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We cannot afford to let Gaddafi win

By Marko Attila Hoare, 13th March 2011

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

1. Libya lies in the European hinterland, and either a victory for Gaddafi or a permanent stalemate between him and the rebels would create serious dangers of terrorism, piracy and instability against which Europe would not be able to insulate itself.

2. US President Obama's vacillation over Libya is hauntingly reminiscent of his predecessor Bill Clinton's vacillation over Bosnia in the first half of the 1990s, that led directly to the war with Slobodan Milosevic's Serbian regime over Kosovo in 1999; as then, so now, a

failure to act will merely postpone our showdown with the tyrant.

3. Prime Minister Cameron should not be deterred by US and EU irresolution, but should act decisively with President Sarkozy and France to push for a no-fly zone over Libya, arm the Libyan rebels, recognise their National Council and prepare to carry out air-strikes to prevent their defeat by Gaddafi.

4. Britain and France should attempt to enlist Egyptian support in their action against Gaddafi, as the US successfully enlisted it against Saddam Hussein in Kuwait in 1991.

Libya was, in a sense, the place where the disasters that befell Europe in the twentieth century began. In 1911, Italy invaded what is today Libya, which was then part of the crumbling Ottoman Empire. The heavy blow this dealt to the latter encouraged the Balkan states of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro themselves to fall upon its remaining possessions in Europe. Their victory in turn weakened the position of Germany and Austria-Hungary in the Balkans, prompting these powers to assert themselves aggressively in the next Balkan crisis, occasioned by the assassination of Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo in 1914. The outcome is known to all. The Libyan road to World War I highlights the fact that Libya is part of the European hinterland, and Europe cannot insulate itself from events taking place there.

The allied invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 was, of course, prompted by our desire to strike against al-Qaeda's terrorist training-camps. That such camps were present in Afghanistan was the product of conditions arising from the state's collapse and unresolved civil war. We should be very concerned at what the consequences for Europe would be if a similar state collapse and civil war were to be perpetuated indefinitely in Libya – it would be an Afghanistan on our doorstep. An imploded Libya could be a source of terrorism and piracy, as well as of mass immigration into Europe of the kind that sends right-wing politicians apoplectic.

Still more dangerous than a military stalemate between Gaddafi and the rebels would be a victory for the dictator. Such a victory could not be permanent or stable. The regime would reimpose its rule bloodily, prompting elements of the crushed opposition to veer off desperately along radical paths. The civil war would continue to simmer. But most dangerous for us would be what an unstably victorious Gaddafi might be capable of. Already now rejected and ostracised by the West and the Arab world, he would be another post-Kuwait Saddam Hussein, permanently in a state of hostility with his neighbours and the wider world. And Gaddafi, be it remembered, was never simply a pedestrian dictator of the Mubarak sort, but the 'Mad Dog of the Middle East', in Ronald Reagan's memorable phrase. Most of us remember his support for the IRA and extremist Palestinian factions, and the Lockerbie bombing. Some may also remember his promotion of war and genocide in Africa, as he pursued his megalomaniacal schemes of

expansion; his attempt to annex neighbouring Chad; his promotion of Arab supremacist, anti-black racism and training of Arab militias to murder black Africans. Gaddafi was one of the **architects** of the **janjaweed** and the Darfur genocide. We can only guess at what he might attempt if he emerges triumphant from the current Libyan conflict.

Alone among the leaders of the major Western powers, David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy have shown some moral backbone in this crisis, and an awareness of what is at stake strategically. As **John McCain** has said, 'I appreciate the leadership that Prime Minister Cameron has shown and also President Sarkozy, but unfortunately here in the United States, it seems we are sounding an uncertain trumpet.' Obama has not proven himself a resolute leader in the Libyan crisis so far, and appears to be replicating all the small-mindedness and vacillation of his Democratic predecessor Bill Clinton over Bosnia in the 1990s. Unbelievably, Obama Administration officials are already **arguing** that the UN arms embargo on Libya applies not only to the Gaddafi regime, but also to the rebels. In which case, as in Bosnia, the arms embargo is helping the butchers. US Defence Secretary Robert Gates's claim, that imposition of a no-fly zone would require prior air-strikes against Gaddafi's air-defence system, likewise smacks of an insincere technical excuse for inaction. A no-fly zone was relatively successfully **enforced** in Bosnia without any such air-strikes.

Over Bosnia, Clinton's unwillingness to defeat Milosevic led

directly to the war with him over Kosovo in 1999. Obama's hands-off approach to Libya will merely postpone our inevitable showdown with Gaddafi. In Kosovo, it was Tony Blair who provided the essential backbone to the still-wobbly Clinton and clumsy NATO, and more than anyone else ensured that the war would be fought to a successful conclusion. Cameron has already shown himself a leader with vision, and must not allow himself to be deflected by US and EU irresolution from the path that he has correctly laid out. This trial will prove the efficacy or otherwise of his military entente with France, so there is a lot riding on this crisis for the prime minister's vision of British strategy.

Britain and France should be prepared to act alone to support the Libyan freedom-fighters, if our allies lack the resolve to act with us. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's **stated belief** that only the UN should be able to authorise a no-fly zone is tantamount to a green light to Gaddafi to crush the rebellion. It is clearly nonsensical to make any military action in support of our vital interests contingent upon permission from Russia and China. Had we waited for UN Security Council authorisation in 1999, Milosevic would have won in Kosovo, over one and a half million ethnic Albanians would have been driven from their homes, and we should have had a Palestinian problem in the heart of Europe alongside a triumphant genocidal dictatorship.

The imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya could scarcely be portrayed as Bush-style unilateralism or old-style imperialism, given that the Arab League itself has **endorsed** the idea. Britain

and France should join the Arab League in continuing to push hard for this, while taking what immediate steps we can to assist the rebels. This should include providing them with arms – again, since the rebels themselves have **called for** arms, this cannot credibly be portrayed as unilateralism or imperialism. Britain should also follow France's lead and recognise the National Council in Benghazi as the legitimate government of Libya, while withdrawing recognition from Gaddafi's regime. We should prepare to employ air-strikes to defeat further advances by Gaddafi's forces toward Benghazi. And we should attempt to involve Egypt in our military actions – a country that has both a vital interest in seeing Gaddafi defeated, and a powerful military capable of contributing to this goal. Egypt, be it remembered, made a significant contribution to the defeat of Saddam Hussein in Kuwait in 1991.

The urgency of the situation in Libya is one that calls for immediate, decisive leadership. David Cameron must rise to the challenge.

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