

Gadhafi's Death Boosts Obama's Credentials In Foreign Affairs

BY PETER NICHOLAS AND DAVID LAUTER

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WASHINGTON — For a president who promised to end the gunslinger ways of his predecessor, Barack Obama has proven himself very comfortable with the use of lethal force.

In the past six months, he authorized Navy Seals to kill Osama bin Laden in Pakistan. He approved the fatal drone strike on an American cleric in Yemen and dispatched military advisors to Uganda to hunt down the leaders of a notorious militia. All told this year, he has sent U.S. troops into action in or over at least seven countries on two continents.

Now he has added Moammar Gadhafi to the list of enemies eliminated.

"This comes at a time when we see the strength of American leadership across the world," Obama said from the White House Rose Garden, tabulating his achievements with language that betrayed a trace of bravado.

"We've taken out al-Qaida leaders, and we've put them on a path to defeat."

Those foreign victories are unlikely to bring him much reward at home. With voters singularly focused on the economy, developments overseas have little influence on Obama's approval level. The president's "bump" in the polls after bin Laden's death lasted barely a month. No one expects a similar boost from Gadhafi's demise.

About the most that Obama and his strategists can hope for politically is that killing national enemies such as bin Laden and Gadhafi will help defend him against Republican charges that he is a weak, indecisive leader. While he may be stuck with Jimmy Carter-style economic numbers, Obama has avoided the image of foreign policy weakness that helped make Carter vulnerable in his quest for a second term.

Obama's aides have not been shy to make that point. Asked in a recent interview whether Obama had been prepared for the presidency, David Axelrod, a

As 'Arab Spring' moves into Fall

The death of Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi is yet another chapter in the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, where some are seeking to replace repressive governments with freer, more democratic ones. A look at the status of the conflicts:

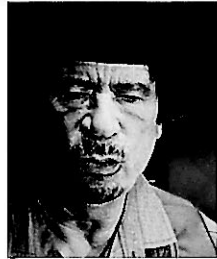
TUNISIA

The birthplace of the "Arab Spring" will hold its first post-revolution elections Oct. 23, selecting an assembly to draft a constitution and form an interim government; Islamist parties are expected to do well



LIBYA

Moammar Gadhafi's death in effect ends NATO's military operation and allows the ruling Transitional National Council to form a government and proceed with elections; leaders now must contend with scores of armed militias



Moammar Gadhafi

EGYPT

A military council continues to rule; elections are scheduled for Nov. 28 to choose a parliament that will write a new constitution; but the forces that led the revolution have split, with secular leaders worried about the rising power of Islamist political groups

YEMEN

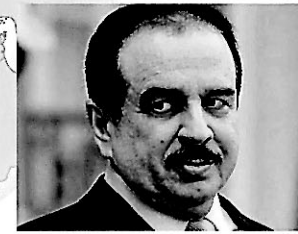
Violence surged after President Ali Abdullah Saleh returned unexpectedly from Saudi Arabia, where he was recovering from an attempted assassination; Saleh has agreed to step down several times, only to renege



President Ali Abdullah Saleh

BAHRAIN

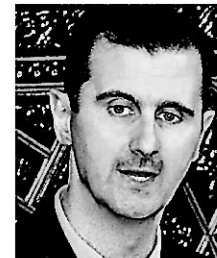
U.S. government has been more tepid in its support for the democracy movement in the country where it bases the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, and was just forced to delay a \$53-million arms sale to the government after a backlash from human rights groups



King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa

SYRIA

President Bashar Assad's regime continues its crackdown on protests that the U.N. estimates has killed 3,000 people so far; there are signs that demonstrators, who were mostly peaceful, have opted to meet the government's violence with force of their own



President Bashar Assad

top campaign advisor, replied: "Maybe you should go ask Osama bin Laden if he thought he was prepared."

In recent months, the Libyan operation, which was launched in the early spring, had become almost an after-thought in Washington, where the president and his Republican opponents are locked in stalemate over the economy and the overall size of government.

But while foreign military operations may not engage the public's attention, they have become one of the administration's clearest legacies. The administration has embraced a distinct style of war that could be seen clearly in the commando raid on bin

Laden's compound, the Hellfire missile that killed Anwar al-Awlaki in Yemen and the airstrikes in Libya.

Obama made clear his preference for those sorts of engagements in his most prideful line Thursday: "Without putting a single U.S. service member on the ground, we achieved our objective," he said.

That change has been partly imposed by circumstances. Obama went into the Libyan crisis determined to not stretch American military resources further, with U.S. forces committed in Iraq and Afghanistan and the domestic economy struggling. The result is a new approach to waging war.

"The contrast between Bush's handling of Iraq and Afghanistan and Obama's handling of Libya is breathtaking," said Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer and a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution. "No ground footprint, no U.S. casualties and no responsibility for the day after."

Obama's willingness to engage militarily has angered some of his Democratic supporters. But he was never the dove that some imagined in 2008. As a candidate, Obama argued that terror groups in Afghanistan were a more direct threat to the U.S. than were the insurgents in Iraq, and he sent an additional 13,000 troops there a month after taking office.

Late in 2009, he approved another 30,000, which increased the overall U.S. troop presence to nearly 100,000. Even when the troop surge ends after next summer, there will still be more U.S. troops in Afghanistan than when Obama took office.

But by contrast with George W. Bush, he has tried to avoid at least the appearance of America acting as a solo sheriff. In his remarks after Gadhafi's death, he linked the end of the Libyan regime to that broader foreign policy theme as he stressed that the U.S. had acted as part of a

"coalition that included ... NATO and Arab nations."

Libya may be back on the administration's problem list long before the 2012 election rolls around, of course.

Gadhafi is "gone, but what will be the character of the political order that emerges in his wake?" asked Andrew Bacevich, a professor of history and international relations at Boston University. "I don't think the U.S. will have a tremendous amount of influence in determining what the character of that order will be."

U.S. and allied officials acknowledged it will be a struggle to bring Libya's independent militias under central control, to scoop up Gadhafi's remaining arms, and to build a democracy that has no tradition of independent political institutions.

"There is going to be a population of people — a small one, but nevertheless one that has to be contended with — who believe they were better off with Gadhafi," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said in an interview with CBS.

She also said that the country remained "awash in weapons," in what is "a big concern for the United States."

Despite those caveats, administration aides have reason to regard the eight-month Libya war as a success — and were quick to claim it as such.

"The bottom line is this is a huge victory for the Libyan people, but we wouldn't be where we are today without the decisions that the president made," said Ben Rhodes, deputy national security advisor for communications. "We were able to see a dictator of over 40 years fall in less than eight months, and that's an extraordinary pace of events."

Staff writers Paul Richter, David S. Cloud, Brian Bennett and Lisa Mascaro of the Tribune Washington Bureau contributed to this article.

Obama Signs 3 Trade Deals, Biggest Since NAFTA

BY JIM ABRAMS Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama signed off Friday on the first three — and possibly last — free trade agreements of his administration, deals with South Korea, Colombia, and Panama that could be worth billions to American exporters and create tens of thousands of jobs.

The three deals were years in the making, and the difficulty of bringing them to fruition make it unlikely there will be another bilateral trade agreement during Obama's current term.

Obama signed them with none of the ceremonial fanfare that normally accompanies such triumphs. Republicans, while supportive of the deals, continue to find fault with Obama's trade policies. And nearly three-fourths of House Democrats voted against the trade measures.

The agreements will bring to 20 those countries that have free trade relations with the United States.

Trade won't go away as an issue, as the administration

pushes ahead with a major Pacific rim trade pact, Congress and the White House scuffle over China, and Republicans take aim at Obama's policies during the presidential campaign.

But, "I don't see this administration coming up with new free trade agreements," said National Foreign Trade Council president Bill Reinsch. "For the next six months we ought to go after trade liberalization in manageable pieces."

Republicans accuse the administration of moving too slowly to find new free trade partners, resulting in U.S. exporters losing out

to foreign rivals. The administration says it is promoting free trade, but wants to assure that the other side is playing by the rules, that basic worker and environmental rights are observed, and that deals promote U.S. job growth.

"From day one," U.S. Trade Representative Ron Kirk told The Associated Press, the guiding principle has been not just to complete the three trade agreements but "to develop a new paradigm for trade, and rebuild and restore America's confidence in our trading policy."

He added that the administration was on track of reaching

Obama's goal, set early last year, of doubling U.S. exports over a five-year period.

Trade officials, in justifying their approach, point to the 83 Senate votes for the South Korean deal, which was renegotiated by Obama to expand access for U.S. vehicles in Korea. That was the highest total ever for a free trade vote.

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Christopher Cox was the 28th chair of the Securities and Exchange Commission. From 1986 to 1988, Cox served in the White House as senior associate counsel to the president. For 10 of his 17 years in Congress, Cox served in the majority leadership of the U.S. House of Representatives and was chair of many committees. With the global economy in uncharted waters, Cox explains the signs coming from the markets and decodes the signals coming out of Washington. He understands the complex push and pull that determines the nature of the regulatory environment, the financial markets and the success of American business around the world.

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