

## Libya: the unconvincing victory

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**T**riumphs are the worst moments to understand a war: when Churchill and De Gaulle paraded through Paris in 1945, they did not understand that their countries had lost at the strategic level the Second World War. The 1956 Suez Crisis was but one notable consequence of this momentous loss of power. Today, Mr. Cameron and Mr. Sarkozy tend to forget that their ‘victory’ in Libya is far from being a convincing one.

The political and diplomatic start has been disastrous. In the UN Security Council the countries that are economically more reliable, or that have emerged as new powers, abstained from voting for a UN resolution that would form the legal underpinning for military intervention in Libya: the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, Indian and China) states and European powerhouse, Germany. This abstention was a thinly veiled ‘no’, which Germany confirmed by the lack of contribution to NATO operations against the Gaddafi regime, and arguably it remains an important precedent for the

future. Moreover, the bombing patterns of the campaign show clearly that the UN mandate has been systematically circumvented.



Europe witnessed another ominous lack of unity in its common security and defence policy – a curse dating back to 1991 (the Yugoslav wars of dissolution). As in Iraq (2003), Germany opposed participating in operations in Libya, whereas France (contrary to its 2003 anti-interventionist policy in Iraq), agreed to attack Libya. Strangely, and yet again, neither Berlin nor Paris made any serious efforts to convince the general European public of the moral and ethical correctness of their respective positions in order to gain a broader consensus. In typical disconnected and bureaucratic style, the European political

elites played their political and strategic games well above the heads of their constituents and for their own seemingly rational reasons.

Germany, quite correctly, understood that the battle for the Euro is far more important than a Rommel Redux Libyan sideshow. Italy could have led at the political and military level, but was hampered by an inept government that prefers to keep its positions by deals behind the scenes.

Also the Franco-British *pétite entente*, despite so many experiences and developments since the Saint Malo Summit (1998), offered a paltry result, sometimes excused by the lack of a European Headquarters. This is the classic fig leaf because the two countries could have used the tried and tested framework national approach, developed precisely within the EU, or they could have set up a light bi-national headquarters.

Finally, NATO has little to rejoice: only eight out of 28 countries took part in the operations against Gaddafi. One should remember that, despite many caveats, the engagement in the far more distant and less

conclusive Afghan operations theatre has been massive and this is a difference that begs an explanation.



How did the Coalition win? These are the main points:

1. It was a campaign waged with scant financial resources, featuring allies that withdrew from operations when the costs became unbearable.
2. The military means mobilised were appallingly insufficient vis-à-vis the task assigned (1,9 attack sorties/hour for a territory as wide as the Libyan one; 50% compared to the foreseen requirement). The two great military powers of Europe offered in the end small contributions (just 55 attack aircraft), that achieved a result thanks to the undercover support given to the rebels (noticeably by

Qatar and the UAE, punching in this case above their weight), who in turn, showed considerable courage. By August, according to official NATO calculations, France generated 33% of the attack sorties, the USA 16%, Norway 17% (with a quick withdrawal due to rising costs), Denmark 11% and the rest 10% (Italy and UK included). Seventeen attack helicopters provided additional targeted firepower (12 FR and 5 UK).

3. The dependence on specialised US assets has been constant. This translates into 80% of the reconnaissance and surveillance flights, an unspecified impressive superiority in satellite intelligence raw data, 75% of the refuelling flights and an undisclosed quantity of guided ammunitions to replenish the sagging stocks of America's European allies. After decades during which France and UK touted their superior defence expenditure, London and Paris should humbly acknowledge their gaps and do something serious together with

other Europeans.

4. 'Victory' was achieved practically by a whisker. On the one hand the anti-Gaddafi 'revolutionaries' had a certain advantage in morale and in fighting tactics, the latter greatly aided by the foreign intervention. In fact this largely 'Toyota war' (a war fought by local forces by Toyota pick-up truck, also known as 'technical') had potential strong points in the de-centred decision-making structure of loosely coordinated car fleets, time speed, visual and auditory access, morale, and supply vis-à-vis heavier and more complex forces. But on the other hand Gaddafi's troops were better trained, had more firepower and quickly adopted dispersion tactics to counter Coalition air superiority. It was clear that by June, despite the arithmetic of some 50 Gaddafi military heavy vehicles destroyed per day, political leaders within NATO were nervously waiting for something to happen. That something was the breakdown of morale in Gaddafi's units.

However, by mid-October Gaddafi was still leading guerrilla loyalists and combat was raging in the Southern desert cities.

5. And last but not least, the option to assist also jihadist forces for the sake of victory surfaced again, deriding the efforts in the past war on terror and forgetting lessons learned, and creating dangerous conditions for the nascent Libyan democracy.

That said, the silver lining of the cloud must be appreciated fully. NATO has won a military victory, there have not been casualties (until mid October), only one aircraft and no helicopter was shot down and no pilots, agents or commandos have been captured (an excellent result).

We shall close with some strategic remarks. Now with the death of Gaddafi (21/10/2011) the US is considering the 'Euro-Mediterranean' theatre as an important secondary one, Israel included, notwithstanding rhetoric and diplomatic skirmishes.

France and the United Kingdom will have to work hard in order to recover their war costs. In absolute terms they are modest and much more bearable than the ones incurred for Afghanistan; the deployment of army units makes a substantial difference, inducing leaderships to commit more easily naval and air forces. Of course the unfrozen Libyan assets can usefully assist in getting lucrative contracts, but oil production will take 1-3 years to recover previous levels and gas will flow again but only to Italy, since there is no connection with the rest of Europe.

In the meantime the French AAA credit rating is under pressure and several banks in Europe have been downgraded, while Germany and the rest of the European AAA club are concentrating on the economic war that is being waged by financial actors.

Africa is still far from being able, (through the African Union), to manage, at least at political level, its own crises. For the moment, the oft-repeated slogan "African solutions to African problems" sounds more like feel-good, empty rhetoric than concrete philosophy and strategy. At a more concrete

level, Nigeria and Algeria are ready to fill the place vacated by Gaddafi.

The last irony concerns the legacy of the Libyan dictator himself. The Colonel was, until last year, the great winner of the nuclear proliferation/disarmament game, if compared with the tragic destiny reserved to Saddam Hussein. By accepting to dismantle all his CBN programmes he had sent a powerful message to the whole Middle East (Iran and Israel included), that nuclear weapons were not necessary to be respected in the international community and to preserve national security. This is not what Tehran and Tel Aviv will understand now and this is a real problem for the immediate future.

*Views expressed in this article are not necessarily those of SAGE International*

NATO bomb strikes Libyan target image:

<http://graphics8.nytimes.com/images/2011/03/20/world/20010321libya-slide-WBD8/20010321libya-slide-WBD8-jumbo.jpg>

NATO warplanes on their way to hit Gaddafi forces image:

<http://rickrozoff.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/091021-f-4751b-002.jpg>

(Accessed: 23/10/2011)