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## Emperor Obama

by Sheldon Richman  
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We were warned. “Who can deny but the *president general* will be a *king* to all intents and purposes, and one of the most dangerous kind too; a king elected to command a standing army.... The *President-general*, who is to be our *king* after this government is established, is vested with powers exceeding those of the most *despotic monarch* we know of in modern times.... I challenge the politicians of the whole continent to find in any period of history a monarch more absolute....”

That was written by Benjamin Workman under the penname “Philadelphiensis,” one of the Anti-Federalists who warned in 1787-88 that the proposed Constitution would centralize power to an appalling degree, particularly in the executive branch.

Now here’s President Barack Obama defending his unilateral military intervention in the civil war raging in Libya (emphasis added):

“Confronted by this brutal repression and a looming humanitarian crisis, *I* ordered warships into the Mediterranean. European allies declared their willingness to commit resources to stop the killing.... [At] *my* direction, America led an effort with our allies at the United Nations Security Council to pass a historic resolution that authorized a no-fly zone to stop the regime’s attacks from the air, and further authorized all necessary measures to protect the Libyan people.... We knew that if we wanted — if we waited one more day — Benghazi, a city nearly the size of Charlotte, could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world.... *I* refused to let that happen. And so nine days ago, after consulting the

bipartisan leadership of Congress, *I* authorized military action to stop the killing and enforce UN Security Council Resolution 1973.... [As] President, *I* refused to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves before taking action.... Of course, there is no question that Libya — and the world — would be better off with Qaddafi out of power. *I*, along with many other world leaders, have embraced that goal.... The task that *I* assigned our forces — to protect the Libyan people from immediate danger, and to establish a no-fly zone — carries with it a UN mandate and international support.”

You see no reference to a congressional declaration of war or the Constitution. Philadelphiensis and his compatriots would not have been surprised. They saw early on that it wouldn't take much for a president to become an emperor.

Obama continued: “I've made it clear that *I* will never hesitate to use our military swiftly, decisively, and unilaterally when necessary to defend our people, our homeland, our allies, and our core interests.... But let us also remember that for generations, we have done the hard work of protecting our own people, *as well as millions around the globe*. We have done so because we know that our own future is safer, our own future is brighter, if more of mankind can live with the bright light of freedom and dignity” (emphasis added).

There in a nutshell is the imperial premise: Our future depends on the condition of the rest of mankind. Therefore, the president may bomb or invade anywhere he likes as long as *he* believes intervention is feasible. And as long as he can get the U.S.-dominated NATO and UN Security Council on board. (NATO, incidentally, was never established for such a purpose.) Obama's touted “coalition” is cold comfort to those who realize that freedom and fiscal moderation at home are jeopardized by a government run amok in the world.

Once upon a time, people actually believed that a president could not constitutionally commit troops abroad without a declaration of war by Congress. With some exceptions, that belief held presidents in check for a while. But it passed away sometime after 1942, and since then presidents have gone to war — big-time and small — whenever they damn well pleased. Congress has simply been too timid to assert itself against imperial presidents. After the undeclared Vietnam war disaster, a War Powers Resolution was passed in an attempt to limit future presidents, but it was a pale substitute for the war-declaration requirement — and besides, cowardly Congresses have never pushed to enforce the resolution.

The Anti-Federalists saw it coming. We can't say we weren't warned.