

## Looking for the ‘Good War’

By Dr. John Bruni

**E**ver since the end of NAZI Germany (1945) and the Soviet Union (1991), the world was left without a serious challenger to the international order. Rather than being a cause for celebration and social evolution, this has been a cause of frustration and disorientation.

The nation-states that survived and grew out of World War II and the Cold War played an interesting game. They swore never again to wage total war, reflecting on the horrors of World War II and the possible extinction of life by a nuclear holocaust during the Cold War. Multilateral frameworks were established in order to rein in the baser instincts of national leaders. To a degree, these frameworks succeeded. But they did so in an ironic way. Nation-states might not have wanted to revisit total war or institutionalised armed confrontation, but they did not give away their instruments of destruction. National service might have ended in many countries, reducing the size of armed forces and military arsenals around the world, but the weaponry evolved to become more sophisticated and more deadly. Furthermore, in a world that is still organised into nation-states, where sovereignty and its physical defence is viewed by many as an intrinsic right, the projection of military power abroad in defence of sovereign interests has not, nor will it end anytime soon. This has left national leaders in a quandary. They need to be able to justify the use of force since they command the national military arsenal. This means preparing for war, even if the likelihood of confrontation or conflict is remote.

In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the international community suffered its greatest disorientation. The United States, the West’s military leader and the world’s sole remaining hegemon, decided to pay a ‘peace dividend’. And this in the midst of a world thrown back into violence with the break-up of Yugoslavia, the strategic challenges of a free Eastern Europe, the growing boldness and sophistication of Islamist terrorism and chaos and misery in Africa. While the military forces of the West were certainly capable of projecting power beyond their borders, national leaders were often confused over priorities, and when crises such as Somalia (1993) or Rwanda (1994) took place, the West chose from two poor options – a) intervention with conventional military forces to fight local guerrillas or b) leaving the locals to themselves. The ultimate problem, however, was that in neither Somalia nor Rwanda national interests of other countries were at stake. Neither Somalia nor Rwanda posed a clear and present danger to the US or the European capitals. And while local forces slaughtered each other with wanton abandon, in the case of Somalia they also violently turned against the armed humanitarian intervention sent in to stabilise that fractured country. (The UN banner under which the armed humanitarian intervention fought offering little comfort to the multinational soldiers wearing the blue helmet.)



The 1990s saw a case of smaller, more efficient high-technology conventional military forces looking for something *real* to target. A threat that was big in the public’s imagination – a new Hitler or Stalin, anything that could justify the enormous multi-billion dollar budgets needed to keep these forces in-being.

In a very limited way, these demons were found in the likes of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden and Serbian dictator, Slobodan Milosevic.

But Hussein and Milosevic, as brutal as they might have been, were never in the category of Hitler or Stalin. Their countries were small, under-developed states with extremely limited capabilities and, importantly, with limited national ambitions. Bin Laden was an altogether different threat. Not commanding armies or cabals of terrorists in numbers necessary to overthrow the established Middle East order or to critically damage the US, Bin Laden's influence grew due to the amount of time former President George W. Bush and his ideological fellow travellers devoted to talking up the threat he posed following 9/11. Immediately following the US military incursion into Afghanistan in 2001, the Al Qaeda threat was largely broken up; its remnants splintering into smaller cells of operatives of which many moved from Afghanistan to Pakistan, complicating US military operations and Washington's relations with Pakistan. Al Qaeda's Afghan ally, the Taliban, did not collapse following the US military intervention, nor after Al Qaeda's retreat and reorganisation. In fact, as the US intervention into Afghanistan morphed from a hunt for Osama bin Laden, to rooting out the Taliban, to nation building, the military operation rapidly escalated into a full-blown out-of-area NATO mission, involving many other states eager to be seen to support the US in its quixotic quest.

In 2003, the stage was set to overthrow Saddam Hussein in a spectacular demonstration of 'shock and awe' military technology. As history has shown, the reasons for his overthrow were spurious. Saddam was neither allied to Bin Laden as some international policy makers and

commentators believed, nor did he pose a clear and present threat to the United States or even the Arab Gulf States because his military was



pummelled during the 1991 Gulf War and starved of avenues to rebuild under the international sanctions regime. While the American overthrow

of a Middle East dictator initially played well to the American audience, the execution of Hussein's demise was ill planned which led to a painful and protracted insurgency, trapping a sizeable element of US military power in that country and eventually turning the American people against the war.

In 2008, during the US presidential primaries, Democratic candidate Barak Obama suggested that the US needed to re-orientate away from Iraq and look toward fighting the 'good war' against remnant Al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

In 2009, Obama did indeed promise to drawdown US forces in Iraq by the end of 2011, and surge new US forces into Afghanistan which happened in 2010. With the main military



mission in Iraq ending in a few months time and Iraqi forces taking on the lion's share of the

country's defence, it remains to be seen whether moving from what many pundits have said was a 'bad war' in Iraq to a more robust mission in Afghanistan, will give the US the good war it seeks – a war that is justifiable, honourable and has the backing of the Afghan and American people. However, recent polling has shown that

the US and NATO presence in Afghanistan is unpopular among Afghans, and largely unpopular among the people from NATO contributing countries. To date, contrary to statements from the US State Department, US military commanders and US politicians who say that the American-led effort in Afghanistan is turning the situation around, the Taliban are far from a spent force. When people speak of this war's end, they articulate it in years, not months or weeks. There is no light on the hill and no hope for a quick solution.

Staying in the Muslim World, we turn to another country currently in flames – Libya.

With Iraq 'secured' and the Afghan insurgency in a strategic stalemate, the international community, this time led by a hawkish Franco-British alliance, has decided to end the 42-year rule of Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi. While no great asset to the international community, Gaddafi, a leader easy to lampoon for his swagger, rumoured life-style and dress, is nonetheless the lynchpin of the modern Libyan state. His demise by accidental or deliberate foreign aerial assassination is perhaps the 'good war' the Europeans need to finally step out of America's military shadow. That the US is happy to take a back seat to this imbroglio says more about Washington's lack of faith in European strategy, than it does about American strength, sapped as it is by Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, those the Europeans are backing, the disorganised and ill-disciplined Benghazi Resistance led by Mustafa Abdul Jalil, have neither a state apparatus, nor an alternative governing structure as a foundation upon which to base a post-Gaddafi Libya. Indeed, while Gaddafi's brutal fight-back against Libyans tired of his rein has given an obvious *raison d'être* for NATO's military intervention, it is still unclear whether NATO's local Libyan allies are up to

the task of taking the fight to Tripoli without a more overt NATO presence on the ground. No European state, including the general public of France and the UK, are in the mood for a protracted fight in North Africa – especially one involving their ground troops. Failing a successful air strike that either kills Gaddafi or incapacitates his senior leadership group, the only unpleasant option is to covertly train, arm and guide the Benghazi militia. This may take many months or even some years to accomplish. Assuming a deal that Gaddafi and his family vacate Tripoli is not in the offing, Libya may very well fracture along its traditional lines i.e., Tripolitania in the West and Cyrenaica in the East, with a weak Cyrenaica likely to fall under the orbit of its current covert military patron – Egypt.



While this scenario would certainly benefit Cairo, the corridors of power in Paris and London would feel this as their 'Waterloo'. They know they need to deliver a unified post-Gaddafi Libya to the Libyans and to the international community. They need to be able to prove to themselves that multilateral military efforts like the one they are currently staging in Libya, will show to the world that the states of Europe can think strategically, act tactically and wield force just as well as the United States. Only then will they be seen as a serious international counterweight to Washington. But the question is – will this war be seen as the 'good war', an epithet that neither the war in Iraq nor the war in Afghanistan attained. Only history can judge.

Burning UN vehicle, Mogadishu image:

[http://www.historycommons.org/events-images/570\\_un\\_vehicle\\_burning2050081722-8262.jpg](http://www.historycommons.org/events-images/570_un_vehicle_burning2050081722-8262.jpg)

Pulling down Saddam's statue, Baghdad image:

<http://www.commondreams.org/files/images/Saddam-Statue-2.jpg>

Obama image:

<http://our-daily.com/obama-iraq-war-is-end/1038/>

NATO Secretary-General image:

<http://www.onislam.net/english/oimedia/onislamen/images/mainimages/NATO%20Libya%20divisions.jpg>

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