

Distinct interests sparked the European involvement in Libya. The United Kingdom and France have issued vociferous calls for intervention in Libya for the past month, ultimately managing to convince the rest of Europe — with some notable exceptions — to join in military action, the Arab League to offer its initial support, and global powers China and Russia to abstain from voting at the U.N. Security Council.

U.S. President Barack Obama said March 21 that the leadership of the U.S.-European coalition against Libya would be transitioned to the European allies "in a matter of days." While the United States would retain the lead during Operation Odyssey Dawn — intended to incapacitate Tripoli's command and control, stationary air defenses and airfields — Obama explained that Odyssey Dawn would create the "conditions for our European allies and Arab partners to carry out the measures authorized by the U.N. Security Council resolution." While Obama pointed out that the U.S.-European intervention in Libya is very much Europe's war, French nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle (R91) and Italian aircraft carrier Giuseppe Garibaldi (551) arrived in waters near Libya, giving Europeans a valuable asset from which to increase European air sortie generation rates and time on station.

Before analyzing the disparate interests of European nations in Libya, one must first take stock of this coalition in terms of its stated military and political goals.

### **The Military Response to the 'Arab Spring'**

The intervention in Libya thus far has been restricted to the enforcement of a no-fly zone and to limited attacks against ground troops loyal to Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi in the open. However, the often-understated but implied political goal seems to be the end of the Gadhafi regime. (Some French and British leaders certainly have not shied from stressing that point.)

Europeans are not united in their perceptions of the operation's goals — or on how to wage the operation. The one thing the Europeans share is a seeming lack of an exit strategy from a struggle originally marketed as a no-fly zone akin to that imposed on Iraq in 1997 to a struggle that is actually being waged as an airstrike campaign along the lines of the 1999 campaign against Serbia, with the goal of regime change mirroring that of the 2001 Afghan and 2003 Iraq campaigns.

Underlying Europeans' willingness to pursue military action in Libya are two perceptions. The first is that Europeans did not adequately support the initial pro-democratic protests across the Arab world, a charge frequently coupled with accusations that many European governments failed to respond because they actively supported the regimes being challenged. The second perception is that the Arab world is in fact seeing a groundswell of pro-democratic sentiment.

The first charge particularly applies to France — the country now most committed to the Libyan intervention — where Former French Foreign Minister Michele Alliot-Marie vacationed in Tunisia a few weeks before the revolution, using the private jet owned by a businessman close to the regime, and offered then-Tunisian President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali the services of French security forces to suppress the rebellion. Though an extreme example, the French case highlights the close business, energy and often personal relationships Europeans had with Middle Eastern leaders.

In fact, EU states have sold Gadhafi 1.1 billion euros (\$1.56 billion) worth of arms between 2004, when they lifted their arms embargo, and 2011, and were looking forward to much more in the future. Paris and Rome, which had lobbied hardest for an end to the embargo, were particularly active in this trade. As recently as 2010, France was in talks with Libya for the sale of 14 Dassault Mirage fighter jets and the modernization of some of Tripoli's aircraft. Rome, on the other hand, was in the middle of negotiating a further 1 billion euros worth of deals prior to the unrest. British media meanwhile had charged the previous British government with kowtowing to Gadhafi by releasing Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, a Libyan held for the Pan Am Flight 103 bombing. According to widespread reports, the United Kingdom's Labour government released al-Megrahi so that British energy supermajor BP would receive favorable energy concessions in Libya.

The second perception is the now-established narrative in the West that the ongoing protests in the Middle East are truly an outburst of pro-democratic sentiment in the Western sense. From this, there arises a public perception in Europe that Arab regimes must be put on notice that severe crackdowns will not be tolerated since the protests are the beginning of a new era of democracy in the region.

These two perceptions have created a context under which Gadhafi's crackdown against protesters is simply unacceptable to Paris and London and unacceptable to domestic public opinion in Europe. Not only would tolerating Tripoli's crackdown confirm European leaderships' multi-decade fraternization with unsavory Arab regimes, but the eastern Libyan rebels' fight against Gadhafi has been grafted on to the narrative of Arab pro-democracy movements seeking to overthrow brutal regimes — even though it is unclear who the eastern rebels are or what their intentions are for a post-Gadhafi Libya.

### **The Coalition**

According to U.N. Security Council resolution 1973, the military objective of the intervention is to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya and to protect civilians from harm across all of Libya. The problem is that the first goal in no way achieves the second. A no-fly zone does little to stop Gadhafi's troops on the ground. In the first salvo of the campaign — even before suppression of enemy air defenses operations — French aircraft attacked Libyan ground troops around Benghazi. The attack — which was not coordinated with the rest of the coalition, according to some reports — was meant to signal two things: that the French were in the lead and that the intervention would seek to protect civilians in a broader mandate than just establishing a no-fly zone.

Going beyond the enforcement of the no-fly zone, however, has created rifts in Europe, with both NATO and the European Union failing to back the intervention politically. Germany, which broke with its European allies and voted to abstain from resolution 1973, has argued that mission creep could force the coalition to get involved in a drawn-out war. Central and Eastern Europeans, led by Poland, have been cautious in providing support because it yet again draws NATO further from its core mission of European territorial defense and the theater they are mostly concerned about: the Russian sphere of influence. Meanwhile, the Arab League, which initially offered its support for a no-fly zone, seemed to renege as it became clear that Libya in 2011 was far more like Serbia 1999 than Iraq in 1997 — airstrikes against ground troops and installations, not just a no-fly zone. Italy, a critical country because of its air bases close to the Libyan theater, has even suggested that if some consensus is not found regarding NATO's involvement it would withdraw its offer of air bases so that "someone else's action did not rebound on us," according to Italian Foreign Minister Franco Frattini. In reality, Rome is concerned that the Franco-British alliance is going to either reduce Italy's interests in a post-Ghadafi Libya or fail to finish the operation, leaving Italy to deal with chaos a few hundred miles across the Mediterranean.

Ultimately, enforcing a humanitarian mandate across the whole of Libya via air power alone will be impossible. It is unclear how Gadhafi would be dislodged from power from 15,000 feet in the sky. And while Europeans have largely toed the line in the last couple of days that regime change is not the explicit goal of the intervention, French and British leaders continue to caveat that "there is no decent future for Libya with Gadhafi in power," as British Prime Minister David Cameron stated March 21, virtually mirroring a statement by Obama. But wishing Gadhafi gone will not make it so.

### Endgame Scenarios

With the precise mission of the intervention unclear and exact command and control structures yet to be decided (though the intervention itself is already begun, a summit in London on March 29 will supposedly hash out the details) it is no surprise that Europeans seem to lack a consensus as to what the exit strategies are. Ultimately some sort of NATO command structure will be enacted, even if it is possible that NATO never gives its political consent to the intervention and is merely "subcontracted" by the coalition to make coordination between different air forces possible. Europe's Libya Intervention: Special Series

U.S. military officials, on the other hand, have signaled that a divided Libya between the Gadhafi-controlled west and the rebel-controlled east is palatable if attacks against civilians stop. Resolution 1973 certainly does not preclude such an end to the intervention. But politically, it is unclear if either the United States or Europe could accept that scenario. Aside from the normative issues the European public may have with a resolution that leaves a now-thoroughly vilified Gadhafi in power, European governments would have to wonder whether Gadhafi would be content ruling Tripolitania, a pared-down version of Libya, given that the bulk of the country's oil fields and export facilities are located in the east.

Gadhafi could seek non-European allies for arms and support and/or plot a reconquest of the east. Either way, such a scenario could necessitate a drawn-out enforcement of the no-fly zone

over Libya — testing already war-weary European publics' patience, not to mention government pocketbooks. It would also require continuous maritime patrols to prevent Gadhafi from unleashing migrants en masse, a possibility that is of great concern for Rome. Now that Europe has launched a war against Gadhafi, it has raised the costs of allowing a Gadhafi regime to remain lodged in North Africa. That the costs are not the same for all participating European countries — especially for Italy, which has the most to lose if Gadhafi retains power — is the biggest problem for creating European unity.

The problem, however, is that an alternative endgame scenario where Gadhafi is removed would necessitate a commitment of ground troops. It is unclear that the eastern rebels could play the role of the Afghan Northern Alliance, whose forces had considerable combat experience such that only modest special operations forces and air support were needed to dislodge the Taliban (or, rather, force them to retreat) in late 2001 through early 2002. Thus, Europe would have to provide the troops — highly unlikely, unless Gadhafi becomes thoroughly suicidal and unleashes asymmetrical terrorist attacks against Europe — or enlist the support of an Arab state, such as Egypt, to conduct ground operations in its stead. The latter scenario seems far-fetched as well, in part because Libyans historically have as much animosity toward Egyptians as they do toward Europeans.

What ultimately will transpire in Libya probably lies somewhere in between the extreme scenarios. A temporary truce is likely once Gadhafi has been sufficiently neutralized from the air, giving the West and Egypt sufficient time to arm, train and support the rebels for their long march to Tripoli (though it is far from clear that they are capable of this, even with considerable support in terms of airpower, basic training, organization and military competencies). The idea that Gadhafi, his sons and inner circle would simply wait to be rolled over by a rebel force is unlikely. After all, Gadhafi has not ruled Libya for 42 years because he has accepted his fate with resignation — a notion that should worry Europe's governments now looking to end his rule.

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