

The road to Libya is paved with best intentions

By [Robert Bridge](#)

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As US warships loom in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Libya, and French and British fighter jets patrol the skies, it is clear that “Operation Odyssey Dawn” is in full-swing against Gaddafi loyalists. But beyond the conspicuous military element, observers fail to understand exactly what the UN-sanctioned campaign will accomplish in the Arab country.

First, many Russian commentators see less-than-benevolent reasons for the coalition forces overtly military presence in Libya, which was supposed to have been an operation to defend civilians.

Indeed, parallels are already being drawn between what is happening in Libya and the NATO operation against Yugoslavia in 1999.

“NATO strategists are trying to resolve an extremely complicated military-political situation of the region at one stroke,” Chairman of the State Duma Defense Committee Viktor Zavarzin told Interfax-AVN on Monday. *“This looks to me as the alliance’s operation against the former Yugoslavia in March 1999. The same as before, the coalition is trying to implement the ‘humanitarian intervention’ concept.”*

NATO forces opened an aerial bombardment against Yugoslavia that lasted from March 24, 1999 to June 10, 1999, when Belgrade finally surrendered to the coalition forces. The military operation, commenced under the pretext that Serbian forces were committing “genocide” in the breakaway province of Kosovo against ethnic Albanians, was conducted solely from the sky as ground forces were never deployed.

Meanwhile, pro-Gaddafi forces in Libya are battling against anti-government rebels who have concentrated their forces in Benghazi, Libya’s second largest city, as well as the site of Libya’s largest oil reserves.

According to Zavarzin, the coalition *“forgets that international laws do not accept the so-called humanitarian bombings. We have seen that before. Vast economic damage was done to the country. The escalation of force exacerbates the regional situation.”*

“Political or military expediency must not prevail over international laws,” he added.

There is, after all, tragic irony about the coalition strategy, which pledges its support to humanitarian values, yet launches massive missile sorties against supposed military sites indiscriminately, thereby leading to the death of innocent civilians.

Russia condemned over the weekend a US launch of 112 Tomahawk cruise missiles, which Libyan authorities say killed 48 civilians and left over 150 wounded.

"Russia opposes the military operation in Libya, because it directly harms the civilian population," Zavarzin stressed. "Alas, the use of foreign military force kills civilians and affects civilian sites."

The Chairman of the Russian State Duma Defense Committee acknowledged that Gaddafi disagrees with international norms and must be opposed, but *"civilian casualties are impermissible,"* he said.

Dmitry Rogozin, Russian envoy to NATO, agreed that the actions taken by the member states of the military bloc in the operation against Gaddafi's regime are exceeding the framework of the UN Security Council resolution.

"I believe the attacks on targets that are unrelated to aviation, including air-defense systems, aerodromes, and air targets, go beyond the limits of the set targets and contradict the UN Security Council's resolution on Libya," Rogozin told Interfax on Monday.

He then suggested that the Allied effort was operating a bit like a chicken without a head, unable to agree on the best course of action it should undertake.

"I believe that is due to the fact that the allies have no unity on how the Security Council resolution should be fulfilled," he said.

Rogozin also stressed that Germany remains negative about the operation.

"As for the use of force against Libya, Germany is concerned about NATO being involved in a war and believes that participation in such military operation could hurt NATO's reputation," he said.

Finally, even the home of "Europe's last dictator," Belarus, is condemning what appears to be yet another example of western forces resorting to excessive force.

"Missile strikes and bombings in Libya exceed UN Security Council resolution 1973 and disagree with its main goal, i.e. security of civilians," the Belarusian Foreign Ministry said on Sunday.

"The Republic of Belarus calls on the states participating in the military operation to cease the hostilities immediately, as they result in civilian casualties," the statement continued. *"The settlement of this conflict is an internal affair of Libya, which must be achieved by the people of Libya without an external military interference."*

Should we fight for every "interim government"?

Remarkably, there was no Libyan opposition to speak of just one month ago, a fact that causes many observers to view their claims to be the "interim Libyan government" with some suspicion.

"One of the biggest problems Western governments have faced throughout the Libyan crisis has been identifying who exactly the 'eastern rebels' are," reported STRATFOR, a daily intelligence briefing.

"Until the uprising began in February, there was thought to be no legitimate opposition to

speak of in the country, and thus no contacts between the United States, the United Kingdom, France or others."

The first man to announce a "transitional government" was former Libyan Justice Minister Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, who defected from the government Feb. 21. Yet just one day after Abdel-Jalil's announcement, a Libyan lawyer named Abdel-Hafidh Ghoga came forward and held a news conference to pronounce himself to be the spokesman of the new council.

"The personality clash between Abdel-Jalil and Ghoga continued on for most of the next week, as each man portended to be running a council that spoke for the eastern rebel movement in its entirety," STRATFOR reported.

"It was significant only insofar as it provided just a glimpse of the sort of internal rivalries that exist in eastern Libya...this will be a problem moving ahead for the coalition carrying out the bombing campaign of Libya, as tribal and personal rivalries in the east will compound with a simple lack of familiarity with who the rebels really are."

To date, it seems that the members of the Libyan opposition are unified on a series of goals: they want to open an armed offensive against the government-controlled regions in the west; they want to overthrow Gaddafi; they seek to end the civil war and maintain Tripoli as the Libyan capital; and they do not want foreign troops on Libyan soil.

While these initiatives are all consistent with removing Gaddafi from power, can the members of the interim government be trusted to be any more efficient at running their country than Col. Muammar Gaddafi, who did succeed, after all, in making peace with Western leaders after a series of fallouts?

Remembering Kosovo

It has been proven that "humanitarian efforts" to remove a suspected menace actually overlooked far greater atrocities, or helped to introduce them.

In December, a European investigation alleged that civilian detainees of the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) were kidnapped and murdered so their organs could be sold on the black market.

The shocking revelations follow a two-year investigation into a criminal underworld that led to the very door of Kosovo's US-backed Prime Minister Hashim Thaci, the leader of the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), and former political leader of the KLA.

The report by Council of Europe investigator Dick Marty suggests that the entrepreneurial Thaci was the "boss" of the grisly trade, while also exerting "violent control" over the heroin trade.

Ironically, the reasoning behind the NATO attack on Yugoslavia was that Serbian forces were committing "genocide" in the breakaway province of Kosovo against ethnic Albanians. Meanwhile, the KLA was officially recognized by the US government as a terrorist organization until as late as 1998.

In other words, the example of Kosovo suggests that just because one group labels itself the "transitional government" does not necessarily make it the righteous inheritor of state power. Yet this is exactly the tact that the Allied forces are taking in Libya.

According to the the UN Security Council website, the passage of Resolution 1973 authorizes the international organization to *“take all necessary measures to protect civilians under threat of attack in the country, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory...”*

The question that many observers are now asking is, *“how far will they interpret the extremely loose wording of the Security Council resolution, which calls for “all necessary measures” to protect civilians.*

In their desire to protect civilians, will the Allied forces only succeed in killing more than would have otherwise been the case?

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