

## A FURTHER PERSPECTIVE

# Whiners at War

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The Europeans' military campaign has stalemated. The enemy threatens to triumph. American assistance is desperately needed.

French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister David Cameron probably imagine that they are reliving the bleakest days of World War I or World War II. Can today's Napoleon and Churchill battle back to victory?

Actually, the spectacle of Sarkozy and Cameron at war should be a show on Comedy Central.

The two leaders decided to atone for their nations' past support for authoritarian governments by attacking Libya's Moammar Gaddafi. They rallied U.S., European, and Arab support by draping their plan for regime change with a humanitarian mantle.

Then everything fell apart. Gaddafi, the toast of European leaders only a few months before, didn't "just leave," in President Barack Obama's inimitable phrase. The rebels turned out to be more mob than army; allied air support prevented their defeat but could not give them victory.

Worse, France and Britain didn't have enough aircraft to maintain bombing operations. The two countries now are begging their allies, including the U.S., for more support. Western policy can best be characterized as a disaster.

The West's war in Libya well illustrates Lord Acton's dictum that power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Libya threatened no one outside of its borders. There was no unique humanitarian crisis. Despite allied rhetoric, nowhere had Gaddafi committed mass murder, despite his well-earned reputation for ruthlessness (and his past crimes). The opposition was largely unknown, with radical elements. The rebels' military capabilities were limited.

Nevertheless, Paris and London rediscovered their martial roots and began campaigning for a "no-fly" zone in Libya, supposedly to protect civilian populations from attack. In fact, intervention would be on the side of the opposition with the objective of ousting Gaddafi. A European diplomat admitted to the *New York Times*: "The no-fly zone was a diplomatic thing, to get the Arabs on board." The Arab League backed away when it realized the extent of the West's

ambitions.

The U.S. and Europe attacked the Gaddafi government simply because they could attack the Gaddafi government. Gaddafi had given up his nascent nuclear program and the capability to build longer-range missiles, leaving himself vulnerable to outside coercion. (The lesson has not gone unlearned in Tehran and Pyongyang.) The allies cheerfully assumed victory would be a mere matter of flying.

Oops.

One problem was the intra-Libyan balance. Gaddafi proved to be more resilient than expected. The opposition proved to be less organized than hoped. Allied support only evened the odds, lengthening the conflict. Like past civil wars, this conflict proved to be bad for people and other living things.

Moreover, the rebels weren't angels. The opposition initiated military action and, where victorious, was none-too-gentle with those accused of backing the other side. Alliance officials even threatened to bomb the rebels to protect civilians, raising the prospect of NATO planes saving fuel by simultaneously attacking forces on both sides.

Worse, NATO-Europe is not the military behemoth it wants to believe. As Jed Babbin pointed out, many members of NATO never will be serious military powers, and those that could be serious military powers don't want to be. Explained James Russell at the Naval Postgraduate School: "The European countries have made a strategic-level to disarm essentially." Even Britain and France are retrenching militarily. No wonder Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke of America's "unique capabilities." In practice, NATO stands for North America and The Others. Only (North) America really matters.

Libya has not changed European commitments. No NATO member will treat Libya as a serious, let alone existential, danger. If the Red Army were pouring through the Fulda Gap headed for the Atlantic, the Europeans might, *might*, undertake extraordinary efforts. But to transform Libya? Messrs. Sarkozy and Cameron apparently saw themselves leading a grand coalition to victory in the Mediterranean. In their dreams.

The Obama administration was reluctant from the start, insisting that Washington would quickly turn operational responsibility over to NATO. When the administration actually followed through, Paris and London complained. One unnamed French official told the *Financial Times*: "We had a concern, which the [United Kingdom] shared, that it wasn't the best signal to send to Gaddafi and the rebels." What really bothered the two countries was the fact that America's withdrawal forced France and Britain to put their airplanes where their politicians' mouths were.

Exhibiting unusual prescience, Germany, a non-permanent member of the Security Council, abstained on the UN authorization. Poland and Turkey also opposed the Franco-British Mediterranean adventure. Other members of the alliance were no more enthusiastic, contributing little or nothing of value.

The Netherlands and Spain are patrolling the "no-fly" zone, even though Gaddafi's air power was always marginal. The Swedes, who do not belong to NATO, also have sent planes only for air patrols. Reminiscent of World War II, Italy's aircraft will neither open fire nor drop bombs. The

Norwegians target airfields, not army units. Only six of 28 alliance members are currently engaged in air-to-ground operations, and only France and Britain place no restrictions on their pilots.

After a few days of "turkey shoots" on the ground, Gaddafi's forces adapted, with soldiers stripping off their uniforms and abandoning their heavy equipment. The rebels proved largely incapable of concerted military action. As Gaddafi recaptured lost territory, his opponents naturally blamed the West for failing to provide sufficient air support.

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen -- who says there is no military solution to the conflict while leading a military alliance in war -- responded that the alliance is "doing its utmost to fully enforce the U.N. mandate around the clock" and "conducting its mission with vigor and determination, supported by countries stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf."

It brings a tear to one's eye. Or many tears, in the case of Messrs. Sarkozy and Cameron.

In fact, a tone of frustration verging on desperation has emerged in Paris and London. French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé complained other allied nations are not doing enough: "NATO absolutely wanted to lead this operation. Well, voilà, this is where we are." British Foreign Secretary William Hague said it was imperative to "maintain and intensify" military operations. Prior to the recent gathering of NATO foreign ministers, Prime Minister Cameron flew to Paris to plot strategy -- primarily hectoring -- with President Sarkozy to wring more support from reluctant allies.

In fact, the new Entente Cordiale has turned whining into an art form. France and Britain are carrying "the brunt of the burden," complained French Defense Minister Gerard Longuet. Oh-la-la. So very unfair!

Why aren't other European nations, which never wanted this war, doing more? Why aren't the Germans, who refused to back the mission in the UN, sending aircraft? Why aren't Poland and Turkey, which opposed the operation, helping out? And why isn't Washington, busy defending rich allies like the Europeans and the rest of the world, doing more?

"The Americans have the numbers of planes, and the Americans have the right equipment," said François Heisbourg at the Foundation for Strategic Research in Paris. Washington's switch from a combat to a support role has made it impossible "to loosen the noose" around the besieged city of Misrata, said Longuet. Why won't the Americans fight Sarkozy and Cameron's war? That was, after all, the original French and British plan.

The better question is: Why does the Obama administration continue to go along with a policy notable only for its deceptive objectives and incompetent execution? Publicly, at least, the administration continues to defend the status quo.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said: "The president and this administration believes that NATO, and the coalition of which we remain a partner, is capable of fulfilling that mission of enforcing the no-fly zone, enforcing the arms embargo and providing civilian protection." State Department spokesman Mark Toner emphasized the president's intention that America's "role would diminish as NATO stepped up and took command and control of the operation" and "that's what happened."

Well, kind of.

Washington originally said American forces would be on call, but would not conduct regular operations. In fact, air-to-ground strikes have continued, though in fewer numbers and against Libyan air defense systems. To its credit, however, the administration refused to lend more U.S. military assets to the Napoleon and Churchill wannabes. Rather, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton responded to French and British demands: "Gaddafi is testing our determination. As our mission continues, maintaining our resolve and unity only grows more important."

Resolve and unity. That will defeat Gaddafi!

Exacerbating the problem is the allies' claim that they are in Libya only to protect civilians, even as they insist that Gaddafi must be ousted. Which is it? Conservative MP John Baron wants Parliament -- which actually voted on going to war, in contrast to Congress -- to be recalled to debate the apparent change in mission. Said Baron: "If one was being charitable one would say that this is mission creep. If one was being uncharitable, one would say this was always the underlying motive."

In any case, NATO is not doing enough to effect regime change. And that isn't likely to change. At the foreign ministers' gathering, only Rome indicated that it would think about doing more. And then it said no: "We are doing enough already," said Prime minister Silvio Berlusconi. Spain also said no. A frustrated Alain Juppé said that "NATO must play its role fully."

But what is the alliance for? It was created to protect Western Europe from the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. When aggressive, hegemonic communism disappeared two decades ago, NATO lost its *raison d'être*. The Europeans still had security concerns, but none required a continued American military occupation.

The U.S. should have pulled out, allowing the Europeans to reconfigure their defense, through either a NATO without America or a new military organization growing out of the European Union. Today the EU has a combined population and economy larger than those of the U.S. Protecting new members in the east, patrolling the Balkans, and knocking off North African dictators should be the Europeans' responsibility.

Instead, Washington has allowed the Europeans to draw the U.S. into European disputes of little interest to America. Indeed, President Sarkozy appears to fancy himself as Nicolas Bonaparte, threatening "every Arab leader" who uses violence to stay in power. Yet Paris is unable to deal with *Libya*. We all know whose military the little Napoleon expects to borrow for any additional Arabian adventures.

Still, Sarkozy's chutzpah pales compared to that of Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn, who announced that stopping Gaddafi "requires military action." The landlocked Grand Duchy, with a population of under a half million, has no air force or navy. The army contains precisely 900 men. There also is a paramilitary gendarmerie with 612 personnel. Good to know that Luxembourg believes military action is required.

War in Libya makes no sense. It is a waste of money. And it is Europe's problem. Washington should end its participation in Libya's civil war before the U.S. is hopelessly entangled in its third conflict in a Muslim land. If Paris and London want this war, let them fight this war. America

should get out and stay out.

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