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Dear Secretary Clinton:

Again, congratulations are in order for Friday's recognition of the Transitional National Council in Istanbul. It is a pleasure to see the State Department again leading the administration on this. Syria, too, but that is a subject for another day.

I suspect that you have been pushing very hard within the administration on Libya. From the outside, the White House doesn't seem like it cares very much. In general, the NSC seems uncomfortable with creative applications of American power and influence. And we all know the military and the Pentagon resist limited military operations, especially airpower-only engagements. So, it must be you and your colleagues at State. Well done.

Some weeks back, when the U.S. first committed to oppose Qaddafi militarily, I wrote a similar message and you suggested we should stay in touch. It has taken me a long time to take you up on your suggestion, for reasons I can explain in person someday.

Hillary, Libya is the right issue for you as Secretary of State to take a leadership role. It may not seem that way on certain days, but I strongly believe it is. (I offer these observations without knowing your thinking or any of the details available to you, so please forgive me if I say the obvious, make technical errors, misread the internal dynamics, or you think this is off-base.)

First and foremost, this is winnable. The killing of Bin Ladin aside, the administration really needs a solid, substantial success. It is only a matter of time before the combination of international airpower and rebel ground forces close in on Qaddafi. Although it may look like a stalemate from time to time, the equation is pretty steady: Qaddafi gets weaker, and the rebels get stronger. When Qaddafi falls or goes into exile, this will be a big success. And the larger the U.S. role, the greater it

will redound to our advantage. (Caveat: It could be very messy when the rebel movement takes over and you should condition people that a civil war like this will be bloody and chaotic when Qaddafi initially falls. As an aside, I think the exile option was killed by the human rights legal community who pushed an ICC process way too early.)

Second, unlike in the Balkans or Afghanistan, Paris and London are fully committed, as are most Europeans, with the exception of Germany, which is a disgrace but not really relevant in the end. The Germans can easily come in to fund and assist in reconstruction and security arrangements for a post-Qaddafi Libya. Of course, the Europeans' military capabilities are limited, as they lack sufficient stocks of the right weaponry. But the Pentagon has and will continue to help. Historically, the harder issue has been their will to win and to reject half-baked compromises. So, in this case, it must be a pleasure to have effective partners in London and Paris.

Third, beyond the moral component of preventing a slaughter, defeating Qaddafi is one of the few concrete and unique ways the West can contribute to the Arab Spring. With our popularity at an all time low in most of the Arab world, our persuasive power is not what it used to be. But cutting off Qaddafi from financing and supplies, and using airpower against his military forces, these are things that the West and only the West can do.

Fourth, even a small success like the one that is coming in Libya will turn around the steady decline in American influence in the region and around the world. I suspect that you know this, but European elites, Gulf elites, East Europeans and many others regard the Administration as weak. Take for example recent data indicating majorities in Europe believe Chinese economic and political power exceeds or will exceed the United States. That is a disastrous indicator.

You may see where I am going with this analysis. It is time for the U.S. to move from the back seat to the front seat of this operation. I know there is a lot of political and White House reluctance to take on another conflict in the Middle East. But not only is this a completely different situation than Iraq or Afghanistan, but we are already paying the political price at home and around the world, yet we will not get the

credit when success comes, and it will come. So long as this is largely a Euro-led mission, it will take far longer to achieve results than it should. Most important, unlike Iraq or Afghanistan, there is a path to clear-cut success, and it is a short path, not years, but months.

There is a reason that NATO's nickname is "Needs America To Operate." We have the weaponry, the assets, and the arrangements necessary to step up the air campaign to accelerate Qaddafi's fall. We can have the Europeans do all the burden-sharing we want when it comes time to fund and support a post-Qaddafi peacekeeping and stability mission of some kind.

What you need is a rationale for a new strategy and an internal argument for the Pentagon to change its position. If the Pentagon moves and a new rationale alters the politics on Capitol Hill, the White House will have to go along. Again, without knowing all the machinations and mini-coalitions inside the administration, I may be reading this wrong. But I would suggest the following strategy:

First, without acknowledging that it was a mistake to let the British and French lead the operation to begin with, you can simply argue that circumstances have changed to the extent that leaving Qaddafi in power is now a national security risk. A mad "mad dictator" threatening Europe and America is a straightforward case to make. Just the way Qaddafi's threats against Benghazi were used to justify the original intervention, his recent threats to take the war to Europe should be regarded as a clear danger of terrorism against our European allies.

Second, for civilians in the Pentagon and the military, you can simply state that the U.S. and NATO's deterrent power is now at risk. There is nothing the Pentagon hates more than a weakened NATO or weakened U.S. deterrent power. This type of credibility argument is not one that works publicly, because of the Vietnam era argument that Americans shouldn't die for credibility but Pentagon officials believe it matters. NATO cannot and should not fail to topple Qaddafi.

Third, the threat of Qaddafi organizing terrorist threats against Europe and possibly the United States is an argument that most Republicans will be forced to accept. (At a private meeting with Tim Pawlenty, he

put forward the idea that framed as a threat from a former terrorist leader, most Republicans would change their view.) McCain and Lindsey Graham are already there and with this new rationale it should be possible to win political support from Republicans that would not support the moral case alone.

The politics on Capitol Hill are obviously not easy. But if the President decides that U.S. national security interests are now at risk, and he makes the case for U.S. leadership in NATO, it will be much, much harder for Democrats to desert him and Republicans to oppose him. It is the half-hearted effort we are making now that is so easy to pick apart.

There is obviously much more to say, but the bottom line is that the war in Libya is now a bigger problem than just getting Qaddafi out. It will determine, in part, whether the United States is remembered as acting and leading the world's response at a crucial time in Middle East politics. At the same time, if we change our approach, success in Libya will restore diminished American leadership in Europe and the world.

This moment reminds me a lot of when Jacques Chirac stuck the knife in with Washington when he told a group of European leaders early in 1995 that there was no leader of the West. As I recall it, President Clinton perceived that with Bosnia collapsing fundamental attitudes towards the United States were at stake. We acted, we used NATO air power, we led the negotiations at Dayton, and everything about the first term in foreign affairs changed. The analogy is not precise but I think it is food for thought. I know how hard it would be to take the lead now, but I think it is worth the effort, and all the subsequent diplomacy and post-qaddafi planning would be much smoother with the U.S., backed by key U.S. allies, in the driver's seat.

Your friend,

Jamie