

## Breaking the Stalemate in Libya

During a May 3 panel discussion organized by *The National Interest*, three top experts expressed skepticism about the U.S. intervention in Libya. They also assessed the recent death of Osama bin Laden and its implications for the future. Panelists included Paul R. Pillar, former National Intelligence Officer for the Near East and South Asia and Director of Graduate Studies at Georgetown's Center for Peace and Security Studies; Christopher A. Preble, Director of Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute; and Dov S. Zakheim, former Undersecretary of Defense (Comptroller) in the George W. Bush Administration. Justine A. Rosenthal, Editor of *The National Interest* moderated the event.

Christopher Preble expressed concern that once the United States intervenes militarily in another country, many are reluctant to withdraw because of their commitment to victory. He disputed this, however arguing that Washington can redefine victory. Moreover, he added that continuing to fight without doing what is necessary to succeed is more damaging to U.S. credibility than withdrawal. Paul Pillar agreed with Preble, stating that few others would question Washington's determination if the U.S. disengaged from the Libya conflict. Pillar also suggested that the U.S.-British decision to abandon their earlier deal with Gaddafi has undermined U.S. interests. In 2004, the United States and United Kingdom persuaded Colonel Gaddafi to give up his nuclear weapons program and to cooperate in combating terrorism in exchange for lifting sanctions on Tripoli. By turning on Gaddafi, America discouraged others from making the same decision in the future.

Dov Zakheim discussed the financial consequences that intervention in Libya has had and will continue to have if the Obama Administration decides to stay the course. Zakheim contended that if the administration does not seek additional funds from Congress, every dollar the United States is spending on Libya is a dollar that it is not spending somewhere else in the defense budget. Worse, he said, the U.S. will pay not only for operations, but also for reconstruction. Further, Zakheim concluded if Gaddafi maintains power and Libya is divided for a sustained period, like Germany or Korea, the financial burden could be even higher.

Discussing Osama bin Laden's killing, the panelists agreed that support for al-Qaeda would decrease without bin Laden. Pillar asserted that bin Laden had not been the strategic director of al-Qaeda for a long time, but that his death could provoke a short-term increase in activity to demonstrate the group's survival. Given the number of al-Qaeda splinter groups around the world, it may be difficult to prevent their retaliation.

Preble emphasized the significance of the raid. The Navy SEALs who conducted the mission not only killed bin Laden, but also obtained documents that could be of value to the ongoing war on terror. This should be a cause for worry for Ayman al Zawahiri, al-Qaeda's second in command, who does not have the following that bin Laden did. Zakheim agreed that Zawahiri lacks bin Laden's broad support, and added that he does not have the money bin Laden did, which will make it difficult for him to play the same leadership role.

Zakheim was optimistic about the message the May 1 raid sent. By succeeding in carrying out the attack on bin Laden, he argued, America showed that it is not a declining power. This may make it easier for President Obama to justify an earlier withdrawal from Afghanistan. Pillar reasoned that bin Laden's death could fuel both sides of the argument for withdrawal, however; on one hand, bin Laden is dead and a key U.S. goal has been achieved, but on the other, his death is only the beginning and there is much more to be done.

The panelists saw mixed results for U.S.-Pakistan relations following bin Laden's death. Pillar observed that the Pakistanis are indebted to the Obama Administration because it did not openly accuse Islamabad of sheltering the al-Qaeda leader, which gives the U.S. some leverage. However, Preble expressed concern that America's conduct suggests Washington needs Pakistan more than Pakistan needs Washington. Zakheim concluded that Congress may be less inclined to provide funding to Pakistan, which could encourage the Pakistanis to turn to China for support.