been several more critical opinions about the intervention as well, especially since the intervention ended and Libya slid into chaos. Valentino argues that the political impact of various humanitarian interventions has won the US few friends and may have harmed the nation's security.⁵ He also questions whether the money spent on military interventions like the one in Libya might not have saved more lives had they been spent on other humanitarian concerns like providing medical supplies or supporting refugees.⁶ Meanwhile Alan Kuperman claims that the interveners made a number of mistakes and ultimately may have harmed more Libyans than it helped.⁷

Many of the articles and books written about the intervention since it officially ended have focused on the precarious situation that Libya was in following the interventions end, with many academics arguing that the country was left in a deeply unstable position following the war. After a relative peaceful period in late 2011 and the early part of 2012 the country was increasingly the scene of violence. In September 2012, an attack on the U.S. embassy in Benghazi resulted in the death of the American Ambassador. Many have claimed that Libya is now a failed state and that the intervention was the cause of this.⁸ Horace Campbell has called the NATO intervention a "catastrophic" failure.⁹ He has also criticised the reaction of Western politicians who were quick to praise the intervention as a success whilst Libya suffered catastrophic damage to its infrastructure and massive loss of life.

By contrast, Christopher J. Fettweis has argued that those who have criticised the intervention are wrong to blame the intervening coalition for Libya's instability.

⁴ Lynch, "What the Libyan Intervention Achieved," <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/27/what-the-libya-intervention-achieved/>

⁵ Valentino, "The True Costs of Humanitarian Intervention," pg. 65

⁶ Valentino, "The True Costs of Humanitarian Intervention," pg. 9

⁷ Kuperman, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention? Reassessing NATO's Libya Campaign" pg. 133

⁸ Sensini, *Sowing Chaos* pg. 206

⁹ Campbell, *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya*, pg. 18

Instead he believes that the country was already heading towards disaster and that it is not fair to expect the intervention to have totally fixed Libya's problems. In his view the problems of Libya will ultimately have to be solved the Libyan people, he draws parallels with Lebanon's past and makes the more general argument that external peacekeeping and interventions can only have a limited impact.¹⁰ In this sense he doesn't dispute the difficult situation that the country is in, he merely absolves the interveners of blame. The various academic perspectives on Libya mostly seem to accept that the country fell into a state of chaos following the intervention, but they differ as to whether the intervention should be blamed for this.

So, what were the reactions to the Libyan intervention outside of these mostly academic circles? In the UK, there was widespread support for the intervention amongst politicians. Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favour of military intervention on March 21st. Five-hundred and fifty-seven MP's supported the action whilst only thirteen voted against it.¹¹ The then Prime Minister David Cameron has stated that he is proud of the role that the UK played in overthrowing Gaddafi. However, in 2015 the Foreign Affairs Select Committee published a highly critical report on Britain's role in the intervention. They found that the government had failed to properly understand the situation in Libya or identify potential extremist groups operating within the country. Ultimately, they said that David Cameron should be held responsible for the British policy failure in Libya.¹² This shows how the intervention is now viewed in negative terms and as a failure, despite initial widespread support amongst Britain's politician.

Amongst the British public support for the intervention was never as widespread. A YouGov poll from March 20th 2011, just after the intervention began, showed that 45% of respondents said the action was right, whilst 36% said it was wrong and 19% said they did not know. Continued polls by YouGov up until the end of October and the

¹⁰ Fettweis, "Don't Blame NATO for Libya," <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/dont-blame-nato-libya-18152?page=6>

¹¹ BBC News, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-12816279>

¹² Foreign Affairs Select Committee Report, Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options.

intervention, shows that these numbers remained roughly the same. The final poll on October 26th showed a slight increase in support. With 49% saying the intervention was right, 31% wrong and 21% don't know.¹³ However other polls showed that only a third of respondents supported the intervention.¹⁴ It seems that the public were somewhat divided and that at no point was there a real consensus in favour or against the intervention like there was from the countries politicians. Public caution regarding intervention in the Middle East can perhaps be explained by the legacy of Britain's involvement in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The Iraq war had a significant impact on trust between the public and political classes, especially when it came to military ventures in the Middle East. By the time of the crisis in Libya it is likely that the British public were far warier of intervention than they had been only a few years earlier.

So, what of media reaction to the intervention in Libya? Like the rest of the Arab Spring, much of what has been written regarding the media and its relevance to the situation in Libya has focused on the rise of social media. By comparison the role of traditional media has been given less attention. Western news reports and academics have both focused on the use of blogs, Twitter and Facebook to organise protests and opposition to the Libyan government. The importance of social media may have been overstated, since major protests appeared in areas with virtually no internet access.¹⁵ The focus on social media during the uprising in Libya and the rest of the Arab Spring is part of the reason I have chosen to research the role of the traditional media instead. I feel there is room for new research in this area.

The role of media in shaping public opinion is important to my research topic. One famous book of relevance in this area is journalist Walter Lippmann's 1922 book *Public Opinion*. Lippmann's book focuses on how the media plays a critical role in shaping public opinion and creating people's idea of the world. An important idea introduced

¹³ YouGov, http://cdn.yougov.com/cumulus_uploads/document/3941/YG-Archives-Trackers-Libya-271011.pdf

¹⁴ Reuters, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-libya-britain-poll-idUKTRE72LOCC20110322>

¹⁵ Ramadan, "Media Coverage of the Arab Spring and the New Middle East," pg. 5

by Lippmann is the concept of “manufactured consent”¹⁶. This idea has then been further developed by thinkers like Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky.¹⁷ Manufactured consent is where the media is said to be heavily influenced by governments and ruling elites, meaning that media reporting reflects the views of politicians and those in power. Thus, in the British media we would expect to see a significant amount of support for the intervention in Libya, at least initially, since those in power were supporting the intervention.

By contrast others have argued in favour of the so called “CNN effect” which takes a different view of media-government relations.¹⁸ Here the idea is that the news media holds enormous influence over public opinion and even government policy. By extensively reporting on major international events the news media can help push governments to respond. Examples of the CNN effect often given are interventions like the one in Somalia in 1993 and Bosnia. The CNN effect and the idea of manufactured consent are both controversial. However, they are both useful ideas to keep in mind when looking at media opinions on the intervention in Libya. The influence the media has on shaping public opinion and politics is part of the reason why I feel research in this area is worthwhile.

3. Research Design and Methodology

The main research question of this thesis is as follows –

What views of the 2011 intervention in Libya were presented in the British press from the interventions beginning until September 2016?

To answer this question, this thesis takes several steps. Firstly, and most importantly, I will use textual analysis to look at the coverage of the intervention in two British newspapers. This will be the main bulk of the research in this thesis. Through textual analysis I will assess each article and determine whether their view of the intervention

¹⁶ Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, chapter 15

¹⁷ Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*

¹⁸ Robinson, “Theorizing the Influence of Media on World Politics: Models of Media Influence on Foreign Policy,” pg. 524

was positive or negative and why. The primary goal of the analysis here is to determine the general tone of each article regarding the intervention. I will then categorise each article as either having a positive, negative or neutral view of the intervention. For example, if the author of the article consistently expresses the opinion that the intervention has been successful then the article would be categorised as being positive. If the article consistently refers to the intervention in negative terms, then it would be categorised as negative and if the article expresses a mixed or unclear opinion then it would be considered a neutral article. I will then be able to look at the articles and determine how opinions on the intervention may have changed over time.

If opinion articles from shortly after the intervention began are generally positive, but newer articles are more negative then this would suggest that there was an overall trend of viewing the intervention more negatively as time went on. It may even be possible to link sudden changes in opinions to certain moments or events. By comparing the dates of publication and opinions presented with a timeline of events during the intervention I might be able to determine if a moment in time swung media opinions one way or another. For example, it will be interesting to see if there was a significant change in opinions following the death of Gaddafi.

I have several working hypotheses that I will be looking to test in order to fully explore and answer my research question –

- *Firstly, I predict that coverage will on average become more negative about the intervention over time.*
- *Secondly, I believe that The Telegraph will broadly be more supportive of the intervention than The Guardian.*
- *Thirdly, I believe that articles written by politicians, military leaders or other “establishment members” will be overwhelmingly supportive of the intervention.*
- *Finally, I predict that support for the intervention will be high in the immediate aftermath of Gaddafi’s death and the subsequent withdrawal of forces.*

These hypotheses should all be testable by looking at the results of my textual analysis. As well as the tone of their content, I will also look at the authors of the articles to see what this says about the press coverage of the intervention. This will help answer several questions. Do certain kinds of authors, such as politicians or those involved in the policy behind the intervention, present a more positive view of it than journalists and what kind of people are writing about the intervention and when?

3.1 Article Selection and Timeframe

As sources for the articles, I have chosen The Guardian and The Telegraph as I believe they are ideal publications to use. Both are respected broadsheet newspapers and both come from opposite wings of the political spectrum, the Guardian being regarded as left wing and the Telegraph as right wing. Looking at two papers from either end of the political spectrum should allow me to more easily see a range of different opinions. I hope this research will give a useful insight into the public discourse surrounding the intervention, although it will not give a full picture.

In terms of specific article selection, I am focusing only on opinion pieces and editorials from the two papers that were published in the time-period from shortly before the start of the coalitions intervention up until the present. By selecting opinion pieces, I will limit the number of articles that I must assess, since analysing every article on the Libya intervention in both papers would be very time consuming. Furthermore, my research question is about the views presented in the news media and so opinion articles seemed a natural fit. The selected articles will already be focused on presenting a viewpoint it will be easier to determine what their opinion is, whereas general news articles are likely to be more neutral and thus harder to categorise as being for or against the intervention. The textual analysis will use articles from the online and print editions of both newspapers.

My research is concerned primarily with how the intervention was received once it was underway and how this may then have changed over time. However, I feel it is

also important to include articles from the period before the intervention started, to gain an understanding of the environment prior to the actual deployment of the intervention forces. All articles analysed were published between February 15th 2011, which marked the beginning of the Libyan Civil War, and October 1st 2016 (the date at which the thesis was being written).

I have broken my results into sections that cover periods of time. Section one covers the period from February 15th, 2011 (the start of the Libyan revolution and protests) until April 30th 2011. This means it covers the build up to and then first few weeks of the intervention, so the articles from this section should give a good insight into how the intervention was initially received. The next two sections cover the rest of 2011 and are broken into parts covering May 1st until September 30th and October 1st until December 31st. The idea here is these two parts will show how opinion changed whilst the intervention was underway and the October-December section should show how opinion reacted following the death of Gaddafi and the end of the intervention. The last two sections are far longer and cover January 1st 2012 until December 31st 2013 and January 1st 2014 to September 30th 2016. Since the intervention was no longer current news there were far fewer articles published and so these sections cover a much longer span of time. The intention is that these two sections can show how opinion has changed in the years since the intervention ended.

I had access to the articles, both online and in print, via databases in the university library. Factiva was the primary database used to source articles for the content analysis section of this thesis. Factiva allowed me to search both The Guardian and The Telegraph (online and print editions) for mentions of the Libyan intervention, within my specified timeframe. It also allowed me to filter the results to include only opinion pieces and editorials concerning Libya. Over the entire period of investigation, 207 articles were looked at, 123 from The Guardian and 84 from The Telegraph.

4. Results

4.1 February 15th – April 30th 2011

The weeks building up to the decision to intervene in Libya and the immediate aftermath of the first airstrikes being carried out by the intervening coalition saw a variety of opinions being presented in both the Guardian and the Telegraph. Both papers published multiple editorials and opinion pieces on the crisis in Libya and the intervention. Overall, The Guardian published significantly more than The Telegraph, with 34 total articles compared to just 21 in the Telegraph. In the Guardian, more articles were negative or critical about the intervention (or the possibility of an intervention before it was underway) than were positive or supportive about it. In fact, more than double the number of articles were negative in tone than were positive. In the Telegraph, there was a much more even distribution of positive, negative and neutral articles.

Table 1 - February 15th – April 30th 2011, opinion pieces and editorials on Libya crisis and their tone regarding the intervention

	The Guardian	The Telegraph	Combined
Positive	7	8	15
Neutral	11	6	17
Negative	16	7	23
Total number of articles	34	21	55

It is important to note that although The Telegraph published an almost equal number of positive, negative and neutral articles overall, the papers editorials were generally supportive of the intervention. An editorial from March 20th claimed that “David Cameron has shown remarkable courage in leading the campaign for military action to

prevent Colonel Gaddafi from continuing to attack and kill his own people.”¹⁹ Whilst other editorials and leading articles in the Telegraph were more neutral in overall tone, they mostly supported the principle behind the intervention and that it was a worthy goal to stop Gaddafi from attacking his own people.

Any criticism of the intervention in the Telegraph’s editorials mostly focused on the disorganisation and uncertainty on how exactly it was to be carried out effectively. On the 21st of March an editorial echoed the positive tone of the one from March 20th, saying that if Libya can be liberated then David Cameron would deserve “enormous international credit”. However, it qualified this praise with concerns about the “wavering” support of the Arab League and whether the British and American governments had a clear plan on how to remove Gaddafi from power, especially if regional opinion turned against the intervention.²⁰ This is a significant trend in the opinions presented in the Telegraph, in both editorials and opinion columns. There is a mix of positive, neutral and negative articles, but most of these back the principles behind the intervention. The critical views of it are largely based on a perceived uncertainty and lack of leadership that might cripple its effectiveness. Several pieces criticise the intervention by arguing that defence cuts by the British government has made any intervention impossible to carry out effectively, which is a distinctively different kind of argument to many of the more morally focused arguments in other articles.

The Guardian’s editorials took a more critical stance by comparison. They were generally critical of the benefits of the intervention and often called for an alternative solution to the Libyan crisis. They often expressed the concern that a western intervention would de-legitimise the rebels cause, as the civil war would go from Gaddafi versus his own people to Gaddafi versus an invading outside force. They were noticeably more critical of the underlying morality and principles behind the intervention than the Telegraph. The first Guardian editorial in this period is from

¹⁹ “A bold and brave initiative — but a risky road ahead” The Sunday Telegraph, 20 March 2011. The Sunday Telegraph

²⁰ “The challenge of Libya can only get tougher”, The Daily Telegraph, 21 March 2011

March 1st and covers all the Arab revolutions that were ongoing at the time. Referring to anti-government movements in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya it states that "they do not want, nor have they yet sought foreign intervention" and that the revolutions belong to the people who made them.²¹ Other opinion pieces in the Guardian have a similar focus on the morality and validity of the intervention. Simon Jenkins wrote numerous columns that called out the intervention as hypocritical, immoral or fundamentally misguided.²² More positive articles published in The Guardian also seemed to focus more on the morality of the intervention, whereas many articles in the Telegraph (whether positive or negative) were more concerned by the execution of it.

Several articles published in this time-period were written by politicians and these were generally in favour of the intervention. Richard Dalton, the former British ambassador to Libya, wrote a column arguing that Britain must prepare for a possible intervention in the Telegraph as early as February 27th.²³ Labour MP Douglas Alexander published a column in the Guardian on March 21st urging MPs to support the government in a vote on the intervention.²⁴ The Guardian also published an article that was a debate between George Galloway and conservative MP Mark Pritchard, with Galloway opposing an intervention of any kind by western powers and Pritchard supporting the possibility of a no-fly zone and supplying Libyan rebels with weapons.²⁵ Of these four politicians who express clear views in articles only one, Galloway, argues against Britain's involvement in the intervention.

²¹ "Leading Article: Arab revolutions: The limits of intervention", The Guardian, 1 March 2011

²² "Comment: Britain can push democracy or weapons - but not both: Cameron's arms-sale tour has mired him in typical liberal interventionist hypocrisy. Better let the Arab world sort itself out", Simon Jenkins, 23 February 2011, The Guardian and "Comment: These humanitarians come with missiles and an agenda: Rather than protecting Libyans Nato is merely prolonging the agony of civil war. Cameron should think on Suez and retreat", Simon Jenkins, 20 April 2011, The Guardian

²³ "We must stand ready to intervene; Commentary," Sir Richard Dalton, 27 February 2011, The Sunday Telegraph

²⁴ "Comment: Why MPs must say yes: Our past military action in Iraq must inform the debate, but not paralyse us. Libya is a special case," Douglas Alexander, 21 March 2011, The Guardian

²⁵ "Saturday: When is it our fight?: The conversation - With talk of intervention in Libya growing, George Galloway argues against British involvement, while Conservative MP Mark Pritchard says inaction is not an option," Susanna Rustin, 12 March 2011.

4.2 May 1st to September 30th 2011

In this period the Guardian continued to publish both more articles than the Telegraph, and the articles it published were more negative. It would appear that both papers became more negative about the intervention over this period than they had been earlier, but the Guardian especially so. Overall both papers published more negative articles than positive ones, although the Telegraph only slightly more. Like in the previous period the Telegraph posted a relatively even number of positive, negative and neutral articles whilst the Guardian mostly contained negative ones. In fact, the Guardian in this period published almost no positive articles.

Table 2 – May 1st to September 30th, opinion pieces and editorials on Libya and their tone regarding the intervention

	The Guardian	The Telegraph	Combined
Positive	2	8	10
Neutral	22	11	33
Negative	17	10	27
Total number of articles	41	29	70

Once again, the Guardian's articles often focused on the moral questions behind the intervention. One Guardian article on May 20th discussed the use of the R2P norm as the justification for Libya. Questioning whether R2P was fit for purpose and asking why it was used so selectively.²⁶ This is the first opinion article analysed to discuss the use of R2P in the Libyan intervention. Meanwhile the Telegraph continued to focus more on the running of the operation, especially in negative articles. Some of these opinion

²⁶ "Comment: The new interventionists aren't so far from Bush: Why Libya and not Tibet? The 'responsibility to protect' doctrine is being undermined as practice devalues its principles", Mark Mazower, 20 May 2011, The Guardian

pieces in the Telegraph claimed there was a lack of leadership.²⁷ Whilst several of the papers editorials and columns focused on conflicts between the British government and the armed forces, including a lack of funding.²⁸

Like in the previous period there were a handful of articles written by politicians. Once again these were mostly positive, as might be expected. In the Telegraph Liam Fox, who was then Defence Secretary, published an article in June arguing that Britain had a duty to protect Libya's civilians from Gaddafi's violence and that this was worth the time and cost.²⁹ Also in the Telegraph were articles by conservative politicians Malcolm Rifkind and Boris Johnson. Rifkind was also broadly supportive in tone concerning the intervention, although he did argue that the British government should give more support to the Libyan rebels by arming them.³⁰ Boris Johnson was the only politician not to write a supportive article, instead he merely discussed the reality of how dictators like Gaddafi could rapidly change from friend to enemy if it was in the countries national interest.³¹

4.3 October 1st to December 31st 2011

Once again, the Guardian continued to publish both more articles than the Telegraph, and the articles it published were more negative. In this three-month period there was a significant drop in overall coverage, especially from early November onwards after the death of Gaddafi had been processed and the Security Council voted to end the intervention. For the first time one of the papers, The Telegraph, published more positive articles than negative ones. Although only by the tiny margin of three to two. The Guardian published only two positive stories compared with six negative and seven neutral ones.

²⁷ "Britain used to win the wars it fought – so what happened? Stalemate in Libya and lack of resources in Afghanistan all point to a lack of leadership," Con Coughlin, 18 May 2011 The Daily Telegraph

²⁸ "Listen to the top brass," editorial, 22 June 2011, The Daily Telegraph and 'Can David Cameron slap down another defence chief over Libya?', James Kirkup, 21 June 2011

²⁹ "Protecting Libya's innocents is worth the time and cost", Liam Fox, 10 June 2011, The Daily Telegraph

³⁰ "Don't just recognise the rebels – arm them; The conflict will drag on unless Britain firms up its show of support for the insurgents," Malcolm Rifkind, 29 July 2011, The Daily Telegraph

³¹ "First we fete them, then we bomb them – but that's politics; Politicians will soon be sucking up to people like Gaddafi again if it's in the national interest," Boris Johnson, 5 September 2011, The Daily Telegraph

Table 3 – October 1st to December 31st, opinion pieces and editorials on Libya and their tone regarding the intervention

	The Guardian	The Telegraph	Combined
Positive	2	3	5
Neutral	7	4	11
Negative	6	2	8
Total number of articles	15	9	24

By this point it seems that a lot of the newspaper coverage in Britain was beginning to focus on the crisis in Syria, which might also explain why the number of articles decreased so sharply once the actual intervention was over. A number of the articles that discussed Libya in this period also talked about the situation in Syria and sometimes compared the situations to see whether an intervention there might also happen. An editorial discussing Syria in The Guardian from November 1st for example says –

“Nato is not, happily, contemplating another intervention. As we are all now witnessing in Libya, a no-fly zone does not protect civilian lives - estimates of the dead over the past eight months range from 10,000 to 50,000.”³²

This editorial is an example of how the Syrian crisis had begun to overshadow events in Libya, and also of how many articles in The Guardian were critical of either the effectiveness or legitimacy of the intervention.

Following the death of Gaddafi both papers published a number of articles discussing his killing and what the future held for Libya. Con Coughlin wrote an article on October 23rd expressing a pessimistic view. The dictator’s death, he said, was a good thing for Arab’s who valued freedom, but he also warned that Libya was deeply divided and

³² “Leading Article: Syria: Delaying the inevitable”, 1 November 2011, The Guardian

risked becoming a hotbed for terrorism.³³ The Guardian published numerous articles expressing similar concerns about the country's future stability, including one by Liberal Democrat politician Paddy Ashdown who offered a neutral opinion of the intervention and said that Libya must restore order and stability before looking to hold elections. He also warned that "our biggest mistake in Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere - from which perhaps the Libyans can learn - was to fail to make the rule of law the first priority".³⁴ His was the only opinion article on the Libyan intervention that was published by a politician during this period.

4.4 January 1st 2012 to December 31st 2013

At this point press coverage of Libya dropped off significantly, which is not surprising. Over this two-year period, I found only thirty-two opinion articles and editorials that clearly expressed a view on the subject. The Guardian's coverage was overwhelmingly negative. Although it actually contained three positive articles to the Telegraph's one, these were heavily outnumbered by the eleven articles that had a negative view. Many of the articles from this period were comparing Libya to current events such as the ongoing crisis in Syria or the French intervention in Mali.

Table 4 – January 1st 2012 to December 31st 2013, opinion pieces and editorials on Libya and their tone regarding the intervention

	The Guardian	The Telegraph	Combined
Positive	3	1	4
Neutral	5	8	13
Negative	11	4	15
Total number of	19	13	32

³³ "Editorial - Dictator's murderous legacy," Con Coughlin 23 October 2011 The Sunday Telegraph

³⁴ "Comment: Libya's path to democracy: Elections can wait. First the country should establish the rule of law and a constitution," Paddy Ashdown, 22 October 2011, The Guardian

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The Telegraph's articles were mostly neutral on Libya. Although negative articles obviously outnumbered the solitary positive one. By this point it seems that both papers are more clearly negative about the intervention than they were when it first started when opinion was a little more divided. The trend continues of the Telegraph often focusing on the running of the intervention and of the lack of funding and leadership for Britain's armed forces.³⁵ This has been a consistent element of the results so far. By comparison The Guardian's articles rarely if ever mentioned this topic and again continued to be dominated by discussion about the morality, legality and success of the intervention. An editorial from February 2012, a year on from the start of the Libyan revolution, criticises David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy for assuming their job in Libya is done whilst "according to a recent Amnesty report, widespread human rights abuses are committed with impunity."³⁶

Several articles over these two years were authored by politicians and the trend continued of these being more positive in tone than other articles. In fact, all three articles from The Guardian there were positive were written by politicians, two by former Ambassador to Libya Oliver Miles³⁷ and one by Labour MP Jack Straw who commended David Cameron's leadership and plan for the intervention.³⁸ Meanwhile in the Telegraph one neutral article was written by the MP Mark Fields. The article discussed the situation in Syria and briefly mentioned Libya as an example of how the

³⁵ Editorial; Opinion, Columns – "It's no use having guns with no one to fire them; Politicians cannot purge manpower and rely on technology alone to fight our battles" Con Coughlin, 20 December 2013, The Daily Telegraph and Editorial; Opinion, Columns – "Our Armed Forces can't survive on a diet of fudge, Mr Cameron; If the PM truly wants to confront the threat from Islamists, he must provide the money", Fraser Nelson, 1 February 2013, The Daily Telegraph

³⁶ "Leading Article: Libya: Job done?" 18 February 2012 The Guardian

³⁷ "The Libyan elections were another step towards stability" Oliver Miles, guardian.co.uk, 11 July 2012
"Libya is not a divided country," Oliver Miles guardian.co.uk, 25 January 2012

³⁸ "Britain did not turn away from Syria. The case for action was not made" Jack Straw (contributor), theguardian.com, 31 August 2013

UK could have a decisive impact on world affairs at times, but he did not clearly express whether in Libya this had proven to be a positive thing.³⁹

4.5 January 1st 2014 to September 30th 2016

By this point articles expressing an opinion on the Libyan intervention are quite rare. With less than one a month being published. The intervention also seems to be almost universally viewed in negative terms, with only a single positive article which was published in The Telegraph. In both papers, there were overwhelmingly more negative articles than neutral and positive combined. This is a stark change from the more muddled views at the start of the intervention.

Table 5 – January 1st 2014 to September 30th 2016, opinion pieces and editorials on Libya and their tone regarding the intervention

	The Guardian	The Telegraph	Combined
Positive	0	1	1
Neutral	2	3	5
Negative	12	8	20
Total number of articles	14	12	26

Press coverage of Libya by this time had clearly declined, but there were spikes in coverage at times. In September 2016, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee published its report into British involvement in Libya which criticised David Cameron’s leadership and stated the intervention had “drifted into an opportunist policy of regime change” without “a strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi

³⁹ “Forget the British Empire – Syria's fate is not ours to determine; When we pretend that Britain is omnipotent in world affairs, we are guilty of imperial arrogance”, Mark Field, 5 June 2013 13:21, The Telegraph Online

Libya.”⁴⁰ Following this there were numerous articles in both papers discussing the report’s findings, most of which agreed with its findings and were critical of the intervention.⁴¹

Once again, many articles from this period were comparing current events in Syria or elsewhere to Libya. Another trend is the number of articles that discuss the migrant crisis and the role that the intervention in Libya and the countries following collapse might have played in it.⁴² By this point even articles that are not strictly negative about the intervention seem to accept that the situation in Libya has deteriorated to the point where Libya has become a failed state.

The one article that mentions the Libya intervention in a positive light is written by a politician, or at least a former politician, and was published in the Telegraph in September 2015. Kate Godfrey is a Labour Party member who stood unsuccessfully for parliament in the 2015 election. Her article is a criticism of Seumas Milne, a Guardian journalist who wrote numerous opinion pieces that were highly critical of the intervention. She claims that Milne was “wrong on Libya, and he will be wrong on Syria.”⁴³ Godfrey argues against the idea the intervention in Libya was "a catastrophic failure" and believes similar action will be necessary in Syria to protect civilians.

5. Analysis

In this section I will analyse the overall results and discuss the trends that I have observed. Each subsection here is dedicated to analysing a specific element of my research results and discussing their implications for my research question and the hypotheses that I laid out in the methodology section of the paper.

⁴⁰Foreign Affairs Committee, Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options - <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmffaff/119/119.pdf>

⁴¹“The Guardian view on Libya: a mess not just of David Cameron’s making” Editorial, 14 September 2016, The Guardian and “Opinion - Libya is another example of Cameron’s folly. History will not judge him kindly” Jonathan Freedland 14 September 2016, The Guardian and “Lessons from Libya,” 14 September 2016, The Daily Telegraph

⁴²“Our role in Libya’s plight,” Telegraph View, 9 March 2015, The Telegraph Online and “The Guardian view on Libya: learning lessons from the latest failure” Editorial 24 April 2015, The Guardian

⁴³“Why I had to speak out about Seumas Milne,” Kate Godfrey, 24 October 2015, The Daily Telegraph

5.1 The papers opinions

When looking at the articles from all our periods there are several things to note about the two papers and the views they presented. Firstly, the Telegraph had the more positive view of the intervention between the two papers. It published more positive articles than The Guardian in four of the five periods looked at, despite publishing significantly fewer articles overall. This meant as a proportion of overall coverage, positive views were more prominent in The Telegraph than in The Guardian. Overall The Telegraph published 31 negative articles, whilst The Guardian published 62 (see the table below for the full results).

Table 6 – results for the entire period covered (February 15th 2011 - September 30th 2016)

	The Guardian	The Telegraph	Combined
Positive	14	21	35
Neutral	47	32	79
Negative	62	31	93
Total number of articles	123	84	207

The Telegraph published more positive articles than negative articles in two of the five periods, February 15th to April 30th 2011 (the lead up and first few weeks of the intervention) and October 1st to December 31st 2011 (the period which saw the death of Gaddafi and the official end of the enforcement of the no-fly-zone). By contrast the Guardian published more negative articles than positive ones in every single period. This is in line with my predictions and working hypotheses. The Telegraph is traditionally right wing and supportive of the Conservative party, who were leading the coalition government which undertook the intervention. By contrast the Guardian is

left-wing and thus you would expect them to be more critical of a Conservative led government.

There were also significant differences in the content of the articles. The Guardian's articles, whether positive, neutral or negative, were most often concerned with the morality and legality of the intervention. They asked whether intervening in Libya was the right thing to do. Two prominent columnists in the Guardian were Seumas Milne and Simon Jenkins, who both published multiple articles criticising the intervention from moral perspectives. Milne, for example, accused it of increasing the number of civilian deaths, rather than protecting civilians on numerous occasions, sometimes when discussing the possibility of a new intervention in Syria.⁴⁴

In the Telegraph, some articles also discussed the Libyan intervention's moral dimension, but many of the Telegraph's articles were focused more on whether the intervention was feasible and how it was being carried out. Con Coughlin, the defence editor at The Telegraph naturally wrote a significant number of opinion articles and editorial pieces on Libya. These made up a large piece of overall opinion pieces published in The Telegraph on Libya. Repeatedly his articles focused on the feasibility of the intervention, the lack of funding for Britain's armed forces and questionable leadership decisions.⁴⁵ This kind of discussion was much rarer in The Guardian. As such the coverage in the two papers could be described by saying The Guardian was more concerned with why the intervention was or was not necessary, whereas The Telegraph was more interested in how the intervention was to be carried out and its feasibility.

⁴⁴ "Comment: Intervention in Syria risks blowback and regional war: The west's bid to ramp up the armed campaign will simply escalate the killing. Only negotiation can stop the conflict spreading," Seumas Milne, 19 December 2012, The Guardian and "Comment: Intervention in Syria will escalate not stop the killing: Russia and China blocked a bid to force regime change. But a negotiated settlement is the only way out of civil war" Seumas Milne, 8 February 2012, The Guardian

⁴⁵ See – "It's no use having guns with no one to fire them; Politicians cannot purge manpower and rely on technology alone to fight our battle's," Con Coughlin, 20 December 2013, The Daily Telegraph and "Britain used to win the wars it fought – so what happened? Stalemate in Libya and lack of resources in Afghanistan all point to a lack of leadership" Con Coughlin, 18 May 2011, The Daily Telegraph

5.2 Changing opinions over time

There is a clear trend of coverage on the Libyan intervention becoming more negative over time. In the run up to the intervention and for most of 2011 opinion in both papers was divided. The Telegraph published slightly more positive articles than negative ones in the first period (see Table 1) and then slightly more negative articles than positive ones in the second period (see Table 2) and then a reversion to more positive articles than negative articles at the end of 2011 (see Table 3). The Guardian was more negative from the very first period onwards (see Table 1). However, there were still a reasonable number of neutral and even positive articles during all of the first three periods looked at.

Things changed significantly from 2012 onwards. Coverage in The Guardian especially became overwhelmingly negative about the situation in Libya and the legacy of the intervention. By the 2014-2016 period it had reached the point where the paper published twelve negative opinion pieces, two neutral and zero positive ones (see Table 5). In The Telegraph this change to negative opinion was less pronounced, but still noticeable. It published more negative articles than positive ones in the final two periods (see Table 4 and Table 5).

It is interesting to see that press opinion did become more negative over time. This confirms my first working hypothesis. As mentioned earlier in the introduction and literature review the intervention was initially hailed as a success by many, with some describing it as a model intervention.⁴⁶ From my results it appears that it was events following the end of the intervention that really turned opinion against it, which is in line with many of the academic opinions. Fettweis for example claimed that it was from late 2012 onwards that the country really ran into problems.⁴⁷ A lack of planning on how to support the country following the fall of Gaddafi led to an almost total collapse in Libya and it seems that this is what turned opinion against the intervention

⁴⁶ See Daalder and Stavridis, "A Model Humanitarian Intervention? Reassessing NATO's Libya Campaign," and Lynch, "What the Libyan Intervention Achieved," <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/27/what-the-libya-intervention-achieved/>

⁴⁷ Fettweis, "Don't Blame NATO for Libya," <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/dont-blame-nato-libya-18152?page=6>

above anything else. Whilst there were objections from the start, for the actual duration of the intervention opinion was divided. It was only after the end of the mission there that the press turned almost entirely negative.

5.3 Articles by politicians and establishment figures

Over the periods looked at there were a number of articles authored by politicians, or other establishment figures like diplomats or military commanders. One of my working hypotheses was that these “establishment” figures would be broadly supportive of the intervention. My findings confirm this prediction to be accurate. None of the articles published by politicians in either newspaper put forward a clearly negative view of the intervention and there were positive articles written by Labour MPs, defence minister Liam Fox and former British ambassador to Libya Oliver Miles.⁴⁸

It should be noted that there were almost no articles written by politicians in the last few years. From 2014 – 2016 there was only a single opinion piece authored by a politician, and that was by a minor figure in the Labour Party who had failed to win a seat in the 2015 election.⁴⁹ It’s perhaps not surprising that as media opinion turned overwhelmingly negative there were few politicians willing to write in support of it. After all what kind of politicians wants to express support for an intervention that the media is now portraying as having created a failed state and contributing to the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean? The lack of articles published by politicians at this point can also be attributed to the fact that the intervention is no longer a contemporary event and politicians are therefore not motivated to engage with the topic. Looked at through the lens of manufactured consent this causality could actually be reversed, the fact that negative coverage of the intervention sharply increased at

⁴⁸ See – “The Libyan elections were another step towards stability” Oliver Miles, guardian.co.uk, 11 July 2012 and “Comment: Why MPs must say yes: Our past military action in Iraq must inform the debate, but not paralyse us. Libya is a special case,” Douglas Alexander, 21 March 2011, The Guardian and “Protecting Libya's innocents is worth the time and cost”, Liam Fox, 10 June 2011, The Daily Telegraph

⁴⁹ “Why I had to speak out about Seumas Milne,” Kate Godfrey, 24 October 2015, The Daily Telegraph

the same time politicians stopped defending it might suggest the papers turned against it only after elites also did so.

Of course, a second possibility is simply that people underestimated the challenges facing the intervention before it began. When there is an ongoing conflict like the one in Libya, it is understandable that people feel compelled to do something about it. Therefore, people are probably willing to support the intervention, as they feel the situation cannot simply be ignored. Once time has passed and they can look back at the intervention, the flaws in the plan will surely be more apparent. In other words, it is always easier to see problems in hindsight, looking back is much easier than looking forwards. The initial support for the intervention might simply be a result of the feeling that something must be done and the later drop in support a result of the problems involved now being far more obvious.

5.4 Major events and their impact on opinion

In this section I want to discuss a few major events and their impact on press opinions. First of all, I want to look at whether the press became more or less positive about intervention once it was actually underway. Prior to the beginning of the intervention there was already a good deal of coverage on the situation of Libya and the debate over whether intervening was the right thing to do. There were 26 articles written between February 15th (the start of the Libyan revolution) and March 19th (the start of the intervention). Of these, 12 were negative in tone, 5 were positive and 9 were neutral. These shows opinion is being quite divided, although generally more negative than positive. Following the start of the intervention a further 29 articles were published up until the end of April. 10 of these were positive, 8 were neutral and 11 were negative. This seems to show that the actual start of the intervention caused opinion to become slightly more positive than it had previously been. Although there was still no clear consensus one way or the other.

The next major event I want to look at is the death of Gaddafi in October 2011. His death effectively marked the end of the intervention, with NATO ending their mission on October 31st following his death on October 20th.⁵⁰ Immediately after his death there was a spike in coverage of the situation in Libya. Some 10 opinion articles and editorials were published in just one week, from October 21st to October 28th. This is a significant number, considering only 24 were published in the entire period from October 1st to December 31st. Of the 10 articles written in the week following Gaddafi's death, 3 were negative, 4 were positive and 3 were neutral in tone. This does not support the kind of positive shift in opinion I had predicted one my earlier hypothesis. Whilst the positive articles outnumbered the negative ones, they did not do so by a significant margin and it appears that opinions ultimately remained divided.

The last major event I want to look at in detail is the migrant crisis which came into prominence in 2015.⁵¹ A large number of the opinion articles concerning Libya from early 2015 onwards discuss the legacy of the intervention in contributing to the migrant crisis. An editorial in The Guardian from February 24th 2015 discusses Libya's collapse and warns that the chaotic situation there "will also feed the trafficking networks transporting scores of desperate African and Syrian migrants from to Italy's shores, with more horrendous scenes of bodies washed up after deadly sea crossings."⁵² Another article from The Guardian's Middle East editor published in April 2015 asks whether British failures in Libya are to blame for the migrant crisis.⁵³ Also in April an online editorial discussing Libya and the migrant crisis was published, saying –

"Many of those crossing embark in an increasingly unstable and lawless state supposedly liberated by Anglo-French military action in 2011. Since then, the country

⁵⁰ "Libya: Muammar Gaddafi's body to undergo post-mortem". BBC. 22 October 2011. Last accessed 22 November 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-15412529>

⁵¹ "Migrant crisis: Migration to Europe explained in seven charts"! BBC. 4 March 2015. Last Accessed 20th December 2016 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911>

⁵² "Comment is free "The Guardian view on Libya: more diplomacy, not bombs, required" Editorial, 24 February 2015, The Guardian

⁵³ "Are UK failures in Libya to blame for Mediterranean migrant crisis?" Ian Black, Middle East editor, The Guardian, 24 April 2015

*has steadily declined, not least for lack of Western support for Libyan democrats and political institutions after Muammar Gaddafi. The tide of misery now washing on to Europe's southern shores is at least partly a result of that neglect.*⁵⁴

The editorial goes on to be highly critical of David Cameron, the British government and the rest of the international community for happily taking the credit for the intervention when it was deemed successful but now remaining silent. In fact, nearly all of the articles published on the migrant crisis and Libya are highly critical of the intervention and its role in creating the crisis. The 2014 – 2016 period is the point at which my results show any support for the intervention vanishing almost totally and in part this can be attributed to the migrant crisis. Perhaps this is because it was the first time when the chaos in Libya came back to create a problem for the West.

6. Conclusion

Between February 2011 and September 2016, the British press' opinion towards the intervention in Libya changed significantly. In the run up to it and for the duration of the intervention opinion was clearly divided. In the two papers looked at, The Guardian and The Telegraph, there were significant numbers of positive, negative and neutral articles in both. The Guardian was certainly more cautious in offering support for the intervention than The Telegraph, but both publications published a range of different views. However, by 2016 clearly positive opinions of the intervention and its legacy had all but vanished in both newspapers. As the country fell into a state of chaos, there were fewer and fewer people willing to defend the intervention.

There were some interesting differences between the two papers coverage of the intervention, beyond The Guardian being slightly more negative. The kind of arguments made when discussing the intervention for example. Articles and editorials in The Telegraph consistently focused on the military and logistical dimensions of the

⁵⁴ "The tragic tide of refugees must be stopped at its source," Telegraph View, 6 April 2015 08:30 The Telegraph Online

intervention. Asking questions about its feasibility, progress and leadership. The Guardian was less concerned with these sorts of questions. Opinion pieces there instead focused on the moral and legal justifications of the intervention. When negative articles appeared in The Telegraph they tended to criticise a lack of resources or leadership. When negative articles appeared in The Guardian they tended to criticise the hypocrisy or immorality of the intervention.

Both papers also gave a platform to political figures to voice their views on the intervention. These articles were far more supportive of the intervention than articles authored by non-establishment figures. This is in line with expectations I had before my research began. Britain's politician had voted overwhelmingly in favour of the intervention, so it is not surprising to see them using the media to defend it. Eventually though the number of politicians writing articles shrunk to almost zero, coinciding with the point at which opinion in general seemed to have overwhelmingly turned against the intervention.

The existing literature on the Libyan intervention shows a divide in opinion on whether it was a success or a failure. My research has shown that press opinion in the UK was similarly divided when the intervention began, with some being positive about the intervention's prospects for success and some being more negative. Eventually though the opinions clearly changed to become almost universally negative. By late 2016 virtually every mention of Libya paints the intervention as a failure and this seems unlikely to change in the future.

There are several possible explanations for why opinions towards the intervention became more negative over time. First is the obvious fact that Libya was left, and remains, a deeply unstable place. Once this became apparent it is not surprising that people began to view the intervention more negatively. There is also the fact that Britain's politicians also turned against the intervention, or at least became divided as shown by the publication of the damning report on British involvement in Libya. Finally, there is the possibility that people are always more likely to see the flaws in a plan when looking back at a situation that has already unfolded. Possibly it was a

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combination of all these factors, but regardless of the reason, it is clear that the Libyan intervention is now spoken about almost universally as a failure.

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