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'The Rachel Maddow Show' for Tuesday, March 22nd, 2011

Read the transcript to the Tuesday show

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Guests: Ezra Klein, Ayman Mohyeldin, Gideon Rose

RACHEL MADDOW, HOST: Good evening, Lawrence. Thank you for that.

And thanks to you at home for staying with us for the next hour.

Happy birthday to the Arab League. On this day in 1945, at the end of World War II, the Arab League was founded in Cairo. Today, the Arab League is part of a coalition of the not-so-willing that is participating in a military intervention in the Arab state of Libya.

In modern military interventions and wars, there have been a number of coalitions of the not-so-willing. In George W. Bush's Iraq war, we used to call it the "coalition of the billing," since many countries' participation in that was bought at a relatively high price to U.S. taxpayers.

What's difference of the coalition of the not-so-willing in Libya right now is that the United States is not just taking part in rounding up the coalition here, the United States is among the countries who are very happy to have it be known that we are only barely willing to be participating in this ourselves.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

BARACK OBAMA, PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES: We will continue to support the efforts to protect the Libyan people, but we will not be in the lead. When this transition takes place, it is not going to be our planes that are maintaining the no-fly zone. It is not going to be our ships that are necessarily involved in enforcing the arms embargo. That's precisely what the other coalition partners are going to do.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: The message is clear. We are here to help, but this is very much not an American war. Listening to President Obama, the United States is a reluctant participant in this.

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And it's not just his words that broadcast that message. All of his actions have been telegraphing that as well. While the United States flew the majority of air missions over Libya at the start of this operation, now, that is no longer the case. The proportion of missions flown by coalition countries is on the rise.

Today, the Obama administration successfully pushed to get NATO more involved in the military command and control operations, again replacing the U.S. Also, a senior U.S. official is telling reporters today that more Arab nations are expected to contribute to the no-fly zone in the next several days.

The Obama administration is doing everything it can to keep the American role here as low profile as possible.

The consequences of that strategy at home look like this. In the beltway media, headlines like this: at Politico.com today, "Sarkozy's War." Sarkozy, he's French. Everybody freak out.

And a part of the American right that never met a military intervention they did not like is quite loudly upset at the lack of presidential chest-thumping here. They want their president in a flight suit, on an aircraft carrier, fake landing a fighter jet, preferably with cinched up straps around the crotch. Thank you very much.

At "The Weekly Standard" today, which is the only place in the world where the Iraq war is

still a good idea, even in retrospect, "The Weekly Standard" today ran an editorial today which I do not think was sarcastic. They wrote, quote, "President Obama is taking us to war in another Muslim country. Good for him." Again, not sarcastic, at least I don't think so.

After noting concerns about perceptions the U.S. was invading another Muslim country, Bill Kristol at "The Weekly Standard" wrote, "rubbish." That's how they talk at "The Weekly Standard." Rubbish! "Our invasions," he wrote, "Our invasions have, in fact, been liberations."

After both American wars in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan and our intervention in the '90s in the Balkans, "The Weekly Standard" says, quote, "Libya will be America's fifth war of Muslim liberation." They even posted alongside this editorial this portrait of the American Revolutionary War.

I'm not sure of the exact analogy. When you

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think about it, I guess, the American colonial rebels are—I don't know, maybe, they are Benghazi, in which case the U.S. intervening in Libya now is like, like, yes, OK, the analogy doesn't make sense at all. But, still, you get the idea. A noble image!

“Libya will be America's fifth war of Muslim liberation.” And that, that triumphalist nonsense from the American right is a global problem in terms of America's role in the world. That is why President Obama is doing what he's doing right now, the way he is doing it in Libya. It is the overarching “America in the world challenge” of the Obama presidency. Frankly, it is the overall “America in the world challenge” of all Americans after the George W. Bush era.

This image, still promoted by the American right, even now, that the U.S. is stomping around the Muslim world, imposing our desires and outcomes on those savage people because frankly we know better, that is the narrative—the narrative of America in the world in the 21st century. “The Narrative,” capital T, capital N.

“The Narrative” is what Moammar Gadhafi is arguing now to other countries, to try to stop them from taking sides against him.

“The Narrative” is what mobs of Pakistanis were shouting outside Raymond Davis' jail cell in Lahore.

“The Narrative” is al Qaeda's fundamental recruiting line, frankly. I mean, it's hard to

approach somebody in the world and say, hey, we think you ought to kill yourself for our nihilist cause we can't explain in polite company.

But you don't start them off on that. You start them off—you start off your recruiting with the narrative.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: That America is waging a war against Islam, invaded Iraq because it hates Muslims, invaded Afghanistan because it hates Muslims. And that the only way to stop the war is for Muslims to stop fighting back on all fronts against the West.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: That was former Muslim extremist explaining on “60 Minutes” what the narrative is and how terrorist groups use it to attract

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new recruits. America waging war against Islam, America invading Iraq and Afghanistan because America hates Muslims, America doing all of that for its own self interest, despite what Muslims want and how they might self define.

The narrative did not just come from the George W. Bush presidency. American intervention in Muslim countries has been exploited for propaganda value and used to make a case for America's role in the world as essentially malevolent long before Bush's invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan.

The narrative just got that much worse when, in addition to all of that, we had a president who was the guy in the flight suit talking about the Crusades.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

GEORGE W. BUSH, FORMER U.S. PRESIDENT:
And the American people are beginning to understand. This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take awhile.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: That narrative of the crusades, of America as the great enemy of Muslims, as a declared combatant in a religious war against which Muslim citizens around the world must defend themselves from an American Army, of America as a country that is imposing its will on Muslim lands, that is the narrative that Barack Obama said that as president he would try to change.

President Obama was inaugurated in January of 2009. By June of that year, he was already in Cairo making his "big picture, challenge the narrative" speech to the Muslim world.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: I've come here to Cairo to seek a new beginning between the United States and Muslims around the world—one based on mutual interest and mutual respect. And one based upon the truth that America and Islam are not exclusive and need not be in competition. Instead, they overlap and share common principles. There's so much fear, so much mistrust that has built up over the years. But if we choose to be bound by the past, we will never move forward.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: This is the big foreign policy idea of the Obama presidency, hitting the reset button

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on America's relations with the Muslim world, undoing forever "The Narrative"—"The Narrative" that America big foots the Middle East and Muslim people whenever we feel it is in our own interests. And then into the first term of that presidency falls Moammar Gadhafi, and his bloody military suppression of a popular uprising against him in Libya.

So, alongside the commitment to changing the big narrative about America imposing its will by force in the Muslim world, President Obama commits to participating in an international military action to stop Gadhafi, but he also commits overtly over and over again to keeping the U.S. role to that of a participant, not of a leader—to define us as one country among many in the international community, including some Muslim majority countries that are concerned enough with Gadhafi to take direct action to stop him. We are part of this coalition, but we are not—well, we are part of a maybe not-so-willing part of it? Can you say that?

President Obama is making short-term decisions about American actions based on a long term goal of redefining America's role in the world. So, we are not perceived as being at war with Islam. So, no matter what "The Weekly Standard" wants, when kids in Cairo or Benghazi or the West Bank get that al Qaeda recruitment pitch about the crusading West throwing its weight around and disrespecting Muslims, that recruiting pitch does not ring true. So, it doesn't stick.

But how Libya works out in the end will

ultimately be the thing that decides whether the president is successful here. If Gadhafi is toppled and it's by his own people, and the international community is seen as having played a protective role and not an imperialist one, not an aggressive one, then not only is Gadhafi gone, but the Arab world takes another step towards self-determination and America takes a direct hit.

But if the rebels can't beat Gadhafi and Gadhafi stays, weakened or not, and this intervention drags on, and American leadership in this intervention is something that can't really be handed off, something for which there isn't a military substitute, then the president will have paid all of the domestic political cost for having done this thing this way, having foregone the chest-thumping that everybody expects of a president. He will have paid that cost and he will have reaped none of the benefit in terms of America's role in the world changing. Those are the stakes.

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Happy birthday, Arab League, and good luck.

Joining us now is Ayman Mohyeldin. He's Middle East correspondent for Al Jazeera English. He's just back from months of reporting on the uprising in Egypt that frankly and justifiably made him world famous.

Ayman, thank you for being here.

AYMAN MOHYELDIN, AL JAZEERA ENGLISH CORRESPONDENT: Thank you very much for having me.

MADDOW: Do you—let me just—I don't want anybody to assume you agree with what I just said because you were sitting here while I said it. So, let me ask you—just for your reaction to that idea that there is a master narrative like that about America's role in the Muslim world, and that President Obama seems to want to try to change it.

MOHYELDIN: Well, you know, if I had to take a look at when President Obama gave his speech, had that speech been last week or maybe a few days before all of these revolutions were kicking off in the Arab world, I would say the timing of that speech, followed by some of the events of the past few days, would certainly kind of give credit or perhaps lend credit to the notion that America is genuine about resetting its policies in the Middle East. The sad reality of it is, there was actually a two-year gap, you know, during which we were actually able to see President Obama's foreign policy play out in the Middle East.

And I can tell you from being in the Middle East, ordinary Arabs across the divide are not convinced by the speech that he gave in Cairo, and subsequently by the actions about the United States wanting to change its policies towards the Arab world and the Muslim world. What makes it more tragic in Libya is that in the eyes of some, this is a situation where there is a convergence of interests between what the United States wants and what a big portion of the Arab world wants, which is they want the ousting of Gadhafi.

So, here's a situation where it would actually be a convergence of interest that could work to the advantage of enhancing America's reputation in the eyes of Arabs and Muslims. But unfortunately, because of those years and the large military footprint America has in the region, that genuine intention perhaps is being lost. America has spent so much of its currency and credibility in the Arab world over the years, it simply does not have it at this

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stage to even convince ordinary Arabs that what we are doing in Libya is for a good cause, not for imperialist reasons.

MADDOW: So, no matter the nuance, no matter the back seat effort that

sort of America taking back seat strategy that the president is trying to put on this intervention, you think that because of the past, because of what's happened in years past—this will still largely be seen as America big footing the Middle East?

MOHYELDIN: I think for two reasons. One, if we were to be very critical and say, well, would this military intervention have happened if the number one resource in Libya that America could benefit from or, let's say, bananas, not oil—

MADDOW: Right.

MOHYELDIN: -- would we be in this situation? That's one.

And two, it's because there has been such a large military footprint of the United States in supporting so many of these regimes, it's very difficult to believe that the United States is now essentially going to change on a dime and completely go 180 degrees and stop supporting many of these regimes.

And I think this is the problem we're facing, particularly from U.S. foreign policy perspective. The United States has lost that credibility. It has to restore it.

Now, it can in Libya to some extent. And that is the scope of the military operation. How big is it? Will there be boots on the ground? Are we going to see longevity?

And more importantly, when it comes to the position of Libyans determining what they want for their future, how and how big of a role and what type of role the United States plays can help reestablish that confidence in the Arab world?

MADDOW: How does—I mean, we've simultaneously got things going on of incredible drama, an incredible significance in countries like Bahrain, and in Yemen. Are those—I mean, are those questions also called, the prospect of intervention in those places, is that prospect being raised by this president now of the U.S. being involved in an international intervention in Libya?

MOHYELDIN: Well, I think every Arab leader

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and I think the chief of staff of almost every Arab army is probably sitting somewhere in their capitals and asking themselves, could have I a no-fly zone imposed over me if the situation boils over?

MADDOW: Right.

MOHYELDIN: Could I see western military forces pounding my country? And the reality of it is, this is what we heard from the two regimes that fell before Gadhafi. They used the scare tactic as they've been calling it. The scare the West in saying, well, you know, if this happens, if I step down, if I step out, you're going to get chaos and you're going to get insecurity and you're going to get al Qaeda. But at the same time, they use the scare tactic with their own people by telling them, you know, I have been an Arab leader, you are now getting Western imperialism.

And this is what we said Ali Abdullah Saleh say in Yemen. He said that this was a coup being hatched in Tel Aviv and Washington. And it shows you that these Arab leaders are in difficult positions, there's a complete disconnect and a divide between the reality and what is being said in terms of rhetoric.

MADDOW: Everybody is selling the foundational myth of choice for that day in order to advance their position.

Ayman Mohyeldin, Al Jazeera English Middle East correspondent—your work from Cairo, and you being on air to explain to our viewers what you were able to report for Al Jazeera

English was a huge asset for us. So, I'm really happy to see in person to be able to thank you for that.

MOHYELDIN: Thank you very much for having me.

MADDOW: Thanks. Good luck.

MOHYELDIN: Good luck. Thank you.

MADDOW: In domestic politics here at home, the last election was all about jobs, right? Jobs and the economy, budgets. Now that the people elected in that jobs, economy, budget election had a few months to get down to work, though, it turns out that when you said jobs, the economy, the budget, what they heard was abortion, abortion, abortion. It is the worst game of telephone ever.

That's coming up.

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(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: At intense times like this, the best way to keep the news from freaking you out—everybody, freak out—is to do what you need to do to understand the things in the news that are proving to be so scary. Information is like a vaccine against fear.

So, for example, with Japan, can you understand why a big tsunami might lead to a nuclear accident? Yes, you can. Can you understand what a nuclear meltdown really is, how it works? Yes, you can. It turns out, even if you sucked at physics.

Can that understanding of those things help us all realize that if you live in California, you really do not need to be taking potassium iodide pills now? Yes, yes, and yes.

Another thing that freaks us out understandably, but about which information can be a helpful fear vaccine is terrorism. There have been a lot of different terrorist organizations that have posed a lot of different threats to a lot of different countries over time.

When the Rand Corporation a couple years ago did a big study of hundreds of terrorist groups in different countries and how those groups came to an end, that provided a useful way to think about al Qaeda, as not just the singular, nihilist, unknowable group that attacked us on 9/11, but as one of among lots of groups that has tried over time to get its way by force.

And if you understand how terrorist try to get their way by force and how they've been defeated in other contexts, it is easier to come up with good, time-tested strategy to use against those groups. It doesn't exactly make you feel better, but it does reduce the freak out factor and it promotes rational thinking about real problems.

There's a reason people devote their whole lives to studying stuff like this, it's because it helps.

As we embark on yet another military campaign in the Middle East this week, do we know enough about America at war now to be able to look at Libya, to be able to look at this in a broader context, and make some smart predictions about how this is likely to work out, about what might increase or decrease the chances for success here, however that's defined.

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There have been over 100 U.S. military actions just in my lifetime that resulted in presidential notification to Congress. Using that sample size of all of our previous modern wars, can we make a calm, cool, collected assessment about how this war is likely to end?

My next guest says we can. He wrote the book on this, which is called "How Wars End." What he says about how this is likely to end in Libya for President Gadhafi and President Obama will probably surprise you.

That's next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: President Obama promised from the outset that there would be no U.S. ground troops involved in Libya.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

OBAMA: I also want to be clear about what we will not be doing. The United States is not going to deploy ground troops into Libya.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: That was not only a promise from the American president, it was also an explicit condition of the U.N. vote for all other countries to intervene—no ground troops, no foreign boots on the ground.

It turns out that's easier said than done. We woke up today to news that an American F-15E had crashed in eastern Libya. The U.S.

military says it crashed because of mechanical failure, not because it was shot down.

But when the plane's two crewmen ejected from that plane before it crashed, what we got inadvertently was American boots on the ground in Libya, quickly followed by more of them as U.S. search and rescue operation landed more U.S. troops on Libyan soil to collect that crew from the crashed F-15. That led to disputed reports that the search and rescue team had shot Libyan civilians during their mission to find and extract those two U.S. crewmen from the crashed plane.

The plan was for zero American boots on the ground, but that sort of plan is hard to guarantee. Similarly, the time horizon here. President Obama has promised that U.S. military leadership in Libya will be of short duration.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

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OBAMA: Let me emphasize that we anticipate this transition to take place in a matter of days and not a matter of weeks.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

MADDOW: It is clearer than clear that the United States does not want to be leading this intervention in Libya, that our government is eager to hand off the lead role to other countries.

We want to be a participant in this operation, not its spearhead. The president keeps saying so over and over again.

But why is it we have been its spearhead so far, given the president's stated reluctance to have America dragged into this fight, particularly in a leading role, why has the Pentagon's Africa Command been helming operational command essentially of this international mission?

It's because of this international mission's complexity, because we have been constantly at war in big, complicated, often multilateral wars involving significant air power for essentially a solid decade now, because our military is not only actively experienced in stuff like this, we spend more on our military than just about every other country in the world combined.

If it is a big, complex military operation and the United States is involved, it is hard to imagine the United States not being in charge.

Do we realistically think that's not going to change any time soon in Libya?

I know the president and the Pentagon said they want that to change. They don't want us to stay in charge. But if days turn into weeks in Libya, if Gadhafi is not toppled any time soon—why would we think this is going to be less complicated? Why do we think there is less necessity for the United States to play a lead and coordinating role?

Joining us now is Gideon Rose. He's editor of "Foreign Affairs."

He's author of "How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle."

Mr. Rose, thank you very much for coming in.

GIDEON ROSE, FOREIGN AFFAIRS: Thank you for having me.

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MADDOW: What is the most likely way that this intervention in Libya ends? Does—do you think that Gadhafi ends up staying in power or going?

ROSE: You know, first of all, it depends on us. Second of all, it depends on the Libyans. The people that the Obama administration seems to think it depends on are the other allied members of the coalition are probably the weakest reed. So, I'm not sure what they're smoking if they think that we can back off and yet something actually gets done.

That's what most puzzling.

MADDOW: In terms of the military power of the other people involved.

ROSE: Essentially at this point, there are only three options. Either we climb down from our goals and let Gadhafi come back and take over, which we're probably not going to do, because it would be humiliating, devastating, and violate the entire reason we went in in the first place, or we essentially achieve the mission, the stated initial mission, which is to protect the rebel areas in the eastern part of the country, but not go for regime change. And regime change doesn't occur on its own, in which case we have a set of protracted stalemate, a de facto partition of the country. And this gets interesting and harried over an ongoing period of time.

Or whether local forces can do it, or whether we or our or allies escalate, essentially, you get Gadhafi ousted and then you have something

else. So, either it goes backward, it stays exactly where we are now, or it goes forward. But all three options are not good.

So, I really—the happy talk coming out of the administration at this point is mind-boggling to me because I just don't see why they think this is not going to be a big deal in any of the three courses of action.

MADDOW: I don't—I don't see it as happy talk. I see it as low expectations that we're not going to—we're not going to stay here for a long time. We're not going to lead an expanding large-scale effort here.

ROSE: But that's happy talk because the implication is, we can avoid doing those things and not have chaos or problems.

MADDOW: See? I feel—I guess—I guess I'm hearing it different than you are. I feel warnings about continued chaos and

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problems, because nobody has anything nice to say about a post-Gadhafi Libya. Nobody has even hyping the prospects of what a paradise it's going to be when those rebels finally take over the presidential tent.

I mean, nobody is talking in those terms. What they're saying is, we're not going to run this no matter what happens.

ROSE: But that's actually—you know, it's interesting you say that because I have a good friend who feels the same way. And I think they're kidding themselves if they think they're having done this operation, they can walk away with Libya in chaos. I don't worry so much that the rebels will turn into bad guys once they take over from Gadhafi. I worry that post-Gadhafi allowed chaos.

You know, in Iraq in 2003, the case study of how not to plan a war for the post-war era, you get to Baghdad and you're like Robert Redford in "The Candidate," you say, OK, so, what do we do now, right? When Gadhafi falls, it's like, you know, the dog catching the car. What do we do with Libya? We now effectively own Libya or the coalition does.

And if we try—if we don't have a plan for putting something in place, we can't just walk away and let it be civil war or chaos. The Obama administration seems to think, gee, you know, we said we'd do this, that's all we're doing, now, we're going to go focus on something else.

I think they'll be unable to do what they seem,

honestly, to believe they can do.

MADDOW: Isn't that the effort to try to put somebody like France, "You want to go first? Go ahead, go first," to try to get the Arab League more involved, to try to get regional countries more involved—that's in essence, isn't that trying to set up those countries as being—as responsible or more responsible for post-Gadhafi chaos than we will be?

ROSE: It is trying. But whether it will succeed, we don't know. There's an old lawyer's expression that never ask a question in court when you don't know the answer. You know, we're basically asking ourselves whether the allies will be able to step up and handle things on their own, and it's a very open question.

MADDOW: Thinking about the prospect of post-Gadhafi Libya—I mean,

I've been thinking about post-Saddam Iraq as

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well, and, of course, we're

still there. Is there a way to make peacekeeping and stability operations

particularly in a country where there are no opposition, there are no institutions of state beyond Gadhafi's circle, right? Is there a way to make peacekeeping and stability operations something other than something that looks like war? Is there any institution capable of doing that outside the U.S. which really doesn't want to do it anymore?

ROSE: Yes and no. It's fundamentally a question of political order.

And, you know, we think of politics as different from force and war.

But, in fact, the power of the state over its citizens, the police are not soldiers, they're police, but they have the power of the state behind them. And the establishment of some quasi-legitimate political movement on the ground, somebody in charge so there's not chaos, that was the big problem in Iraq. Who would supply chaos? We didn't supply public order, and so it devolved into communal warfare and outright sort of a mess.

In Libya, the real question will be: can you generate some kind of local political order, or can it be provided from the outside in a relatively benign way with international forces, with nonviolent means? You know, we'll see. This is a big experiment.

And the idea that this was basically decided last week in a couple of meetings, in between other things, without any kind of domestic participation, it's mindboggling, frankly.

MADDOW: While being accused of dithering and taking too long putting while they try to put this together.

ROSE: You got it right earlier, in the comment where you said that they didn't want to do this and they still don't want to jump 180 degrees into the old narrative. So, they are doing it in a backhanded, hesitant way, all the while claiming that's not really what we're doing.

But there's certain logic of interventions themselves. We are now involved in Libya's civil war. And the fact that we say we're not, the fact that we say it's humanitarian, the fact that we say we're going to back off, that conflicts with the substantive logic of the mission we're now engaged in.

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MADDOW: Yes. And highlights why they are trying to say it's not us in the lead, politically.

Gideon Rose, the other of why we "How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle"—I have been wanting to talk to you about this sort of since we started realizing what was going to happen here. And I'm really glad you can come in. Thank you.

ROSE: Thank you very much.

MADDOW: With crises around the world, the biggest story in American politics is still getting reported totally backwards in the beltway press. Note to my colleagues in the talking about the news business, making your budget way, way worse than it already was does not count as you fixing your budget—unless you mean fixing your budget the way you mean fixing your pet cat.

We will enlist no actual cats, but instead the astonishing new governor of Ohio to show how everybody keeps getting this story exactly wrong. That's when we come back.

But, first, "One More Thing" about the U.S. military operation in Libya—as you can see on this map, this map, the Pentagon has divided the world into regional responsibilities. NorthCom is North America, SouthCom is South America. The Middle East for some reason is CentCom. And Africa, naturally, that's AfriCom.

Where's the headquarters for AfriCom? Which is heading up the Libya operation? Where is

AfriCom headquartered? It's headquartered in Stuttgart, in Germany. Naturally, AfriCom headquartered in Stuttgart.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: In South Dakota, Republican Governor Dennis Daugaard signed the nation's most draconian anti-abortion bill, just like he said he would. And never mind the \$4 million the state says it may have to spend to defend the law in court.

South Dakota will now require women to wait 72 hours from when they see a provider to when they actually are allowed by the state to have an abortion. That's the longest waiting period in the country. And it forces women to consult with a so-called pregnancy crisis center before they are allowed to move forward as well.

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pregnancy crisis center, they are essentially fake quack medical clinics run by abortion opponents. They are usually designed to make women think that they are consulting a center that provides abortions when in reality, what they are in for is anti-abortion fake counseling.

What do I mean by that? Well, one pregnancy crisis center in South Dakota gives this description of the morning after pill. Quote, “the tiny baby will die.”

And now, the government of the state of South Dakota will be big enough that it will mandate, it will force women to go to a quack counseling center that will tell them things like that before they are allowed to see an actual doctor.

So, South Dakota wins the prize for big government conservatism most extreme, new anti-abortion law. But it sounds real competition. We asked somebody from the nonprofit Guttmacher Institute a list of states where abortion rights are at risk.

The list that she gave us looks like this: 24 states with bills designed to make it almost impossible for abortion clinics to operate, or that restrict insurance coverage, or that ban abortion outright after 20 weeks, or at some point after you reasonably know you are pregnant at all.

At the federal level, in Congress, it's the same deal. Republicans took control of the House in November, then spent the winter pushing

abortion bills. The No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act, the H.R.3 at the top of the list. The Protect Life Act, H.R. 358, further down because it's mostly doubly, triply does the same thing that's already law anyway. H.R.217, the Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act which defunds Planned Parenthood because that makes sense when you're trying to prevent unplanned pregnancies?

This is what Republicans have been doing wherever they have taken over in the states or in our nation's capital.

What did you think the 2010 elections were about? Did you think the 2010 elections were about jobs? The Republicans who got elected in such overwhelming numbers in those elections apparently did not think they were elected because of jobs. They thought they were elected to crackdown on access to abortion and abortion rights.

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That must be it, because for politicians who are supposedly in such a rush to fix the economy, these guys have a ton of time on their hands to worry about monitoring every last pregnancy in America—among other things that also have nothing to do with creating jobs. We'll have more on that in just a moment.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

MADDOW: If you want to buy booze in the great state of Ohio, not beer and wine but booze, anything more than 42-proof, you have to buy it from a state liquor store. Lots of different states do it this way for a lot of different reasons. But in Ohio last year, that arrangement brought in a profit for the state of about \$229 million, a record. Ohioans are drinking more than ever, and that has been great for the state's bottom line -- \$229 million from selling booze in Ohio.

Bottoms up, Buckeye, it's sort of patriot!

But because Ohio is broke, because Ohio has a big budget deficit, like lots of states, the new Republican governor of Ohio, former FOX News celebrity, John Kasich, has apparently decided to give away that funding stream. Wait, what? Yes, this is the sort of thing that's happening all around the country right now. This is sort of like finding out that your family finances are in trouble, and so, you then go to your boss and ask your boss to please lower your salary.

Ohio right now makes nearly \$230 million a

year from state-run liquor stores. But Governor Kasich, pleading poverty, says the state should take that money and instead give it away to businesses. I feel like the politics around what's going on with Republicans in the states right now is being conducted in English and reported in Esperanto. I do not understand why the national reporting on this continues to be so back asswards.

Governor like—governors like Scott Walker in Wisconsin, John Kasich in Ohio, Rick Snyder in Michigan—all of these Republican governors and legislators there keep pleading poverty, telling everybody how broke their states are, right? But then their proposed solutions to this problem of how broke they are is to make their state more broke, to make their budgets worse.

Think about this for a second—for all of Ohio's budget troubles, one bright spot is that Ohio had an income stream of nearly \$230 million

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last year from booze to help pay for the state's needs. Governor Kasich is trying to get rid of that bright spot. Governor Kasich is trying to get rid of that black ink in the state budget and instead give it away.

This does not make Ohio's budget problems better, this makes Ohio's budget problems worse. This is not a means of closing the budget gap, this is a means of taking a whole that exists in the budget gap and blasting into an expanse in the budget.

Anybody who reports that Republican governors and legislators are taking drastic measures to close their state's budget gaps is not reporting there truthfully. In New Jersey, where the governor's cuts to education from last year were just ruled unconstitutional today, in New Jersey, the justification for those cuts was, of course, that New Jersey is broke, right?

What does the Governor Christie want to do to fix that problem of New Jersey being broke? He wants the state to spend \$200 million a year that it is not spending already to cut taxes on estates and corporations.

In Arizona, where Governor Jan Brewer has said the state is broke that people on Medicaid who are on the transplant list have to die because the state can't afford their organs anymore, despite arguing that her state is that broke, Governor Brewer thinks the state of Arizona can somehow afford to spent \$538 million over the next six years on tax cuts, with fully half of that money from totally broke

Arizona being spent on corporate tax cuts.

For all of the pleading poverty these governors and Republican legislators are doing, they have somehow found a lot of money in state budgets to spend on some really specific beneficiaries. Again, I don't know why it is not being reported this way. Maybe it is because the word profligate is hard to pronounce and hard to spell. Honestly, I don't know.

Joining us now is "Washington Post" writer and "Newsweek" columnist and MSNBC contributor, and a man who can both spell and pronounce profligate, Mr. Ezra Klein.

Ezra, thank you for being here.

EZRA KLEIN, MSNBC CONTRIBUTOR: I'm glad to be here, but not after a couple of visits to the Ohio liquor store.

MADDOW: Yes. That can be profligate

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backwards or while walking a very narrow line.

Why is it a secret that giant multimillion dollar tax cuts make budgets worse, and not better? Why is that a national secret in 2011?

KLEIN: It is a triumph of will over numbers. There is—I think you can say there are two things going on here. One, I think there is a long-standing assumption in the press corps that the Republicans care about deficits more than the Democrats do. This, I think, has to do with the fact that Republicans use deficit more than Democrats do.

It has not however been dented by the fact that Democrats in recent years under Clinton have managed to actually balance the budget, while Republicans in recent years under George W. Bush have managed to explode once. That I think is one bucket of it.

The other is that every time you ask Republicans about it, they say, wait for us. They say we're bringing out our budget in a couple of months. Then we will show you how to balance everything, then we'll show how to deal with entitlements. And so, there's been a bit of a wait-and-see approach.

But, as you say, on the state level where the budgets are already coming out, we have waited and we are seeing and they do not look good. They look like an enormous amount of tax cuts that are being paid for on the backs of, in many cases, the poor.

MADDOW: What is interesting, too, is that Republicans also get credit for being super anti-tax. But in many of these Republican states that are giving away these huge budget-busting tax cuts to corporations and to the wealthy, for example, with the state taxes, we are also seeing Republican legislatures and Republican governors proposing raising taxes on the poor. In Georgia, they are proposing raising taxes on blind people.

In Michigan, they are raising taxes specifically on the elderly and the poorest people in the states. But yet, they are still getting credit for being anti-tax zealots. Is—do we have class based distinctions in the way we understand the word “tax” maybe?

KLEIN: This goes to a very serious part of the Republican economic philosophy right now, which is that what you want to do to get economies back on track is you want to lower taxes on, quote-unquote, “the most

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productive members of society,” not the people who spend money, which is what Democrats want to do. They figure you give the tax cut to somebody who needs to make ends meet. He goes out, he pays his rent, his landlord has money.

No, they want to give it to money who have a lot of money under the theory that if you give them more of an incentive to work, because now, they’ll be able to make even more money, they will sort of work their magic on the economy and the economy will rebound. I don’t think the data really bears this out, but it’s an important distinction. They’re not just for low taxes. They are specifically for low taxes on the rich under a sort of Randian philosophy that the rich are the ones who really drive economic growth in this country.

MADDOW: Haven’t we already seen a bit of experimentation with that as corporate profits have rebounded so much in the last couple of years? I mean, corporate profits have been doing great and, yet, what corporations have been doing with that profit is sitting on it. They’ve not been plowing it back into the kind of investment that would create jobs. Isn’t that right?

KLEIN: I wouldn’t say this has been a theory very amenable to evidence. In the Bush years, of course, we lowered taxes on the rich dramatically and I don’t think anybody looks back at that and says it was a great time.

But as you say there was a shifting rationale here. We go from—it’s all about deficits and

they want to come in and they want to extend the Bush tax cuts at a cost of \$4 trillion and then it’s all about reducing uncertainty and sort of now we’re here—bigger deficits, a lot of uncertainty, and unclear economic philosophy.

MADDOW: “Washington Post” writer, “Newsweek” columnist, MSNBC contributor and profligacy pronouncer, Ezra Klein—thank you very much for joining us.

KLEIN: Thank you.

MADDOW: Coming up next: the story of mistakes made at an American nuclear plant that are so outrageous there is no short hand Twitter expression appropriate to capture the appropriate reaction with or without the hash mark. That’s next.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

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MADDOW: When human beings are responsible for things, when humans lay our human hands on them and use our human brains and implement our human ideas with our humanness, there is by definition a possibility for human error. You can say your safety assurances are super human but unless your safety experts are from the “Planet Krypton” nothing you as a human, nothing you can do will ever overcome the possibility of human error.

Accidents happen. Mistakes happen. They happen all the time. And sometimes, they happen all the time in the same place. Such a place is near an earthquake fault or two, and when such a place also plays host to nuclear fission on a regular basis, that’s news.

And here it is. By the year 1970, construction permits have been issued for a new nuclear power plant in California. When the utility Pacific Gas and Electric, PG&E, applied for the permits, the company said the site had only insignificant faults that have shown no movement for at least 100,000 and possibly millions of years.

Construction costs for that assuredly, totally, non-seismic nuclear plants were estimated to be around -- \$320 million. Barely a year later, it’s 1971, and—uh-oh, new fault line is discovered offshore, less than three miles from the plant’s location.

Humans decide that the site is still well-suited for releasing energy from atoms as long as the money spent on construction goes from \$320

million—to more than \$5 billion, slightly less than a 15 fold increase.

Then, by 1981 -- uh-oh again—it turns out that the seismic supports built to deal with that newly discovered offshore fault, we humans built them backwards. Literally, we looked at the blue prints the wrong way around. It’s like a post-modern episode of Mr. Magoo, except nuclear apocalypse is the punch line.

So, all of the retrofitting which was done backwards had to be retrofitted. That would be another \$2.2 billion please.

Flash forward to 2008 and—uh-oh again—a new fault discovered less than a mile from the plant. PG&E and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, they go ahead and decide that the new fault line, no biggie. It will be fine.

But the state energy commission in California

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begs to differ. The state energy commission says that not enough is known about that new fault line and the plant should do some 3D seismic mapping to see if things are safe. That was three years ago and, no, they still haven't done the seismic mapping.

But they have been running the star crossed, human error-riddled nuclear reactor all along. And then Japan happened and then when Japan happened, California's Lieutenant Governor Gavin Newsom went on TV to draw attention to the safety shortcomings at this God-forsaken California nuclear plant.

And then the Union of Concerned Scientists dropped this non-atomic bombshell. It turns out after all the safety scares this plant has been through. After all the billions and billions of dollars of safety upgrades at this plant, turns out that the emergency cooling pumps that are supposed to kick in if anything goes wrong in the reactors or the spent fuel pools, those pumps were disabled for 18 months. They were non-operational before anybody noticed. The valves were stuck for a year and a half.

Nothing approaching an earthquake or tsunami like Japan happened during those 18 months, but if it had, there would have been no backup cooling systems available at this California nuclear plant.

After all of that, the geophysicist who is also the California state senator whose district includes this plant is now asking for its license to be suspended, at least until the updated

seismic studies can be finished. That state senator is a Republican. And did I mention he's a geophysicist?

I have long had a theory that people who came before us should be given the benefit of the doubt when they gave names to things that were clearly designed to warn us away from those things. The canyon where California's God-forsaken nuclear power plant is located is called Diablo Canyon. That should have been a hint, maybe. It's the nuclear power plant from H-E-double hockey sticks. Diablo Canyon? Seriously?

That does it for us tonight. We'll see you again tomorrow night.

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END

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