

A war worth fighting? The Libyan intervention in retrospect

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Sloggett, D. (2012)

The RAF's Air War in Libya. New Conflicts in the Era of Austerity. Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books.

Notin, J.C. (2012)

La Vérité sur Notre Guerre en Libye. Paris: Fayard.

Chivvis, C.S. (2014)

Toppling Qaddafi. Libya and the Limits of Liberal Intervention. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Abstract | The Libyan intervention, originally considered a success for NATO in the context of the 'Arab spring', is now criticized for creating the political turmoil Libya is currently going through. The three books under review offer different perspectives on the intervention itself, raising important questions about its conduct and its consequences. They also indirectly raise the issue of the difficulty to write about contemporary warfare.

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Introduction

On 4 December 2014, forces allied to one of two rival governments vying for power in Libya launched an air strike near Tripoli, killing at least three. Libya is currently caught between two sides, each with its own government and parliament, with the officially recognized government of Libya forced out of Tripoli in August by a self-proclaimed government drawn from a militia called 'Libya Dawn'.

Three years after the end of the Qaddafi regime, it might be tempting to regret the NATO-led intervention that was intended to protect the civilian population against a possible bloodbath committed by the Libyan dictator. It is also difficult to remember that the intervention, although at

times criticized by the media and pundits for being too long and delivering little, was hailed a major success for NATO at a time when the Alliance had difficulties defining a course for the Afghanistan campaign. The scenes of joy in the streets of Tripoli that followed the fall of Qaddafi, widely broadcasted on Western media, seem today at odds with the current situation in Libya, and this unfortunate turn of events could force questions regarding the NATO-led intervention.

The three books reviewed here shed the light on the intervention itself: how it was conducted and what went well (or wrong). As such, they constitute an interesting material for anyone willing to understand where the current situation in Libya comes from, but also broader issues of

transatlantic cooperation or the future of NATO. They also give very different perspectives on the conflict, and are worth comparing in order to get an as accurate as possible understanding of the difficulties involved in the intervention. The three authors have different backgrounds (Dave Sloggett is a consultant, Jean-Christophe Notin a journalist and Christopher S. Chivvis a researcher at the RAND corporation), which constitute an interesting exercise in comparison as their books draw on different types of materials. The first section of this article will discuss the sources each author had access to, and the way he uses them. The second part will analyse the conduct of the intervention, by focusing on the burden-sharing issues between the United States and her allies, but also inquiring whether Libya could be the illustration that the US way of warfare is *not* the only one possible for Western militaries. Finally, the third section explores the consequences of the campaign on NATO and the future of liberal interventionism.

Telling the Story of Modern War

As any researcher in the field of defence and security knows, conducting qualitative research in a military environment is difficult. The access to data is usually limited to interviews, as most researchers do not have the ability to conduct participant observation in a military environment. Interviews themselves must be handled sensitively (usually the interviewee wants to remain anonymous), as the first breach of trust, although it might lead to a 'juicy' publication, would also be the last: it is highly unlikely that the researcher could ever have again access to interviewees. For those authors who combine insider knowledge of the armed forces (such as working for a think tank under contract with the military or serving in the armed forces) with academic research, a high degree of reflexivity is absolutely critical in order to produce an interesting research outcome (Ben-Ari, 2014).

Another way for researchers to investigate modern warfare is to rely on open sources. The advent of the Internet and the availability of multiple sources in multiple languages facilitates the reconstitution of decision-making processes, reduces the temptation of parochialism by bringing forward multiple perspectives and creates richer and more complex narratives. Obviously, it is ideal to combine open sources with interviews, as the two are mutually enriching. The good practices remain the same: be critical about the sources, collect multiple perspectives before making a statement, acknowledge that interviewees can have a limited insight into the situation or a personal agenda and so on.

The authors of the three books reviewed here have different backgrounds and fare differently in terms of their use of sources. Sloggett is the less transparent and probably the most problematic in that regard. The book has no footnotes

and no bibliography, which is surprising (although the editor could have imposed such measure for marketing purposes). Nevertheless, this decision is problematic, as the reader is left guessing about the sources the author used. The only indication is a 'data analysis note' at the opening of the book, in which the author explains where the data for his analysis of the patterns of NATO strikes come from: a database compiled by the British newspaper *The Guardian* (itself a compilation of the information available in the NATO official communiqués) and the official communiqués published by the British armed forces. Apart from this brief presentation, we know almost nothing about the other sources the author used to create his narrative, although it is clear in the text that Sloggett only used open sources (and no interviews) in the writing of the book. On occasions, analysis provided by the company *IHS Jane's* are mentioned, but that is all the reader will notice in terms of sources. Is this lack of indication problematic? In terms of good academic practices, undoubtedly yes. Yet, the book is destined to a non-specialist audience, and cannot be held to the same standards as a purely academic book. But is it a reason to conceal all information about the sources? Even written by non-academics and with a large audience in mind, non-fiction books usually mention their references. And there is a good reason to that: it allows every reader to assess for herself the credibility of a source, and thus the quality of the author's argumentation. Without the sources, the reader is left with little choice but putting a great deal of faith in the author's integrity and honesty, which is a lot to ask from any critical mind. Is this reliance on open sources problematic for the analysis of the Libyan campaign presented in the book? With a limited amount of information, the author nevertheless manages to recreate the overall dynamic of the intervention: the importance of the initial strikes to halt Gaddafi's forces, the stalemate caused by the fluidity of the battlefield and the rebels' lack of military experience, and the military breakthrough in August–September 2011, hence demonstrating that it is possible to make sense of the main phases of the war with a careful reading of the open sources and a knowledge of the dynamics of military operations. Yet, his analysis suffers from several limitations. First, the book reads as if the overall political context did not matter to the prosecution of the war: there is very little discussion of the negotiations at the United Nations, the support of the Arab League and the reluctance of the European Union and the African Union, and so on. His narrative is also very British-centred: reading the book gives the impression that David Cameron was the great architect of the war, which he managed and politically controlled from the beginning to the end. One is left wondering whether the author read anything other than British newspapers when preparing the book, as the roles of Barack Obama and Nicolas Sarkozy are barely mentioned. Moreover, even in military terms, the analysis is limited.

Sloggett never discusses the diverging strategies between the French and the British over the prioritization of either Brega or Misrata as the key objective of the military effort, and does not seem to perceive that the breakthrough actually came from the Nafusah Mountains. This lack of granularity probably comes from the dataset Sloggett uses, which subsume all the strikes under a convenient 'NATO' umbrella, thus preventing the observation of who does what, critical in order to understand the broad dynamics of the conduct of the campaign by the coalition. For the same reasons, Sloggett overlooks the role of the Arab states in the coalitions, which he mentions only in passing and, understandably considering the lack of open sources on this topic, barely mentions the role of special forces in the conflict. Sloggett also conveniently overlooks events that could be embarrassing for the British armed forces, such as the capture and subsequent expulsion of two MI6 officers and six SAS by the rebels near Benghazi on 3 March 2011. Another problem stemming from this limited amount of sources is the misinterpretation of some critical events. For example, when he criticizes the French minister of defence for announcing that NATO countries would be planning for a no-fly zone on 11 March, Sloggett writes: 'anyone familiar with the Falklands campaign would have offered advice to the French Defence Minister that might have straightened out his view on this' (Sloggett, 2012, p. 60). Apart from the Francophobic tone of the comment (recurring in the book), it turns out that the French defence council (of which the Minister of defence is part, alongside other top officials such as the President, the Prime Minister and the Chief of the General Staff) had decided to use a no-fly zone as the first step towards an ousting of Gaddafi. Announcing a no-fly zone was then the first step of an agreed-upon strategy, something Sloggett misses due to his limited (and concealed) sources. It is far from impossible to write a great recollection of a recent conflict based on open sources, Freedman and Karsh (1993) demonstrate in their history of the Gulf War. Yet, this requires using a large variety of source, in multiple languages, a type of research Sloggett did not have the time, or the linguistic capabilities, to conduct.

An alternative strategy to open sources is to base the book on interviews with decision makers. This is the approach chosen by Notin, whose book provides the reader with an intimate knowledge of the functioning of the French armed forces during the conflict. The narrative is gripping, and at times reads like a Tom Clancy novel: Notin spares no details when he reconstructs the first strike by French fighters on 19 March 2011, or when he brings the reader on board a French submarine serving as an intelligence source near the Libyan coast. This exciting narrative is possible thanks to an unparalleled access to the sources, and a real empathy towards his topic. The reader learns how the transition to a NATO-led operation was initially resisted, and eventually accepted by the French

authorities and what this transition meant in practice for the conduct of military operations; what the French priorities in the definition of the strategy were (privileging Brega, engaging the helicopters and so on); and the detail of the conduct of the operations, sometimes with a spectacular level of insights at the tactical level. In short, the book is a great opportunity to lift the veil on the functioning of the French political-military apparatus. But the strength of the book is also its main weakness, as Notin completely lacks the reflexivity that would be necessary for his work to be more than a collection of interesting and exciting anecdotes. The first clue is given by the list of interviewees. Notin was able to meet with 188 policymakers, diplomats and military officers within a few months after the events. Anyone having conducted research in the field of military studies would acknowledge that this is an impressive performance. Yet, it is surprising to observe that all these interviewees are directly referenced in the footnotes, which is puzzling considering that policy-makers usually prefer talking under the condition of anonymity. The fact that high-level decision makers such as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations are comfortable being quoted indicates that the discourse has been calibrated and conveys a specific message. Yet, the main problem with Notin is that he takes these statements face value, without double-checking or interrogating other sources. This is particularly true when it comes to the relations with NATO or the United Kingdom: while the author seems at first to expose both sides of a contentious issue, he always concludes his discussion by quoting a senior French official, thus legitimizing his position as being the more correct. One would be hard-pressed to find the view of NATO officials or British officials in the book, which would create a more balanced narrative: Notin did not find it useful to interview any of them. In fact, one can easily imagine that Notin, fascinated by his subject, wanted to have an as wide as possible access to the sources and that, in return, the military saw in him an opportunity to have someone writing a 'feel-good' story about the French side of the intervention. It is no surprise that Notin has become the *quasi*-official publicist of the French armed forces, publishing a book about the French intervention in Côte d'Ivoire in 2013 and a 500 pages-long book about the French war in Mali only 7 months after the intervention (Notin, 2013, 2014). Willingly or not, Notin conveys the official French position on many topics, from targeting during the Libyan campaign to the relationships with NATO, and his role would be better conceived as similar to a medieval chronicler, narrating a story from his master's perspective with the aim of highlighting his prowess and concealing his failures, than a journalist's work aiming at obtaining a credible and balanced story. As such, the book is extremely interesting to get a good understanding of the French official narrative about the war, and should be treated as such, while being aware of all its limitations.

Chivvis's book is the most balanced of the three under review. The author relies on a large number of open sources (mostly newspapers articles from the United States, the United Kingdom and France), which he references, but has also conducted a number of interviews with policymakers from the main countries having participated in the intervention and at NATO, although interviews with US policymakers seem to predominate. As such, his narrative identifies the main phases of the war and, contrary to the two other books, strikes the right balance between the discussions of the international political context of the intervention and its conduct at the operational/tactical level: the successful blending of diplomatic and military history is probably the book's biggest achievement. An informed reader might sometimes notice a relatively US-centric perspective on the campaign, but this problem (probably impossible to completely solve considering the social environment in which the author writes and his access to sources) is order of magnitudes less visible than in Sloggett's and Notin's books. The book is also relatively short and, due to a lack of open sources, partially overlooks some aspects covered by Notin, such as the use of special forces on the ground. Although it is not the definitive book on the subject (for which we will have to wait for the opening of archives), Chivvis' work is probably as good as it gets when it comes to using a blend of interviews and open sources to reconstruct a recent military campaign.

Toppling Qaddafi is then the best book to begin with in order to get a good sense of the general political-military dynamics of the Libyan campaign and a balanced assessment of the main debates pertaining to it. Reading Notin after Chivvis is a good complement, because it gives the French perspective on the events (and it is also very entertaining for readers interested in the nuts and bolts of the conduct of military operations), while Chivvis is better at reconstructing the bigger picture. Compared with the two other books, *The RAF's Air War in Libya* offers little more in terms of analysis of the campaign and is plagued by a patriotic tone that is not forgiven by any specific insight in the functioning of the British armed forces. Its slightly longer discussion of the RAF's role in the campaign is unfortunately disconnected from the largest political context that would help readers make sense of the added value of the British contribution. As such, it is the less interesting of the three books under review.

Conducting the Intervention

The conduct of the intervention itself raises two questions: an old one and a new one. The old question is related to burden-sharing in a multinational military intervention and the problem of maintaining a meaningful transatlantic relationship in a context of shrinking European military capabilities. The new question emerging from Libya is the extent to which the American way of war is truly universal, and the gradual

realization by the United States that others can do differently, and possibly better. I address these two issues in turn.

The main military lesson of the Libyan campaign appears to many as being summarized by the Russian permanent representative to NATO who went on the record with some inflammatory comments, quoted by Sloggett (2012):

[The Russian representative] suggested that "if we call a spade a spade, even powerful armed forces like the ones of Britain and France are perhaps not particularly capable without the Americans". Warning to his theme he went further, even suggesting that it was "laughable" to speak of any individual actions by the British or French on the territory of Libya without the outside support of America.(p. 61)

The Libyan operation confirmed capability shortfalls that were already long identified. The first one was the European lack of aircrafts designed for close-in ground attack missions such as the Americans A-10 Warthog or the AC-130 Gunship. The only airplane in the European arsenal to be equally proficient in air-to-air and air-to-ground missions is the French Rafale, whose captors and weaponry allow the pilot to identify and destroy a target without external support. In comparison, the British Typhoon is forced to 'buddy-liaise' with a Tornado that helps in laser targeting.

However, the most critical shortfall, identified as such in the three books, was in the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) domain. Good ISR was important during the campaign for several reasons. The first one was the political, legal and ethical imperative to reduce civilian casualties and collateral damages to an absolute minimum. Rules of engagement for the strikes were therefore particularly strict: a minimum of 30 min of observation was required before a strike on a fixed target would be authorized, in order to ensure that no civilian was in the area. This was important in order to maintain the legitimacy of the coalition, as any civilian casualty would be exploited by the regime, and widely broadcasted to Western audiences. The Bishop of Tripoli, Giovanni Martinelli, claimed that NATO airplanes were killing civilians everyday with no evidence (as he himself acknowledged), but was nevertheless widely quoted by Western medias (Notin, 2012, p. 274). Chivvis also suggests that minimizing damages was important to hold the coalition together, as Italy and Turkey owned much of the Libyan energy infrastructure (Chivvis, 2014, p. 112). In that context, the British government's decision to scrap the Nimrod MRA4 programme despite the importance of the ISR domain and its importance in Libya 'makes little sense' (Sloggett, 2012, p. 178). The French capability gap in this domain is also important as the Mirage F1s are getting old, and Paris was only able to deploy one Harfang drone during the campaign. This lack of ISR capabilities was one of the main drivers behind the French decision to acquire a number of Reaper drones

in 2013. The gap remains nevertheless concerning, especially considering the fact that the United Kingdom and France are the two most powerful militaries in Europe. Chivvis also suggests that the problem is not limited to the lack of relevant capabilities, but also lies in the lack of trained personnel. According to his interviewees, there was a shortage of qualified targeteers at the Combined Air Operations Center (CAOC) in Poggio-Renatico, and the United States had to fill the gap: ‘hundreds of US staff were transferred from the regional US commands and other theatres to fill in the lacuna and keep the operation going’ (Chivvis, 2014, p. 113). Chivvis is the only author to mention this problem, which nevertheless seems credible: with the continuous reduction of the size of Europe’s armed forces, it becomes increasingly difficult to train specialists in all areas of modern warfare, and spare them to a multinational headquarters. Overall, the United States had to provide over three-quarters of the ISR.

Another concerning aspect lies in the lack of ammunition, in particular small precision munitions (Hellfire or Brimstone missiles, for example). The British had a limited supply of Tomahawks missiles, which limited their participation in the opening of the campaign when the United States and the United Kingdom targeted Qaddafi’s air-defence systems. By mid-June, it was also reported that the United Kingdom was running low on the Brimstone missiles, which were widely used. France did not have an equivalent to the Brimstone missile (although it is built by the Franco-British consortium MBDA) and was forced to innovate in order to try to fill the gap. A French experimentation centre developed a bomb without explosive, which would destroy the target simply through the mass effect produced by a 200 kg bomb dropped from altitude. The downside was that the laser targeting had to be extremely accurate in order for the bomb to land exactly on the target. Despite some use in the campaign, French engineers could not obtain enough precision for the targeting kit, which led to an important failure rate (Notin, 2012, pp. 309–310). The tactical experiment was stopped after two weeks, as the making of the bombs was expensive but the strikes had little effect. Norway and Denmark also went under pressure because of their use of ammunition during the campaign, and the US had to step in. According to Chivvis (2014), ‘the United States would sell allies and partners approximately \$261 million worth of ammunition, repair parts, fuel, technical assistance, and other support’ (p. 137).

Other gaps were identified during the campaign, for example the lack of tankers for air-to-air refuelling. Once again, the United States had to step in and help the European allies. Several anecdotes revealed by Notin about the French armed forces also highlight the fact that European forces were always on the edge. When the French political authorities decided the first strikes on 19 March, the St Dizier airbase received the order to equip a number of

Rafale in an air-to-ground configuration in order to conduct a strike as soon as possible. But, considering that other planes were already equipped for an air defence mission and/or in the air, only one Rafale was available to be armed with four A2SM missiles. The strike package had to be completed with two Mirage 2000-D from the Nancy airbase which were equipped with GBU-12 bombs in a rush (Notin, 2012, pp. 156–157). This anecdote shows the resilience and professionalism of the French Air Force, but also its lack of capabilities and planes in numbers sufficient to offer the political level various strike options. The French frigate *Courbet*, which was on its way to participate in a counter-piracy mission in the Indian Ocean was diverted at the last minute; and the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* (the only one in service in the French navy), which was scheduled to serve for 100 days per year, spent 240 days afloat in 2011. In short, the French navy was so stretched that all other routine missions (such as patrolling, maritime police or training missions) suffered from the commitment in Libya. The same is also true for the Royal navy, which was dangerously overstretched, although Sloggett only mentions this point in passing, without documenting it further.

Of course, there were also successes, and the truth remains that French, British and other nations’ air forces were able to deliver on strike and air defence missions. Yet, as Chivvis (2012) explains: ‘the United States still flew more sorties and contributed more aircraft than any other ally, providing three-quarters of the ISR and tanker capacity, the vast majority of the capability used to destroy Qaddafi’s air-defence system, much of the electronic warfare, the bulk of the strategists and targeteers, and the only armed drones’ (p. 190).

Two decades of continuous cuts in Europe’s armed forces, coupled with the massive expansion of the United States’ military budget after 9/11 had the effect of creating an ever-widening gap between the US and its European allies, be it in terms of capabilities or of doctrines (Terriff *et al.*, 2010). This situation amplifies the traditional ‘burden-sharing’ debate within NATO as the US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ controversial speech in Brussels in June 2011 exemplifies. During his farewell speech, Gates criticized the allies for not doing enough in terms of military spending, highlighting the important contribution of small allies, such as Denmark, while more powerful countries were not participating in the common military effort.

Certainly, Gates has a point when criticizing the disarmament currently underway in Europe. Yet, the Libyan intervention forces to raise difficult question about the American way of warfare as the only possible model to conduct a military campaign.

The French General Stephane Abrial, who was serving as Supreme Allied Commander Transformation during the Libyan campaign, declared that it would have been possible for European countries to conduct the intervention

without the American support, but only by taking more risks, and with extra care in order to avoid collateral damages (Notin, 2012, p. 194). This declaration from an experienced military commander (he served as chief of staff of the French Air Force) who was heading the second NATO command seems odd considering the overwhelming importance of US military assets during the campaign. But it seems that Libya illustrated an important dynamic. It is a statement of fact that European countries cannot sustain an American-style military campaign. Yet, the American way of warfare is intensively technological and relies on overwhelming firepower (Mahnken, 2008). Aerial warfare for the United States is then conceived as achieving strategic effect through a disruption of the enemy's air defence systems but also an attempt to force the entire infrastructure of the state to collapse, thus leading to the enemy's surrender. At the same time, a growing concern for humanitarian law and the importance of avoiding civilian casualties is gradually acknowledged. Technology is then for the United States the way to deliver a massive firepower while minimizing non-combatant casualties in the context of an aerial campaign (Evangelista and Shue, 2014). This way of warfare calls for the suppression of enemy air defence before any other offensive action, and is expensive in terms of ammunition expended during the campaign. As the French defence attaché in Washington explains, when it comes to the establishment of a no-fly-zone, 'the American military tends to present a maximalist option which corresponds to its doctrine' (Notin, 2012, p. 65). The French would certainly agree that Oscar Wilde's motto, 'anything worth doing is worth overdoing', perfectly describes the American way of warfare. Notin (2012) presents the French understanding of the American military doctrine when he writes: 'the Americans did not intend to deviate from their handbook of aerial warfare which can be summarized in one single axiom: "before flying over it, break everything"' (p. 187). Chivvis (2014) himself acknowledges that: 'very few European aircraft [apart from the French Rafale] would really have been able to evade Qaddafi's air defences without risk' (p. 195), which is exactly the point. The intervention might have been planned and executed differently, as Aerial suggested, with extra risks. The American model of aerial warfare, while suiting a specific nation's political/strategic preferences, is not the only possible way to conduct a military campaign. This idea is illustrated by the way French airplanes conducted their strikes. On average, 35 per cent of NATO strikes were deliberate targeting (firing on a pre-identified target), and 65 per cent were dynamic targeting (firing on an opportunity target). For France alone, 83 per cent of the strikes were dynamic targeting, and 17 per cent deliberate targeting. France was thus the most aggressive, but also flexible, nation during the campaign (Notin, 2012, p. 314).

This observation must be put in the larger context of a Western way of warfare that is increasingly expensive, with diminishing returns. Reflecting on the Israel/Hezbollah war of 2006, the French strategist Michel Goya had established that the cost of each member of the group killed by Israel was US\$10 millions, for a very limited strategic result. His prospect for the future of the western way of warfare was bleak:

the Israelis failed to defeat a few thousands fighters entrenched in a 45 by 25 km rectangle. This is a surprising tactical result, which probably announces a new phenomenon. Fifteen years ago, the crushing of the Iraqi army by a US-led coalition was the surprise. The Gulf War was the beginning of an era of limited wars dominated by western high technology. The Israeli failure in Lebanon probably announces the end of that era. (Goya, 2007, p. 191)

From this perspective, the outcome of the Libyan campaign is not particularly impressive. The most integrated and powerful alliance in the world, with the help of several partners, needed 7 months to defeat a military force of 20 000 to 30 000, which is about 1 per cent of the military power of the Warsaw Pact, the threat that originally motivated NATO's creation. Although Chivvis (2014) might argue 'it was an intervention on the cheap' (p. 177), with a total cost of \$1.1 billions, the military efficiency of the intervention must be questioned, in particular against an enemy which made several strategic mistakes, such as underestimating the risk of an intervention against him, being unable to use diplomacy in order to gain time, continuously underestimating NATO's ISTAR capabilities or failing to implement a full range of asymmetric options (Sloggett, 2012, pp. 157–159). Contemporary warfare is marked by the emergence of hybrid warfare, which is the adoption by 'techno-guerrillas' of a combination of asymmetric tactics and selective high-tech capabilities. As Henrotin (2014) explains, it is 'the worst of both worlds', a form of guerrilla on steroids. Western militaries have thus to take into account risks at the high-end of the spectrum (such as anti-aircraft missiles) while firing expensive missiles at cheap Toyota land cruiser vehicles (the so-called 'technical'). Sloggett (2012) correctly writes:

the issue of the rate of the Brimstone however raises an interesting question. Despite its obvious success in the campaign, is it the most effective way to deal with the range of targets that now routinely present themselves on contemporary battlefields? [...] At a reported £35 000 to £45 000 per missile to destroy a 'technical' it could be argued that a cheaper form of weapon system is required in the future. (p. 111)

Fundamentally, Libya further illustrates that wars are won on the ground. It was the rebels who overcame their initial lack of military training and eventually managed to exploit a battlefield that had been shaped by NATO's airpower. In short, success was possible because NATO countries were willing and able to conduct an attritional aerial campaign that gave enough time to the rebels (Borghard and Pischedda, 2012). The three books under review acknowledge that the breakthrough occurred at the right time. Had the campaign lasted longer, the coalitions' cohesion would have been compromised. This intervention was also possible because of the permissive environment (no serious aerial threat) and the relative lack of capabilities of the Libyan army. The use of proxies to conduct the fight on the ground, however, does not come without problems. The more obvious are the difficulties to coordinate the actions on the ground with aerial support in the absence of workable chains of command or communication systems. Notin (2012) gives examples of several cases of miscommunications between the rebels and NATO, the former signalling targets that were not destroyed (p. 339). But other political problems can also emerge: supporting local forces makes the supporter accountable for what such forces accomplish on the ground. NATO's reputation would have badly suffered had the rebels committed obvious war crimes, for example. In short, the Libyan intervention combined a political consensus to continue the campaign long enough to achieve the breakthrough, no misbehaviour from the proxy forces and a strategically inept enemy, and can thus hardly serve as a template for future interventions.

What are the alternatives to the imitation of the US way of warfare if it is becoming too expensive for European countries, and if one wants to avoid the strategic blunders of Iraq and Afghanistan? In addition to the 'Libyan model', Ucko and Egnell suggest two types of interventions: the indirect approach and the contingency operation (Ucko and Egnell, 2014). The indirect approach, which consists of the training and mentoring of local forces, might look appealing but advising local forces is inherently difficult and any action can only be envisioned in the long run. The difficulties of training the Afghan National Army or the Iraqi army only testify to the limitations of this approach. The second option, the 'contingency operation', consists of a short and violent intervention in support of an existing peacekeeping mission or in preparation of the transition towards an action by regional organizations. Egnell and Ucko give the example of the British intervention in Sierra Leone, but the French intervention in Mali is another illustration of this type of intervention. Such actions seem to be primarily national in their conduct in order to be effective, which forces to re-conceptualize the post Cold War paradigm of 'the more is the merrier' in the creation of international coalitions. In fact, it might be better to let a country 'do it its way', and eventually help by providing

logistical support, as was the case in Mali. Although the conduct of the war might be different from American procedures and doctrine, it can still be efficient, as a RAND study acknowledges (Shurkin, 2014).

Overall, the Libyan campaign illustrates the limitations of the western model of highly technological/low-risk warfare preferred by the United States. The current intervention against the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq seems to be a combination of two of the three models mentioned by Ucko and Egnell: the Libyan model (airstrikes in support of local ground troops) and the indirect approach (training of the Iraqi armed forces). The Libyan campaign can thus serve as a warning, by reminding American policymakers that this operation will take time to achieve tangible effects, is likely to be expensive or at least inefficient in terms of the ratio price of the ammunition/value of the target, and that their European allies will only be able to furnish a limited contribution.

NATO and Liberal Interventionism After Libya

The consequences of the Libyan intervention for NATO could be important. Chivvis (2014) identifies an important lesson: 'even though Germany and others objected to the operation, they did not block it. That flexibility should help keep the alliance relevant' (p. 192).

The observation that the alliance is flexible is important. After all, the United States had lamented its rigidity during the intervention in Kosovo. This flexibility is the result of the long intervention in Afghanistan, which forced NATO to invent new ways to integrate partners in its decision-making process, but also accommodate cases of partners being more committed to the ISAF mission in Afghanistan than allies. These new decision-making procedures were codified by rewriting the 'Political-Military Framework' in 2011, a guidebook detailing NATO procedures for dealing with crisis situations, which put the partners on an almost equal footing with the allies. The decision-making rules of the alliance also have an effect. In fact, 'NATO decisions are "unanimous" only in the sense that no state is strongly enough opposed to voice opposition. [...] Rather than requiring unanimity, the alliance's decision rules would seem to encourage deal making by powerful and/or passionate members who want to get their way' (Auerswald and Saideman, 2014, p. 35). The Libyan campaign highlights such a dynamic, as the group of 'strikers' (those states willing to conduct strikes against Libya) would meet before each meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) to coordinate their positions, thus presenting a united front which facilitated the decisions. Notin tries to justify the argument put forward by the French diplomacy that NATO was only used for its 'machinery' (the military capabilities necessary to conduct a campaign), that the NAC had almost no political authority and that the real decisions were made by the contact group, which was serving as the

actual political leadership of the intervention. This story only serves to cover the French humiliation of having to accept that NATO took command of the operations after having hoped that a joint franco-british command could be in charge. But, with the United Kingdom and other allies insisting on NATO taking responsibility for the operation, Paris was forced to back down and conveyed the story that the contact group, and not the NAC, had the real political authority. This is non-sense: while the contact group was an *ad hoc* forum to discuss the broad orientations of the intervention, the decision to carry on (or not) with the campaign was always in the NAC's hands.

The most interesting aspect of this discussion lies in the fact that the meetings of the 'strikers' are a quasi-acknowledgement of a hierarchical management of the alliance. Of course, everybody knows that not all allies are equals when it comes to get their way at the NAC. Nevertheless, the way the campaign was managed is strikingly different from the Kosovo campaign 12 years earlier and epitomized a contrast between the 'doers' and the 'watchers' within NATO. This is the new form of the old 'burden-sharing' debate within the alliance: while past debates had to do with investment in defence capabilities, the contemporary debate is about risk-taking. The problem is that the gap between allies willing to conduct high-profile interventions (and accept the financial, human and reputational costs associated with it) and allies willing to stay low could create a two-tier alliance fuelled with resentment. A first solution would be to reward willing nations with high-profile and influential positions within the alliance. After all, it is only justice if the 'doers' could have more opportunities to shape what the alliance is about. These types of adjustments are likely to be painful for some nations who would lose positions in favour of others (for example, it is part of the *cursus honorum* of a German officer to be assigned to NATO, and the loss of flag posts would force the *Bundeswehr* to rethink its officers' career trajectory), but such reforms would probably not be too difficult to implement. A second way to mitigate the growing gap between the doers and the rest would be for nations unwilling to engage in high-profile activities to specialize in the more discrete capabilities required for modern warfare. For example, instead of basing the 'smart defence' on a somehow arbitrary specialization of countries in specific activities (with the risk of such countries not showing up in case of need because of the visibility costs entailed), it could be conceivable to have the 'low-profile' countries specializing in 'low-profile' activities such as cyberwarfare, psychological operations (PSYOPS), ISR or logistics. Such capabilities are critical in contemporary warfare, but less visible than airstrikes. A combination of rewards for 'doers' and a specialization in discrete capabilities for 'low-profile' countries might be the way forward to avoid resentment in the alliance.

Another interesting aspect for NATO emerges from Notin's book: Libya served as a way for France to better understand the decision process within NATO. Notin quotes several policymakers who express their frustration for not having been able to sufficiently shape the conduct of the campaign, due to a relative lack of understanding of the importance of specific positions within the NATO structure. In particular, French officials complain about their lack of influence on the targeting process, due to their relative absence from the Joint Targeting Board but also lament the fact that they had to convince NATO of the opportunity to have the French helicopters deciding themselves which targets to engage, and not waiting for an authorization from the CAOC. As Admiral Rogel (the then Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff for Operations) explains, 'Libya highlighted our lack of knowledge of NATO's functioning. This is normal, the reintegration was too recent' (quoted by Notin, 2012, p. 313). But despite these recriminations, a more interesting aspect lies in the fact that the general feeling among the French officers interviewed by Notin is that NATO worked, and much better than expected. NATO's socializing role, originally studied in the context of the post-Cold War expansion to Eastern European countries (Gheciu, 2005), also seems to have had an effect on the less integrated of the oldest allies: France. It will then be interesting to study in depth how France's policy towards NATO evolved since Libya, and what it will look like in the following years. The classical cliché of a reluctant France opposing the United States and the United Kingdom out of delusional dreams of a long-gone 'grandeur' might well be over.

A last important aspect is mentioned in the three books: the future of liberal interventionism after Libya, in the context of the internationalization of the civil war in Syria and an alleged exhaustion of Western countries leading to a reluctance towards future engagements. All three books are keen to emphasize the specific conditions of the Libyan intervention, in particular the French and British activism, the American willingness to avoid being the most visible political actor and, mostly, the Russian and Chinese abstention at the UN Security Council. In that respect, Libya is likely to remain exceptional, since Russia has since then claimed it was fooled and the UN mandate breached as, in the Russian understanding, it was not supposed to involve any form of regime change. Any future intervention of this kind is unlikely considering the opposition of both Moscow and Beijing, who are so adamant about Libya being an exception that they even blocked a UN Security Council resolution condemning the Syrian dictator Bashar Al-Asad for the massacre of the Syrian population. Considering Moscow's renewed adversarial relationship with the West and the Chinese ambitions in world politics, the veto right could then be once again a factor of blockade at the UNSC akin to the Cold War

period, far from the hopes of a 'New World Order' that followed the fall of the Berlin wall. This is why the French proposal to suspend the veto right in case of humanitarian crisis is important. Although the proposal has no chance of being accepted (as it requires the Chinese and Russian agreements), the aim is to raise the political cost of using the veto, thus preventing the UNSC from losing all relevance as a forum for the management of international crises.

The evolution of the Libyan political situation is also problematic, some even calling for a new intervention before the total collapse of the country. But the international intervention against Qaddafi can hardly be blamed for this outcome. The problem lies in the absence of any serious post-war planning for the stabilization of the country, especially in a country where no formal institutions were in place. Chivvis is the only author mentioning this aspect, explaining that post-war planning was always made under the assumption that the US footprint would be low, and that the sudden fall of Tripoli accelerated the tempo of the intervention, thus forcing the US government to rush into a minimal support for post-war Libya. Even if the dynamics described by Chivvis are true, they should not excuse the absence of serious peacekeeping effort after the fall of Qaddafi. It is surprising that the United Kingdom or France did not even try to get the Arab League or the African Union to deploy an assistance mission to Libya, without even mentioning the total absence of the European Union on a topic in which the EU has developed some expertise through the various EUFOR missions. The lack of post-war planning and meaningful post-war assistance to Libya is a clear example of how winning the war does not lead to peace, as if the lessons from the Balkans had to be re-learned all over again. In fact, this might be the bad news: although post-war peace-building forces policy-makers to

solve difficult dilemmas (Paris and Sisk, 2009), it might well be an inescapable phase if they want the benefits of the initial military action not to be lost (Berdal, 2009). All peace-building efforts do not have to be like the attempts to rebuild Iraq in 2003, where the United States seem to have made all the conceivable mistakes one after another, or like Afghanistan, where the reconstruction attempt occurred in the midst of a growing insurgency due to the lack of interest in the country between 2001 and 2006. Unfortunately, Libya might end up being a sharp reminder of the necessary continuum between war-making and peace-building.

Conclusion

As Chivvis explains, 'the Libya intervention was a moderate success given what was achieved, how much it cost, and how challenging the operation was' (Chivvis, 2014, p. 187). The three books reviewed here offer different perspectives on the intervention, but common themes emerge, such as the capability gap between European countries and the United States, or the observation of a flexible NATO. They also remind the reader that the Libya intervention was, indeed, a success, and that the current tragic situation has more to do with the absence of planning for the post-war situation than with the intervention itself. The impulse to 'do something' in order to stop the massacres is not enough if it is not accompanied with serious state-building efforts, and betting on a peaceful transition to a legitimate government in a country where no state structure previously existed was ambitious, at best. Ultimately, the most important yet unspectacular lesson of the Libyan war is that the utility of military power is real, but also has limits. A lesson we never seem to learn.

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