



The 'enemy' at the gates? Assessing the European military contribution to the Libyan war

by

Fabrizio Coticchia *

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Abstract

According to the ‘Defense Strategic Guidance’ (2012), the growing military capabilities of US allies will create new opportunities for sharing responsibilities in world affairs. The US strategic document considers the recent military operation in Libya a successful example in terms of burden sharing. The paper aims to assess the validity of such perspective, analyzing the concrete military contribution provided by the most relevant European countries involved in the intervention: UK, France and Italy.

The NATO military mission has triggered a controversial debate in International Security Studies (ISS). Three months after the end of operations, it is possible to provide a strategic and military overview of the intervention. What are the key results and lessons learnt of the mission? What have been the shortfalls? What has been the role played by European armed forces (and by the EU defense policy)? Can ‘Unified Protector’ be considered a success in terms of burden sharing?

Through the analysis of primary (official documents) and secondary sources (especially ISS literature), the article aims at answering these questions. After illustrating the current debate over the operation and how Libyan campaign represents the most recent evolution of contemporary military operations, the paper critically examines the crucial features of ‘Unified Protector’. The preliminary results of the analysis reject the Strategic Guidance’s optimism on European military capabilities, emphasize shortages, problems and a massive dependence on US assets.

Key-words

Libya, NATO, EU, R2P, contemporary warfare, ISTAR



Introduction

On a visit to Vietnam, Senator Hollings from Westmoreland's home state of South Carolina was told by Westmoreland: 'We're killing these people,' the enemy, 'at a ratio of 10 to 1.' Said Hollings, 'Westy, the American people don't care about the ten. They care about the one.' Westmoreland didn't get it.

(Lewis Sorley)

At the very beginning of 2012, Barack Obama announced the new 'Defense Strategic Guidance'. (US Department of Defense 2012). Oddly enough, the President personally went to the Pentagon to illustrate the contents of the document that will drive the US future strategic rearrangements in next years (Cobb 2012). 'De-emphasis' (Walt 2012) on counter-insurgency and nation-building, military budget reductions, strategic prominence of Asia, downsizing of ground forces and growing relevance of cyber warfare are the key-points of the new Pentagons' perspective^I.

The Defense Guidance highlights a 'strategic opportunity to rebalance the U.S. military investment in Europe, moving from a focus on current conflicts toward a focus on future capabilities'^{II}. In other words, the US posture in Europe will evolve. The document anticipates dramatic changes in America's role in NATO. While the Article 5 commitments will be firmly maintained, a 'smart defense approach' will be developed with NATO allies in order to 'pool, share, and specialize capabilities as needed to meet 21st century challenges'^{III}. According to the Defense Guidance, the growing military capabilities of US allies will create new opportunities for burden sharing. Consequently, Washington will encourage NATO allies to 'develop the integrative capacity they need to simultaneously conduct a Libya-style war and a Balkans-style peace support operation -- without the United States' (Kay 2012). Indeed, the Defense Guidance considers the operation in Libya the most recent successful example in terms of burden sharing.

Undoubtedly, European countries such as France, UK and Italy, which are all now producers of security rather than consumers of it, played a central role in NATO operation



‘Unified Protector’ (OUP). The military intervention in Libya seems to fit perfectly with the idea of a small-footprint approach for achieving US security goals, sharing costs and responsibilities. However, one could wonder if the European countries really have the capabilities to lead (without the United States) a ‘Libya-style war’, a complex military operation at their borders, facing multidimensional threats (terrorism, regional instability, organized crime, waves of migrants, etc) to the European security. Considering the current European military capabilities, is this option already feasible? What, if any, are the main military European shortages hindering such possibility? Above all, is it correct, as noted by the Defense Guidance, to consider ‘Unified Protector’ as a success in term of burden sharing?

A detailed analysis of NATO military intervention in Libya will provide preliminary answers to these questions. Before looking at the main features of the operation from the perspective of the European armed forces involved in North Africa, the article will briefly illustrate the contribution of the Libyan war to the current debate over the evolution of contemporary military operations.

1) The evolution of the international security and the Libyan War

The debate in International Security Studies (ISS) over the supposed changing nature of the warfare is extremely lively and controversial^{IV}. The traditional strategic view, focused on the role of state and armed forces as principal explaining variables of security issues, since the end of Cold War has been robustly challenged by a wide range of new approaches, such as conventional and critical constructivism, post structuralism, critical security studies, etc. (Buzan and Hansen 2010). The incontestable raise of intra-state conflicts occurred in the last decades^V, brought many authors to develop new conceptual tools in order to understand the post-interstate industrial conflicts era (Van Crevald 1991; Kaldor 1999; Smith 2006). After the Berlin Wall collapsed, western armed forces faced a profound transformation. Instead of focusing only on a traditional military threat to states (e.g., an external invasion by foreign troops) they have adopted a multidimensional approach to security problems, such as terrorism or organized crime (Murray 1999). Moreover, after the end of the bipolar era, the dramatic spread of civil wars led to



massacres and genocides, harming mainly civilians rather than soldiers. Consequently, the number of ‘humanitarian interventions’ undertaken by the ‘international community’ notably increased^{VI}.

The conflict in Libya represents a remarkable case because it provides additional and innovative elements to the contemporary debate. From its analysis, it is possible to distinguish three significant aspects of warfare transformation in the new century: the ‘revival’ of air superiority, the ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P) and the multidimensional nature of security threats.

Firstly, the ‘Libya-style conflict’ mirrors a specific way of waging war, mainly based on air superiority without boots on the ground^{VII}. A ‘model’ adopted in several interventions undertaken in the 90s by western armed forces (i.e. Bosnia, 1995 and Kosovo, 1999). Despite the peculiarities of the Libyan crisis^{VIII}, the importance of air power, the formal humanitarian aims of the operations and the support to local forces, represent crucial shared elements with those missions. Such a model of intervention deviates to a large extent from the counterinsurgency (COIN) approach that has shaped western military doctrines in recent years. In fact, the operations undertaken in Iraq and Afghanistan have been largely inspired (especially after 2006) by the COIN doctrine^{IX}. Both conflicts fostered a growing debate on counterinsurgency (Galula 2005; Nagl 2005; Gray 2006 and Kilcullen 2009), downsizing the strategic importance of mechanized warfare for contemporary armed forces. The so-called Petraeus’s doctrine (*U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual 3-24*) spread an increasing attention towards COIN and its key principles: conquering ‘hearts and minds’ and protecting civilian population are considerably by far more important than destroying enemy in a ‘conventional way’. Despite the recent western ‘enthusiasm’ for counterinsurgency^X, switching emphasis from eliminating enemies to providing security for the local populace still requires considerable cultural and operational efforts. Indeed, the COIN ‘version’ applied in Iraq and Afghanistan represents a significant departure from the post-Vietnam western way of war, which has always preferred air power to infantry-on-infantry warfare (Coticchia and Giacomello 2011). The huge technological advantage of western armies, and the casualties aversion of public opinion represent the main explaining variables behind the ‘post-heroic soldiers’ (Luttwak 1996) of last decades. If ‘Iraqi Freedom’ and ISAF seemed to transform a consolidate way of war, the Libyan operation reintroduced the previous model of



intervention. Economic crisis (with huge financial constraints to the defense sector), mounting problems faced in current COIN operations (Walt 2011; Bacevich 2010) and peculiarities of Libyan conflict (geography, rebels on the ground, proximity to the EU), clarify the renewed strategic relevance of air superiority in contemporary military interventions abroad.

Secondly, ‘Unified Protector’ has been interpreted as the first military enforcement of the Responsibility to Protect norm (Patrick 2011). The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1973 highlights the Libyan authorities’ responsibility to protect its population^{XI}. Since the end of the bipolar era states have increasingly deployed troops to ‘protect citizens other than their own from humanitarian disaster’ (Finnemore 1996: 153). Responsibility to protect (International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty 2001, Weiss and Hubert 2001; Pace and Deller 2005; Bellamy 2009) represents a massive challenge for state sovereignty because ‘it makes a state’s presumed right of nonintervention contingent on its ability and willingness to protect its citizens and threatens ‘collective, timely, and decisive action’ if it does not’ (Patrick 2011). Consensus on when and how to intervene has never been reached in the international community^{XII}, especially regarding the feasibility of military action to halt genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing (Weiss 2004). The absence of a veto in the Security Council (China and Russia had not ‘special relationship’ with Libya), the unusual appeals of the Arab League to intervene, the growing global support to popular protests against undemocratic regimes both in Middle East and North Africa, substantially paved the way to a R2P operation, as ‘Unified Protector’ was labeled and presented. According to Patrick (2011), all these ‘favorable’ political conditions were deeply related to a specific geographical and historical moment and unlikely to be repeated in a near future.

Thirdly, the challenges posed by the Libyan crises well describe the profound evolution of contemporary security and the multidimensional nature of threats. After the end of Cold War, when homeland defense was the primary task of armed forces, European troops have been constantly involved in military operations abroad, facing a wide range of ‘new’ menaces to national security. Terrorism, organized crime, regional instability, illegal migration, drug and weapons trafficking are among the main threats defined by the European Security Strategy (2003)^{XIII}. NATO soldiers, employed for decades at the eastern



European frontiers, 'waiting' for an eventual Soviet attack, are nowadays engaged in Afghanistan aiming at protecting national security from terrorism.

According to Gustafson: 'Globalisation has facilitated the interconnected nature of global organised crime, insurgency and terrorism' (2010: 74). European armed forces are deeply concerned about the instability at the EU borders. Also the European Union is becoming far more active across its periphery, through a wide range of instruments, from Frontex to CSDP civil-military operations, to promote stability along its boundaries by contrasting 'new' threats as smuggling or terrorism (Strazzari and Coticchia 2012). In contemporary conflicts there is an evident correlation between the permeability of boundaries and the instability brought by military or political crises. The Libya war has strongly confirm such correlation: Gaddafi used migration as a 'weapon' against the European countries involved in the operation, aiming at influencing their domestic support to the military intervention (as partially occurred in the Italian case)^{XIV}. 'The enemy at the gates' is not a foreign army at the border, but a flow of desperate migrants, alimeted by the crisis and partially fostered by the Gaddafi regime (Cadalanu 2011). The analysis of 'Unified Protector' can shed light on how European forces (within the NATO framework, due to the EU political and institutional inability to create and support an operation on its own) have contributed to face new threats, providing security in instable areas at the EU periphery.

In summary, the Libyan war adds several elements to the current debate over the transformation of international security. However, as stressed by the Africa Command Chief, General Carter Ham, the Libyan operation will not be the blueprint for future interventions (Munoz 2011). Ham made clear that every conflict is different, and consequently the template adopted in Libya may produce a very different result elsewhere. According to Patrick (2011), the peculiarities of the Libyan case (i.e., a small geographical context that favors logistics for external military interventions) make the attempt to generalize extremely dangerous. However, the war in Libya undoubtedly provides important lessons learnt on contemporary military operations and, above all, it well illustrates the current military capabilities of the European countries involved in 'Unified Protector'.



2) ‘Operation Unified Protector (OUP)’

Protests against Gaddafi’s regime spread across Libya in mid February 2011^{xv}. United Nations Security Council initially imposed an arms embargo (through the Resolutions 1970, February 26th) and later authorized a ‘no-fly zone’ over Libya (UNSC Resolution 1973, March 17th). While Gaddafi forces launched a counteroffensive towards Benghazi, a US-led multinational coalition (‘Operation Odyssey Dawn’) started air and maritime operations against the regime^{xvi}. NATO took control of the mission some days later: the ‘Operation Unified Protector’, which began on March 31st under UN mandate^{xvii}, was officially composed by three elements: arms embargo, no-fly-zone and interventions aiming to protect civilians and civilian-populated areas. A peak of 8.000 soldiers were involved in the operation, through 260 air assets (e.g., fighter aircraft and attack helicopters) and 21 naval assets (e.g., frigates and aircraft carriers)^{xviii}. The pro-Gaddafi forces^{xix} were noticeably hit by the extended campaign of air-strikes. According to NATO official final stats over 26.500 sorties were carried out by sixteen countries^{xx} (including over 9,700 strike sorties), destroying over 5.900 military targets (such as artillery, rocket launchers, tanks or armored vehicles)^{xxi}. Arms embargo allowed NATO warships to hail 3.100 vessels, boarding 300 of them^{xxii}. At the same time, 600 migrants were directly rescued by NATO forces^{xxiii}.

The massive military effort sustained by NATO finally helped rebels to defeat Gaddafi troops. At the end of August Tripoli was conquered by the National Transitional Council (NTC) and on 20th October Gaddafi was killed near Sirte. ‘Unified Protector’ officially ended on 31 October 2011^{xxiv}.

The debate over the Libyan war has been lively, especially in ISS literature (Clarke 2011; Eyal 2011; Lacher 2011; Patrick 2011; Vira and Cordesman 2011). Several think tanks (such as Stratfor, Center for Strategic and International Studies - CSIS, Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies – RUSI and International Institute for Strategic Studies - IISS) illustrated the conflict in detail, even throughout the operation. Three months after the end of the intervention it is possible to provide a comprehensive military and strategic analysis of ‘Unified Protector’.



Before looking at the elements that help to assess the real military capabilities showed by European countries, we should emphasize the ambiguous nature of the operation: NATO forces were engaged in a ‘war of attrition [that means] a significant expansion from the letter of the UN Security Council Resolution 1973’ (Vira and Cordesman 2011: 5). Commentaries agree on the fact that the way through which NATO has waged war effectively expanded the restricted objective of the UNSC Resolution (i.e. to take all necessary measures to protect civilians). Looking at the military campaign (the introduction of attack helicopters and special forces, whose presence on the ground was ruled out by the Resolution, the air strikes against regime centers of gravity and even the Gaddafi’s compound in Tripoli, etc.) it seems clear that ‘regime change’ became the main unsaid goal of the intervention (ISS 2011). As stated by Eyal: ‘After Benghazi was secured, the operation was expanded and became open-ended’ (2011: 4). Despite official denials^{xxv}, the operations were visibly designed to remove Gaddafi. In that sense, it is quite illustrative that OUP formally ended few days after Gaddafi’s death^{xxvi}.

3) Military and Strategic overview: a preliminary assessment of the European countries’ capabilities

While literature reports a broad consensus on the ambiguity of mandate, strategic reflection over the mission is extremely controversial. The paper will illustrate the key elements through which it is possible to assess the military capabilities of the main European armed forces involved in the operation.

Does OUP confirm the optimistic view adopted by the US Defense Guidance on the European military capabilities? What have been the foremost military and strategic lessons learnt of the intervention in Libya? The next paragraphs, through the analysis of primary (official documents) and secondary sources (literature, reports, etc) will answer these questions.

3.1 Burden sharing?

The US Defense Guidance highlights new opportunities for burden sharing created by the growing military capabilities of allies. The Libyan operation is portrayed as a positive



example in that sense. However, the analysis of military intervention shows a different picture. France and Britain undoubtedly played a crucial role in the operation, taking the diplomatic (and later also the military) lead of the mission. The ‘unprecedented limitations’ (Clarke 2001: 5) imposed by the Obama administration to the US military involvement fostered an Anglo-French leadership. The legitimacy of their role (as well as of the whole operation) was increased by the unusual sustain provided by the Arab League towards the imposition of a no-fly-zone. However, in term of burden sharing, NATO was internally divided, with several ‘reluctant allies’ that denied their military contribution. Former US Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, openly called for Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Turkey to contribute to the fights^{xxvii}. As noted by Gates, despite the large political support to the mission and the absence of boots on the ground, less than half of NATO members were involved in the operation. In his words:

“Frankly, many of those allies do so not because they do not want to participate, but simply because they can’t. [...] It has become painfully clear that similar shortcomings – in capability and will – have the potential to jeopardize the alliance’s ability to conduct an integrated, effective and sustained air-sea campaign” (The Wall Street Journal 2011).

The fact that OUP was a mission that attains at European crucial interests (e.g. oil and gas, stability in the neighborhood, etc.) along the European borders, makes the hesitant participation of several countries extremely significant in terms of burden sharing. Occasional disputes erupted over command arrangements and military coordination among partners (e.g., the attack helicopters were deployed by France unilaterally, irritating the UK), several countries gradually reduced or withdrew their military support (i.e. Norway pulled out its F-16 aircraft), some others refused to deploy crucial assets or imposed on them rigid constraints (the Netherlands did not employ F-16 aircraft for airstrikes). As noted by to Vira and Cordesman: ‘The burden of the Libya operations is increasingly borne by a small number of countries. Others have erected strong political obstacles to participation, or caveats on their military contributions.’ (2011: 7). Notwithstanding the relatively small scale of the operation, undersized in comparison with other recent NATO interventions (e.g., Afghanistan), several European countries were unable (or unwilling) to deploy aircraft (Quintana 2011). In summary, as reported by Secretary Gates, Libyan war



showed a divided NATO: '[...] between those willing and able to pay the price and bear the burdens of alliance commitments, and those who enjoy the benefits of NATO membership, be they security guarantees or headquarters billets, but don't want to share the risks and the costs' (The Wall Street Journal, 2010). Such image openly contrasts with the US Defense Guidance optimism on burden sharing.

3.3 Air campaign: results and shortages

Literature agrees in considering NATO's air campaign successful regarding the capability to halt the counteroffensive of the Gaddafi's forces, maintaining air dominance, effectively supporting the rebels and avoiding (mainly through the use of precision-guided munitions) 'collateral damages' (ISS 2011). According to NATO's final report: 'Targeting is done with extreme care and precision, using the weapon with the smallest yield possible, to avoid harm to the Libyan people and their infrastructure'^{xxviii}. However, recent journalist reports have drawn a less rosy picture. 'The New York Times' found 'accounts of dozens of civilians killed by NATO in many distinct attacks' (Chivers and Schmitt 2011).

If the debate on civilians casualties needs more investigation on the ground to assess properly the 'collateral damages' of the intervention, most of strategic analyses in the ISS literature shared the same perspectives on key lessons learnt, shortages and problems concerning the Libyan air campaign.

First, out of all the combat aircraft deployed by NATO members, less than half were able to conduct air to ground operations and only six European countries (Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, and the UK) contributed to strike missions^{xxix}. Other nations (Netherlands, Qatar, Spain, Jordan, Sweden and Turkey) deployed aircraft to enforce the no-fly zone without attacking ground targets. In conformity with Gates' views, several countries did not take part to the intervention because they had not adequate military capabilities.

Secondly, the air campaign has highlighted shortages in ISTAR capabilities (Intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition, reconnaissance), since they depended heavily on US support. As noted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies: 'Operations remained largely dependent on American JSTARS (joint surveillance target attack radar system) and AWACS (airborne warning and control systems) aircraft'^{xxx}. ISTAR is a



crucial asset in a military campaign as OUP without booths on the ground (apart for few special forces deployed in covert operations), because it represents the main way to obtain information^{xxxI}. Cordesman and Vira refer to ‘chronic shortfalls in ISTAR capacity’ (2011: 21).

Thirdly, considerable budget cuts (which have involved several European countries) directly affected the military contributions provided by the armed forces throughout OUP. The European inadequacy regarding ISTAR has been deepened by recent cuts, forcing some countries to extend the service of relevant assets (e.g. the UK Nimrod R1 reconnaissance aircraft). The so called ‘carrier debate’ is another illustrative example. The UK, having renounced to its carrier for financial constraints imposed by the government, was unable to deploy it during OUP. Therefore the Libyan campaign represented a useful test for the new UK-France bilateral defense co-operation arrangement. On one hand, as reported by RUSI (2011), the Britain’s amphibious assault ship HMS Ocean acted as a ‘helicopter carrier’, supporting allies in launching aircraft^{xxxII}. On the other, OUP was unable to take the advantages a carrier can provide, worsening the dependence on the allies military assets and land-bases, which were mainly in Italy. The initial Italian ambiguity towards the operation^{xxxIII} demonstrates that: ‘the assumption of available shore-basing always involves a balance of risks’ (Willet 2001: 9).

As pointed out by this last example, looking at the specific national contributions provided by the most important European armed forces supplies additional elements for assessing their military capabilities.

3.3.) National contributions in details: UK, France and Italy

Apart from Washington, the main military contribution given to the operation has been provided by three European countries: UK, France and Italy.

The UK mission to enforce the UN resolutions was called ‘Operation ELLAMY’. According to the official stats released by the UK Ministry of Defense: ‘at its peak, the UK had around 4,000 personnel, 37 aircraft and four ships’^{xxxIV} committed to the intervention. The official documents emphasize the positive performance given by the RAF Typhoons, especially due to their versatility, the significant threat posed by Gaddafi’s forces (which were considered ‘very well equipped and trained and well-motivated’^{xxxV}) and the crucial



role played by the AH-1 Apache helicopters embarked on HMS Ocean. It is worth noting how the military ‘positively’ considered such operation in comparison to its intervention in Afghanistan. In the words of Major Mick Neville, Officer Commanding 4 Regiment AAC: ‘In Afghanistan we are used in a reactionary way, giving support to guys on the ground, so it was nice to be involved in deliberate targeted operations’^{xxxvi}. This sentence well illustrates the different nature of the two missions, highlighting the cultural and operational problems western troops are facing in counterinsurgency warfare.

‘Harmattan’ is the name attributed by France to the national operation that started March 19th. The official documents illustrate the details of the French military contribution: 4.200 personnel, 40 aircraft (among them Rafale, Mirage 2000 D and Mirage 2000 N), 20 helicopters and the Charles the Gaulle carrier. France contributed at the 35% out of the air to ground operations undertaken by the coalition^{xxxvii}. The role played by the French helicopters (‘SA-342 Gazelles’ and ‘Eurocopter Tiger’^{xxxviii}) was even more important, carrying out 90% of the overall attacks launched through such asset throughout OUP^{xxxix}. Attack helicopters were employed since the beginning of June in urban areas (mainly in Misurata) to target Gaddafi’s forces on the ground after the main air defense had been removed. Their role was significant, especially due to the capabilities to engage enemies in urban areas effectively and with less fear of civilian casualties. According to Cordesman and Vira: ‘Their ability to loiter and provide close-fire support is an important asset but comes with their vulnerability to ground fire, particularly MANPADs [Man-portable air-defense system], but also RPGs [rocket-propelled grenade] and small-arms^{xi}’ (2011: 216).

On a whole, the French military contribution was considerable and it reflected a noticeable activism on the diplomatic stage: France and UK made pressure on the UN Security council since the very beginning of the Libyan crisis, playing a leading role in the multinational coalition^{xli}.

On the contrary, the Italian approach towards the crisis was initially ambiguous and ambivalent. Miranda emphasizes the ‘vacillations’ (2011: 17) of the government, which had initially excluded a national involvement in the air strikes, due to the strong economic, political and military ties with Gaddafi’s regime and the unpleasant colonial past in the country^{xlii}. Probably, such initial ambiguity helps to explain the scarce international recognition attributed to the significant Italian military involvement in OUP. For example, the considerable role played by Italy in the Libyan campaign was completely forgotten by



President Obama during its statement at the UN General Assembly, fostering a vigorous political controversy^{XLI.iii}.

Securing energy supplies, contrasting migratory flows and preserving the national economic investment in Libya to cope with the activism of other international actors, led Italy to intervene, following what Miranda calls an ‘interest-driven approach’ (2011: 16). However, the humanitarian mission deployed at the Tunisian border and the strong appeal to build a multilateral framework to ‘Odyssey Dawn’ confirm once again the relevance of the key-values through which Italian leaders traditionally justify military operations abroad: humanitarianism and multilateralism. According to Ignazi, Giacomello and Coticchia:

“Frameworks such as “multilateralism” and “peace”, which were fundamental cultural guidelines of the Italian foreign and defense policies during the Cold War, are still central in the national strategic culture. Despite an effective evolution of the Italian defense policy in the last two decades, the military dimension of the operations still appears “removed” from the political debate?” (2012: 4).

The Italian involvement in Libyan crisis is pretty adherent to such perspective on the ‘national way’ to military operations abroad: strong caveat and constraints to military action (Gaiani 2011a), substantial consensus by the main political parties to the mission^{XLI.v}, scarce information over the air campaign^{XLI.v}, extreme reluctance to involve troops in combat operations. On a whole, the Italian participation to OUP confirms the national attitude for sending troops overseas in a wide range of operations: peacekeeping, peace-building, peace-enforcement and humanitarian interventions. ‘Deploying a carrier and eight other ships, Italy took a leading role in the NATO operation, especially with French, UK and US assets operating under national tasking’ (Willet 2011: 9).

In addition to a preeminent responsibility assumed in the NATO maritime operations^{XLI.vi} (which were officially led by an Italian admiral), Italy contributed to OUP in a considerable way, providing seven air bases in its territory^{XLI.vii}, employing the best assets of the national Air Force (i.e., Tornado, F16 Falcon, Eurofighter 2000, AMX, Predator B, G 222, AV-8B) throughout 1182 missions^{XLI.viii}. Gaiani (2011b) estimates the Italian contribution to 10% of NATO’s air campaign, after US, UK and France^{XLI.ix}.

In summary, despite positive results achieved (especially in terms of diplomatic activism) and extensive efforts made by European armed forces during OUP, all the



shortfalls and problems described above contribute to reject an optimistic view on European military capabilities in contemporary operations. The degree of military dependence on US assets is still massive. Moreover, if the involvement of key European countries proved some shortages, the role played by the European Union confirms the crisis of the EU defense policy.

4) The (absent) role of the EU

I am ready to take work forward on possible new CSDP missions – in particular in regions of such strategic importance to Europe’s security as such as Sabel and Libya’.

(High Representative Catherine Ashton on the Common Security and Defense Policy in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, 13 December 2011)

‘The CFSP died in Libya – we just have to pick a sand dune under which we can bury it’

(Unnamed European diplomat quoted by the Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 24 March 2011)

In front of the outbreak of the Libyan crisis, the European Union was unable to react rapidly and in coherent way. Its response was widely criticized for being too slow and too divided (Koenig 2011). Brussels implemented sanctions against Libya adopted by the UN Security Council imposing also an arms embargo to the Gaddafi’s regime^I. In April the EU approved a military mission to provide humanitarian assistance, activating also the civil protection mechanism: European experts were deployed in Libya and at the borders with Tunisia, Egypt, Algeria, and Chad^{II}. Around 5,800 EU citizens were evacuated. As of 11 January 2012, the Commission and member states had provided over 158 million Euros for humanitarian aid and civil protection.^{III} The EU is still the biggest humanitarian donor to Libya.



However, unanimity was reached by the EU members only on humanitarian support. In the words of High Representative Catherine Ashton, there were: ‘different approaches from different member States to the military issues [...] they are sovereign nations. They determine what approach they take to military action, and that’s right and proper. That’s for them to do. They are sovereign states’^{LIII}. Any intervention under the framework of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) was taken into consideration due to the divisions among EU members. Brussels has been almost a sort of ‘spectator’ in the face of war (Santini 2011). According to Menon (2011) the EU was incapable of agreeing on how to act, failing miserably in the Libyan crisis. The disunity of the EU has been widely interpreted by European diplomats and policy-makers as ‘the end of the illusion’ for CSDP (Armellini 2011). In addition, as noted by Santini, the crisis exposed: ‘two serious flaws of European foreign policy: the lack of a common migration approach beyond the creation of Frontex, a border control agency, and the death of collective energy security policy’ (Santini 2011).

It is impossible to say whether the Libyan crisis will mark the end of the CSDP, but EU inactivity has definitely illustrated the dramatic weaknesses of the European defense policy in terms of coherence and capabilities (Menon, 2011). Since the European Union has proven to be so internally divided towards a political and military crisis at its borders, the US Defense Strategic Guidance’s confidence on burden sharing appeared misplaced.

5) Conclusion

‘Your chief of staff couldn’t lead a platoon around the corner to buy a newspaper’, the American ambassador, Winthrop Brown, once told him. ‘I know’, Phoumi answered, ‘but he’s loyal’

(David Halberstam on former Laotian leader Phoumi Nosavan)

Sustaining the victory obtained by operation ‘Unified Protector’ requires a massive effort (Cordesman and Vira 2011). Despite a diminishing global attention towards Libya, the current situation is dramatically worsening^{LIV}. Libyan National Transitional Council chairman Mustafa Jalil openly warned that Libya faces a civil war (Ditz 2012). Inter-militia fighting erupted, especially around Tripoli. After the war, different militias obtained the



control of various spheres of influence in the country and the disarmament process appears extremely complex and intricate. The violent protests at the National Transitional Council's headquarters, attacked by hundreds, well illustrate the huge problems faced by the interim government to get control over the country (Stack 2012). Growing instability and fragmentation, civil war, jihadist sanctuary for al-Qaeda, are some of the worst-case scenarios for the new Libya. The international community still has a considerable strategic and economic interest in maintaining stability in the area. At the moment we are unable to predict if, eventually, the European countries will provide further military support to the National Transitional Council (training missions^{LV}). US Defense Strategic Guidance, which has portrayed the Libyan war as a successful model of burden sharing, has probably provided an inadequate example.

* Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna, Pisa. CDG - International Research Laboratory on Conflict, Development and Global Politics f.coticchia@sssup.it. The author wishes to thank Davide Cafaggi and two anonymous reviewers for helpful suggestions and comments.

^I For a comprehensive, even if preliminary, analysis of the 'Defense Strategic Guidance' see the open debate held at the Council of Foreign Relations, available at: <http://www.cfr.org/defense-strategy/obamas-defense-strategy/p27012> (Accessed January 2012).

^{II} U.S. Department of Defense (2012: 3)

^{III} Ibid.

^{IV} For an overview of the debate over the transformation of war see, among others: Buzan and Hansen, 2010.

^V See, among others, Centre for the Study of Civil War at PRIO and Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), available at: <http://www.prio.no/CSCW/Datasets/Armed-Conflict/> (Accessed January 2012).

^{VI} See the dataset in: www.sipri.org/contents/conflict/conflictdatasets.html (Accessed January 2012).

^{VII} In that sense, we rule out covert operations and Special Forces, which actually played a relevant role during the NATO operation.

^{VIII} On main differences between the operations in Libya and Kosovo see, among others: RUSI (2011).

^{IX} According to Strachan: 'the ideas of counterinsurgency [...] are means to an end, not an end in themselves' (2010: 159). In conformity to such perspective, talking about COIN 'strategy' is misleading because the counterinsurgency approach attains at the operational level of war.

^X For a critical perspective see: Gentile, 2008

^{XI} UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1973 (17 March 2011), available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm#Resolution> (Accessed January 2012).

^{XII} For a critical perspective on humanitarian interventions and R2P see, among others: Duffield (2003) and Zizek (2005).

^{XIII} See the European Security Strategy: *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, 2003

^{XIV} 'Lega Nord' (Northern League), which was a crucial Berlusconi's ally in the majority coalition, was openly critical towards NATO's military intervention (even though without voting against the parliamentary approval of the mission). See: Casadio (2011).

^{XV} See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12477275> (Accessed January 2012).

^{XVI} The operation began on March 19th. Key contributors were France ('Operation Harmattan') and United Kingdom ('Operation Ellamy') See: http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0311_libya2/ (Accessed January 2012).



^{xvii} UN Security Council Resolution 1973 mandates all necessary measures to protect civilians and civilian-population areas under attack or threat of attack in Libya. See: UN Security Council Resolution S/RES/1973. (17 March 2011), available at: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm#Resolution> (Accessed January 2012).

^{xviii} Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR - Final Mission Statistics available at: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/71679.htm> (Accessed January 2012).

^{xix} According to Cordesman and Vira: ‘At the start of the uprising, unclassified sources estimated that the 50,000-man Libyan Army, included 25,000 poorly trained conscripts, and constituted the bulk of Libya’s 76,000 active forces. The 40,000 strong People’s Militia, a paramilitary organization was sometimes included as part of the army, but was really an additional and autonomous defense institution. The Libyan army seemed to lack anything approaching an effective and well-trained reserve system and was deliberately weakened by Qaddafi, who did not trust in its loyalty, particularly after an attempted military coup in 1969’ (2011: 21).

^{xx} Nations were: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, Jordan, Netherlands, Norway, Qatar, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom and United States.

^{xxi} Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR - Final Mission Statistics, available at: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/71679.htm> (Accessed January 2012). NATO’s forces carried out reconnaissance, surveillance and information-gathering operations through fighter aircraft, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft, air-to air refuellers, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) and attack helicopters.

^{xxii} Twelve nations (Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Greece, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Romania, Turkey, United Kingdom, and United States) have provided naval assets to enforce the embargo. Operation Unified Protector: NATO-led Arms Embargo against Libya - October 2011, available at: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/71679.htm> (Accessed January 2012).

^{xxiii} Ibid. On the political disputes between Italy and NATO on rescue operations see, for instance: *La Repubblica* (2011) and *Libero* (2011).

^{xxiv} Concerning costs, NATO’s official report of OUP highlights that: ‘each contributing nation paid the costs resulting from the use of their capabilities deployed as part of Operation Unified Protector. Airborne Early Warning and Control Aircraft (AWACS) were the only NATO-owned capabilities subject to NATO common funding. The total cost of the 24/7 deployment of NATO AWACS were estimated at 5.4 million EUR/month. In addition, the complementary cost for the structural and personnel augmentation of headquarters involved in Operation Unified Protector was estimated at 800,000 EUR/month, subject to final verification by NATO financial authorities’. Final Mission Statistics available at: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/71679.htm> (Accessed January 2012).

^{xxv} See NATO’s official statements available at: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/71679.htm> (Accessed January 2012), or *United States Activities in Libya*, White House, June 15, 2011. Available at: <http://bit.ly/IWT54Z> (Accessed January 2012).

^{xxvi} Additional criticism towards NATO’s intervention was also related to the ‘double standard’ of the Western approach, especially after the massive violence erupted contemporarily in Syria. See, among others: Bruba (2011).

^{xxvii} NATO defense ministers’ meeting in Brussels, June 8th. See Burns and Shanker (2011).

^{xxviii} ‘Operation Unified Protector: Protection of civilians and civilian-populated areas & enforcement of the No-Fly Zone - October 2011, available at: <http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/71679.htm> (Accessed January 2012).

^{xxix} Also US and Canada employed aircraft for air strike mission (RUSI 2011).

^{xxx} ‘The US also flew around 30 of the 40 air-refuelling tankers upon which coalition airplanes depended’ (IISS, 2011).

^{xxxi} Traditional human intelligence (HUMINT) was obviously crucial. Special forces provided relevant intelligence information, especially in a context where air-to-ground communications were minimal. At the same time, special forces played an important strategic role in the conflict, mainly due to training activities to rebel forces. In that sense, it is worth noting the huge effort made by the Qatari special forces in advising rebels in Nefusa Mountains before the decisive offensive towards Tripoli.

^{xxxii} French (“Charles de Gaulle”) and Italian (“Giuseppe Garibaldi”) carriers and a US amphibious assault ships (initially USS Kearsarge then USS Bataan) represented the key assets of the OUP in the maritime operations.

^{xxxiii} See, among others, *Il Messaggero* (2011).



XXXIV 'The UK's contribution to freeing Libya', available at: <http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceNews/MilitaryOperations/TheUksContributionToFreeingLibya.htm> (Accessed January 2012).

XXXV Ibid.

XXXVI Ibid.

XXXVII In details: '27 000 heures de vol et environ 5 600 sorties réparties comme suit : 3 100 sorties offensives, 1 200 sorties de reconnaissance, 400 sorties de défense aérienne, 340 sorties de contrôle aérien, 580 sorties de ravitaillement' See : 'Libye : point de situation n° 50 - bilan de l'opération Unified Protector', available at: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/autres-operations/operation-harmattan-libye/actualites/libye-point-de-situation-n-50-bilan-de-l-operation-unified-protector> (Accessed January 2012).

XXXVIII According to Cordesman and Vira: 'The Tigers however are believed to be the HAP version, and armed with only guns and Mistral air-to-air missiles, rendering them less useful against heavy armor than for reconnaissance, fire support or escort duties'. (2011: 54).

XXXIX 'Le GAM (groupement aéromobile), constitué par les hélicoptères de l'aviation légère de l'armée de Terre (ALAT), a réalisé une quarantaine de raids au cours desquels 600 objectifs ont été détruits. Ils ont ainsi effectué 90% des frappes par hélicoptères de la coalition', See : 'Libye : point de situation n° 50 - bilan de l'opération Unified Protector', available at: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/operations/autres-operations/operation-harmattan-libye/actualites/libye-point-de-situation-n-50-bilan-de-l-operation-unified-protector> (Accessed January 2012).

XL Cordesman and Vira believe that the strategic relevance of the helicopters in the Libyan conflict (and especially in the battle for Misurata) should not be overrated. 'Despite their introduction in theater, a few days later on June 6-7 it was reported that loyalist forces had mounted another major assault on the city, with —thousands of troops advancing along multiple axes' (2011: 216).

XLI France appeared eager to employ its military forces against Gaddafi. Such behaviour undoubtedly spread a pressing sense of emergency in order to halt violations to human rights. On negative consequences of a so called "just do it approach" in humanitarian interventions see Rieff (2005). On French political and diplomatic activism see, among others, Bumler (2011).

XLII See, among others: di Caro (2011) and Franco (2011).

XLIII See Caprara (2011)

XLIV Main parties presented different resolutions but they all approved the Italian involvement in the operation.

XLV An Italian aviator that released information over the air campaign was relocated (Mastrolilli 2011).

XLVI The Italians deployed the carrier 'Giuseppe Garibaldi', which was withdrawn in July to save on costs. According to official documents released by the Ministry of Defense, the Italian Navy employed during the operations also frigates ('Euro', 'Bersagliere' and 'Libeccio'), destroyers ('Andrea Doria'), submarines ('Todaro' and 'Gazzana'), amphibious assault ships ('San Giusto', 'San Giorgio' and 'San Marco') corvettes ('Minerva', 'Urania', 'Chimera', 'Driade' and 'Fenice'). The data are provided by the official report related by the Ministry of Defense, available at: http://www.difesa.it/Operazioni_Militari/operazioni-internazionali_concluse/Libia-odissea-alba/Pagine/Contributonazionale.aspx (Accessed January 2012),

XLVII The bases were: Trapani, Gioia del Colle, Sigonella, Decimomannu, Aviano, Amendola and Pantelleria. The 80% of OUP air missions took off from the Italian bases. For a critical perspective on the Italian military involvement see: Mazzeo (2012).

XLVIII The Italian C130J have been deployed also for humanitarian missions.

XLIX According to the NATO Joint Force Command in Naples, General Leandro De Vicenti, the Italian air strikes proved extremely effective, with a success rate of 79%. Reported by Gaiani (2011b)

L The Council adopted decision 2011/137/CFSP (28 February, 2011) in order to implement UNSC Resolution 1970.

LI European Commission - ECHO, *Libyan Crisis, Factsheet*, 21 June 2011, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/libya_factsheet.pdf. (Accessed January 2012).

LII Ibid.

LIII <http://www.euronews.net/2011/03/22/ashton-defends-eu-unity-over-libya/> (Accessed January 2012)

LIV See, among others, *The Associated Press* (2012).

LV As announced at the end of January by Minister Di Paola, Italy will deploy in Libya around 100 soldiers for a training mission in defence and security sector. See Gaiani (2012).



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