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**THESIS**

**NATO'S INTERVENTION IN LIBYA: THE POLITICAL  
REASONING BEHIND NATO'S INTERVENTION**

by

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March 2021

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**NATO'S INTERVENTION IN LIBYA: THE POLITICAL REASONING BEHIND  
NATO'S INTERVENTION**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the political reasoning behind the United States, the United Kingdom, and France's decisions to get involved in an intervention in Libya and their ultimate desire to ask the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to get involved. The political reasoning for the three countries' decisions varied from wanting to obtain political capital in an election year to wanting to avoid a humanitarian crisis, especially in a location so close to Europe's southern border. NATO had its own political reasoning for its involvement, which included the desire to prevent the alliance from fracturing in a time of defense cuts and to prevent coalitions from forming that could undermine the long-term health of the alliance.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| EUCOM  | European Command                           |
| NSS    | National Security Strategy                 |
| NATO   | North Atlantic Treaty Organization         |
| OUP    | Operation Unified Protector                |
| PGM    | Precision Guided Munition                  |
| SACEUR | Supreme Allied Commander, Europe           |
| UN     | United Nations                             |
| UNSCR  | United Nations Security Council Resolution |
| U.S.   | United States                              |
| UK     | United Kingdom                             |

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The 2011 intervention against Libya by NATO is the most recent operation that the alliance has conducted where the majority of the alliance came together to conduct offensive operations against an adversary.<sup>1</sup> The operation was deemed a military success as the alliance was able to bring a formidable force to bear and fulfill the mandate of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1973, which was to protect the citizens of Libya from suffering a humanitarian crisis at the hands of Libya's leader, Muammar al-Qaddafi.<sup>2</sup> In the leadup to the intervention, members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) held different opinions regarding whether their respective countries should get involved. This thesis will answer the question of what were the political reasons for France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and ultimately NATO to get involved in Libya?

### A. THE LIBYA CRISIS AND A CALL FOR ACTION

In February 2011, news of a rebellion against the Libyan government started circulating. The United States and its European allies learned that the Libyan regime had been conducting atrocities against those involved in the revolt.<sup>3</sup> The rebellion, which drew inspiration from similar uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt amid the so-called Arab Spring, was initially expected to remain a peaceful protest against the Qaddafi regime.<sup>4</sup> However, Qaddafi did not follow the lead of his counterparts in Tunisia and Egypt (who decided to step down) and instead responded with force against the rebellion.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "‘We Answered the Call’ – the End of Operation Unified Protector," NATO, November 7, 2011, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_80435.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_80435.htm)

<sup>2</sup> Resolution 1973, United Nations Security Council, 2011.  
[https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20\(2011\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20(2011))

<sup>3</sup> Derek Chollet and Ben Fishman, "Who Lost Libya?" *Foreign Affairs* 94, no. 3 (Mau/June 2015): 254, <http://libproxy.nps.edu/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1674235074?accountid=12702>

<sup>4</sup> Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 2 (March/April 2012): 2.

<sup>5</sup> Daalder and Stavridis, 2.

On March 19, 2011, upon obtaining authorization from the United Nations (UN), a coalition comprising the United States, France, Great Britain, and nine other nations (including seven NATO members) began offensive operations against the Qaddafi regime.<sup>6</sup> After destroying Qaddafi's air defense system and stopping his forces from attacking Benghazi and Misrata (which gave the rebels a safe haven to operate from), the coalition began to plan for the next phase of the operation.<sup>7</sup> With the other participating NATO members beginning to take the majority of the strike missions, the U.S. elected to ask NATO to take over the command and control role (with U.S. military leadership involved via their appointments to NATO) while U.S. forces largely assumed a supporting role in the conflict.<sup>8</sup>

The decision to have NATO eventually assume command and control had been made shortly after the passing of UNSCR 1973. When NATO assumed these roles, the United States could remain involved in the operation and hold influence, while not having to commit strike assets to military operations.<sup>9</sup> The desire to have NATO take control was shared by other NATO members, specifically Great Britain.<sup>10</sup> However, this desire was not shared by all NATO members<sup>11</sup> France, which had rejoined the integrated military structure of the alliance in 2008 after a 42-year absence, initially wanted to have a consortium of willing countries, rather than NATO, conduct the operations against al-Qaddafi.<sup>12</sup> As Mueller et al. observe in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, France wanted the consortium to become, "a guiding political body for military operations, circumventing the alliance altogether. At the same time, they sought to minimize the influence of countries such as Turkey that were reticent about the

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<sup>6</sup> Karl P. Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, RR 676 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2015), 20-23.

<sup>7</sup> Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Daalder and Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya," 3.

<sup>9</sup> Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Mueller et al., 25.

<sup>11</sup> Mueller et al., 25.

<sup>12</sup> Mueller et al., 25.



operation.”<sup>13</sup> In addition, such other countries as Germany and Poland had reservations about the operations and asked not to participate militarily.<sup>14</sup> Germany’s decision to abstain stemmed largely from its concern about getting involved in another conflict due to its heavy presence in Afghanistan at the time, and from the increasingly frustrated domestic opinion of its military conducting offensive operations overseas .<sup>15</sup> In the end, the NATO operation that ensued, Operation Unified Protector (OUP), was led by NATO Headquarters, with the United Kingdom and France taking over most of the offensive operations once the U.S. shifted to a supporting role.

This situation paved the way for a new political aspect to operations that had not previously occurred, namely an operation being led by European nations with European equipment (a longtime goal of the European member and longtime desire of the United States).<sup>16</sup> The shift toward the European member’s taking a lead operationally was a new dynamic to NATO operations, while still operating under NATO’s established chain of command.

While NATO ultimately ended up assuming command and control of the intervention in Libya, the sequence of events leading up to its assumption of this role begins with the question: What was the political reasoning that compelled the United States, the United Kingdom, and France to intervene in Libya and ultimately leverage the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to also get involved in a conflict with Libya in 2011, even though the campaign was launched without full U.S. commitment and proceeded without the participation of several major European NATO partners?

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<sup>13</sup> Mueller et al., 25.

<sup>14</sup> Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 25-29.

<sup>15</sup> Kent Oglesby, “Germany, NATO’s Out-of-Area Operations, and the CSDP: The German Defense Policy Dilemma,” (master’s thesis, University of Washington, 2014), 33-34.  
[https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/26779/Oglesby\\_washington\\_02500\\_13224.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/26779/Oglesby_washington_02500_13224.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>16</sup> Uwe Hartmann, personal communication, March 7, 2021.

## B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The shift by the European NATO members toward more autonomy from the United States begins with the age-old question within NATO of how does burden sharing and burden shifting impact the alliance. This literature review seeks to provide an understanding of the role that burden sharing and burden shifting has on the politics within NATO and what has occurred in years since the conclusion of operations in Libya. Burden sharing is the principle of having each member of the alliance provide the necessary money and military equipment to contribute to the overall military strength of the alliance.<sup>17</sup> Burden shifting is the process of persuading another member of the alliance to step up to fill deficiencies, so the original country does not have to.<sup>18</sup> This literature review will further discuss burden sharing and burden shifting while also discussing how it works and how it maintains the alliance. The writings of the following authors will be used to discuss these topics: Walther Thies, Anke Richter and Natalie Webb, Donald Abenheim and Marc-Andre Walther, and Simon Lunn and Nicholas William.

The topics of burden sharing and burden shifting go back to the earliest days of NATO. Thies writes that the issue began after World War II, when countries (many of which were early NATO members) began to invest more money in domestic programs such as education and healthcare, vice the military.<sup>19</sup> The rise of additional cost burdens caused the alliance to look into redistributing the financial costs among all members of the alliance, which would assist in keeping costs down while still providing collective defense. This was important due to fiscal constraints brought on by the rise of welfare programs during the latter stages of the Cold War, and even further cuts afterwards, which caused

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<sup>17</sup> Attila Mesterhazy, "Burden Sharing: New Commitments in a New Era," *NATO Parliamentary Assembly*, November 17, 2018, <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=/sites/default/files/2018-12/2018%20-%20BURDEN%20SHARING%20NEW%20COMMITMENTS%20IN%20A%20NEW%20ERA%20-%20MESTERHAZY%20REPORT%20-%20170%20DSC%2018%20E%20rev1%20fin.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Walter J. Thies, *Friendly Rivals: Bargaining and Burden-Shifting in NATO* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3.

<sup>19</sup> Thies, 3.

modern welfare states to be hard pressed to fund their militaries as well as their other social projects.<sup>20</sup>

The consensus among the authors is in favor of burden sharing. Thies states that the goal of burden sharing was an attempt to, “close the gap between demands and resources by eliminating duplication and overlap, thereby allowing efficiencies and economies of scale that would make possible a robust collective effort at a manageable cost.”<sup>21</sup> Abenheim and Walther view on burden sharing is that it is, “the tasks of mutual aid and self-help for collective defense.”<sup>22</sup> Abenheim and Walther note that historically any discussions on burden sharing began with a, “fundamental consensus about alliance cohesion and the trans-Atlantic security.”<sup>23</sup> These feelings are echoed in Richter and Webb’s 2012 paper, which uses NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen’s proposal for Smart Defense as a new approach toward burden sharing in an era with enhanced fiscal constraints.<sup>24</sup> Smart Defense, according to the authors, “seeks to address the issue of burden sharing in a climate of economic downturn by encouraging closer alignment and even interdependencies of defense spending and acquisition among member nations.”<sup>25</sup> They continue by claiming that this will help address the issues of “alignment of member nations forces, the interoperability of NATO forces, and the notion of burden sharing.”<sup>26</sup>

While there are a lot of positives to burden sharing, there are negative aspects to it due to a perception of inequality among contributors. While the concept of burden sharing

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<sup>20</sup> Thies, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Thies, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Rachal Epstein, Donald Abenheim, and Marc-Andre Walther, “Burden-Sharing Within NATO: Facts from Germany for the Current Debate,” *Political Violence at a Glance*, August 7, 2018, 1. <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/60215>.

<sup>23</sup> Epstein et al. “Burden-Sharing Within NATO: Facts from Germany for the Current Debate,” 2.

<sup>24</sup> Anke Richter and Natalie J. Webb, “Can Smart Defense Work? A Suggested Approach to Increasing Risk- and Burden-Sharing Within NATO,” Naval Postgraduate School, 2012. <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/37010>

<sup>25</sup> Richter and Webb, “Can Smart Defense Work? A Suggested Approach to Increasing Risk- and Burden-Sharing Within NATO.”

<sup>26</sup> Richter and Webb, “Can Smart Defense Work?”

is noble and in ways beneficial for all in fiscal terms, Lunn and Williams note that the alliance has never been able to agree on, “a definition of what constitutes a national ‘fair’ share by identifying specific national factors—economic, historic, other non-NATO contributions to stability—which could influence NATO members’ ability to contribute to the narrowly defined NATO target.”<sup>27</sup> They argue that too often the measure of burden sharing has strictly been tied to what each nation contributes financially to NATO instead of taking into account the full means that nations contribute.<sup>28</sup> They note that anything involved with spending should be aimed at identifying what the alliance needs in order to have an effective collective defense and note that blindly throwing money at the problem would result in capability shortfalls due to the money not being spent where it is needed.<sup>29</sup> Richter and Webb discuss the role of burden sharing and its impact on the smaller member states within NATO. They state that these members could be hesitant to contribute their fair share due to their reservations in spending large amounts of money, when the larger states are more financially equipped to carry the burden (leading to burden shifting).<sup>30</sup>

A good example of the burden-sharing dilemma is given by Abenheim and Walther, who compare how Germany and France contribute to the alliance. Germany, which is working to increase its military spending, has historically been one of the most dependable members in fulfilling the country’s burden-sharing role. While the authors point out that the German military has been financially neglected by the German government since the end of the Cold War, Germany has continued to meet all obligations while taking on new roles such as training and maintaining NATO’s first Very High Readiness Joint Task Force.<sup>31</sup> On the flip side of the coin is France, which has a higher defense budget but contributes less to NATO.<sup>32</sup> The authors give the example of the French Force de Frappe,

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<sup>27</sup> Simon Lunn and Nicholas Williams., “NATO Defence Spending: The Irrationality of 2%,” *European Leadership Network*, June 2017, 3.

<sup>28</sup> Lunn and Williams, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Lunn and Williams, 4.

<sup>30</sup> Richter and Webb, “Can Smart Defense Work? A Suggested Approach to Increasing Risk- and Burden-Sharing Within NATO.”

<sup>31</sup> Epstein et al. “Burden-Sharing Within NATO: Facts from Germany for the Current Debate,” 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Epstein et al., 3.

and state that it is “a purely national asset that will never be included into NATO’s strategic assets.”<sup>33</sup> In addition, France’s contribution to NATO’s Standing Maritime Group has been largely inconsistent.<sup>34</sup> These two cases give an example of a country that is serious in its contribution to the burden sharing role, while the other’s actions fall more in line with conducting burden shifting.

The topic of burden shifting and its benefits are heavily discussed in Thies’ piece. He observes that the financial concerns brought on by the rise of the welfare state has led to heavy burden shifting among the alliance as members look to their fellow members to raise or at least maintain their defense budgets so others could reallocate funds in order to pay for other programs.<sup>35</sup> Thies writes that burden shifting is appealing to the alliance members due to the integration that occurs within the NATO construct. He notes that, “integration increased the extent to which the forces of one NATO member could substitute for those of the others. The greater the degree of substitutability, the greater the temptation to engage in burden shifting.”<sup>36</sup> When discussing burden sharing versus burden shifting, Lunn and Williams note the recent trend of European members that are increasing their military funding, thus giving more for burden sharing. This has in turn allowed for the United States to shift toward burden shifting by asking the European members to continue their spending increases so the United States will not have to contribute as much to the alliance.<sup>37</sup>

The main issue with burden shifting is the underlying political issues that it can cause. As Lunn and Williams note, most members of the alliance build their militaries in a manner that fits into the larger NATO construct as part of the collective defense.<sup>38</sup> Such countries are more willing to shift the burden to the larger members, whose militaries are built to deal with global issues beyond the NATO mission. If a country is continuously

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<sup>33</sup> Epstein et al., 3.

<sup>34</sup> Epstein et al., 3.

<sup>35</sup> Thies, *Friendly Rivals: Bargaining and Burden-Shifting in NATO*, 4.

<sup>36</sup> Thies, 14.

<sup>37</sup> Lunn and Williams, “NATO Defence Spending: The Irrationality of 2%,” 8.

<sup>38</sup> Lunn and Williams, 4.

seen to be shirking its responsibilities with the expectation of someone else picking up the slack, the result could undermine the political cohesion within the alliance. When discussing the situation of members not fulfilling their contribution role, Thies notes that it could, “sow discord throughout the alliance, thereby spreading doubts about its value.”<sup>39</sup> Abenheim and Walter write about the consequences of the alliance fracturing, stating that Europe would fall back into its old rivalries, which could cause a security crisis that would threaten not only Europe, but the United States as well.<sup>40</sup>

Each of the writings used in this literature review agree that the issues of burden sharing and burden shifting goes back to the earliest days of the alliance and will continue to be topic within the alliance going forward. As noted above, burden sharing is valuable as it helps maintain the alliance through the formation of a strong joint force, allowing for a collective defense without each individual member having to form a single large force on their own. Burden shifting, while useful in allowing members of the alliance the ability to shift responsibilities around, can carry major political risks. These risks could cause rifts among the alliance that could be used to undermine its cohesion, causing potentially further harm.

In terms of how burden sharing played into OUP, there were reservations whether the European members would be able to truly take the operational lead prior to the operation commencing. During discussion within the Obama Administration regarding whether the United States should participate in an intervention, Barack Obama observed, “despite the rhetoric from Sarkozy (France’s president) and Cameron (the United Kingdom’s prime minister), the U.S. military would end up having to carry most of the load for any operation in Libya.”<sup>41</sup> In order to prevent this from occurring, Obama decided to use burden sharing to his advantage by having U.S. assets conduct the earliest missions into Libya and to utilize the U.S.’ unique capabilities to defeat Libyan air defenses which allowed the European nations air superiority and the eventual handoff of operational

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<sup>39</sup> Thies, *Friendly Rivals: Bargaining and Burden-Shifting in NATO*, 14.

<sup>40</sup> Epstein et al. “Burden-Sharing Within NATO: Facts from Germany for the Current Debate,” 4.

<sup>41</sup> Barack Obama, “On the High Wire,” in *A Promised Land*, (New York: Crown, 2020), 657.

control to the European members.<sup>42</sup> While this maneuver by Obama was a perfect example of burden sharing at work, other developments during the course of OUP showed the limitations of burden sharing due to the lack of funding European countries had given their respective militaries, resulting in shortages of weapons and logistics.<sup>43</sup>

### C. REASONING FOR OPERATION UNIFIED PROTECTOR

In the leadup to Operation Unified Protector, the one unifying theme across the NATO alliance was to prevent reprisals against Libyan civilians by the Qaddafi regime.<sup>44</sup> Further reasoning for intervening in Libya was dependent on the respective countries that ultimately participated in the operation. In terms of NATO holistically, the desire to act stemmed from the inaction of the alliance to intervene in affairs on the African continent during the 1990s. The genocide that occurred in Rwanda in 1994 occurred during a time when NATO was largely unemployed due to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The failure by the international community to intervene left a lasting impression on the alliance, causing it to get involved in similar genocides that would later occur in Bosnia and Kosovo. These conflicts took place in NATO's realm of Europe, allowing the alliance more flexibility in getting involved. These conflicts paved the way for NATO's eventual involvement in the War on Terrorism, marking the first occasion that NATO operated outside of Europe.<sup>45</sup>

In terms of why certain members of NATO decided to intervene in Libya, it is important to look at what has occurred in the years since the end of OUP. The mass migration that has occurred throughout Europe and the Mediterranean basin in the wake of the turmoil in Syria and throughout Africa could be a fear that had been realized. When the revolution began in Libya on February 16, 2011, Qaddafi's forces responded by killing two

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<sup>42</sup> Obama, "on the High Wire," 569.

<sup>43</sup> Allin and Jones, "As Good as it Gets?" *Survival*, 53, no. 3 (June-July 2011): 209, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2011.586219>

<sup>44</sup> Gareth Chappell, "Operation Unified Protector: No 'Swan Song' for NATO," *The Polish Quarterly of International Affairs* no. 2 (2011): 65.

<sup>45</sup> James Sperling and Mark Webber, "NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul," *International Affairs* no 3. (2009), 501.

hundred thirty people on February 21, showcasing to the world the ruthlessness of the Libyan regime.<sup>46</sup> With Libya in turmoil, the fear of a mass exodus across the Mediterranean and into the Southern European countries may have been a concern. The concern over an immigration crisis is supported by the fact that the countries in Southern Europe (France, Spain, Italy, and Greece) that would be subjected to a mass migration from Libya, all participated in OUP in some form.<sup>47</sup>

#### **D. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This thesis will use three components to help in determining why NATO came to a consensus on the decision to participate in a conflict in Libya:

1. The thesis will evaluate the domestic political landscape that France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany were facing in the timeframe leading up to OUP to determine how their political landscapes impacted their actions.
2. It will examine NATO's political reasoning (outside of the individual member's reasoning) for wanting to participate in an intervention against Libya. Topics will include the desire to stop the fragmentation of NATO prior to Libya, background information regarding NATO's assumption of the command-and-control lead, and identification of the pros and cons given by scholars regarding the alliance's decision to intervene in Libya.
3. It will discuss how burden sharing affected the operations and will discuss how the lessons learned from the operation can be applied in order for a new transatlantic security relationship to be formed with the European members at the helm.

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<sup>46</sup> Richard A.C. Alton and Jason Reed Struble, "The Constitutionality and Advancement of International Humanitarian Ideals in Libya by NATO and United States' Operations Odyssey Dawn and Unified Protector," *Tulane Journal of International and Comparative Law* 23, no.1 (Winter 2014): 7.

<sup>47</sup> David Yost, *NATO, the UN, & Other International Organizations in Libya*, 26.



## **E. THESIS OVERVIEW**

This thesis is composed of three additional chapters. Chapter II will provide a background to the conflict and will discuss the various political reasons that the major NATO players (France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany) had regarding their role in the operation and discuss the political maneuvering that occurred domestically among these members and how politics drove their actions regarding their respective contributions.

Chapter III will include an examination of NATO's desire to stop the fragmentation of the alliance's members that was occurring in the leadup to Libya and the humanitarian reasons for getting involved in a conflict in Libya. The chapter will discuss the Kosovo Campaign of 1999, which was conducted along similar humanitarian lines to Operation Unified Protector and was mostly conducted through the use of combat aircraft. Finally, Chapter III will review the pros and cons of NATO's involvement in Libya.

Chapter IV will offer lessons learned from the campaign and the lasting impact that NATO's involvement has had on the alliance and the world immediately following the campaign. This chapter will be the final chapter of this thesis, offering final thoughts on NATO's involvement in Operation Unified Protector and will provide recommendations on how the alliance can operate in future operations where the European members may have to take the operational lead in a coordinated effort against an adversary.

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## **II. THE ROAD FROM ARAB SPRING TO OPERATION UNIFIED PROTECTOR**

The events that transpired in Northern Africa in the early months of 2011 precipitated a major change in world affairs. The Arab Spring in Tunisia and Egypt ignited insurrection in neighboring Libya, where Muammar al-Qaddafi had ruled with an iron fist since 1969.<sup>48</sup> The resulting revolution brought the downfall of the Qaddafi regime partly due to the intervention of NATO forces, whose members had dealt with Qaddafi's transgressions throughout his time as the leader of Libya.<sup>49</sup> NATO's decision to act against was difficult for many of the member states. France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Germany faced a variety of political arguments as they decided whether they would participate in an intervention in Libya. Ultimately, United Nations Security Resolution 1973 allowed for the establishment and enforcement of a no-fly zone and the use of all means necessary to protect civilians from attacks by Qaddafi's forces.<sup>50</sup> Even so, not every NATO member joined this mission – for reasons that were important then and remain important today. This chapter will discuss the road to intervention from the beginning of the Arab Spring, through the political maneuvering of the key four NATO players, to the ultimate assumption of operations by NATO in March 2011.

### **A. LIBYA'S COMPLICATED ROLE IN THE WORLD**

Muammar al-Qaddafi was a unique world leader with a complicated relationship with Western nations. During the 1980s, Qaddafi's regime was linked to international terrorism, which earned him the titles of “the mad dog of the Middle East” from President Ronald Reagan and “the crazy Libyan” from Egypt's President Anwar el-Sadat.<sup>51</sup> His role in financing and arming extremist elements assisted in devastating terrorist attacks in

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<sup>48</sup> Neil MacFarquhar, “An Erratic Leader, Brutal and Defiant to the End,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/world/africa/qaddafi-killed-as-hometown-falls-to-libyan-rebels.html>

<sup>49</sup> MacFarquhar, “An Erratic Leader.”

<sup>50</sup> Resolution 1973, United Nations Security Council, 2011. [https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20\(2011\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1973%20(2011))

<sup>51</sup> MacFarquhar, “An Erratic Leader, Brutal and Defiant to the End.”

Europe, including the bombing of a West Berlin nightclub on April 5, 1986 (killing two U.S. servicemen and injuring 200) and the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland on December 20, 1988 (killing 270 people).<sup>52</sup> These actions led to confrontations with the United States throughout the 1980s, including Operation El Dorado Canyon in 1986, which was a direct response by the United States to the West Berlin nightclub bombing that had killed three people (including one U.S. serviceman) and injured 229 people.<sup>53</sup> Throughout the 1980s, the United States and Libya had several incidents in the Gulf of Sidra (in 1981, 1986, and 1989), resulting in military fires being exchanged between the two countries.<sup>54</sup> However, the 1990s saw a change in Libya and in Qaddafi, who suddenly undertook actions to rebuild his reputation with the West.<sup>55</sup>

This process began in the early 1990s with the regime's suspension of non-conventional weapons programs in the wake of the U.S. led invasion of Iraq in 1991 and continued later in the decade with the handing over of two individuals that were believed to be involved in the Pan Am 103 bombing.<sup>56</sup> The biggest change from Libya came after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda against the United States. Qaddafi not only condemned the attacks but also cooperated with the United States by offering intelligence on Al-Qaeda.<sup>57</sup> These actions helped persuade the United States and Great Britain to re-establish diplomatic relationships with Libya. The re-establishment of diplomatic ties allowed Libya to have a larger role in the world, to include being invited to international conferences and the re-establishment of additional diplomatic ties.<sup>58</sup> However, the geopolitical situation in Libya and its neighboring countries was becoming

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<sup>52</sup> MacFarquhar, "An Erratic Leader, Brutal and Defiant to the End."

<sup>53</sup> Andrew Glass, "U.S. Planes Bomb Libya, April 15, 1986," *Politico*, April 15, 2019, <https://www.politico.com/story/2019/04/15/reagan-bomb-libya-april-15-1986-1272788>

<sup>54</sup> "Timeline: Libya – US Relations," *Al Jazeera*, September 4, 2008, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2008/9/4/timeline-libya-us-relations>

<sup>55</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> MacFarquhar, "An Erratic Leader, Brutal and Defiant to the End."

<sup>57</sup> MacFarquhar, "An Erratic Leader."

<sup>58</sup> MacFarquhar, "An Erratic Leader."

untenable for their respective populations. In Libya, the general public's long simmering feelings of hatred toward Qaddafi would be ignited by the Arab Spring, ultimately leading to the downfall of the Qaddafi regime.<sup>59</sup>

## **B. THE ARAB SPRING AND THE BEGINNING OF A REVOLUTION IN LIBYA**

The story of the Libyan civil war began with the Arab Spring, which, in its turn, started on December 17, 2010, when a 26-year-old Tunisian man burned himself alive after a perceived insult at the hands of a police officer in Sidi Bouzid.<sup>60</sup> Others, who sympathized with the young man's situation, immediately began to protest against the Tunisian government. Within days the protests spread throughout Tunisia; demonstrators implored President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali to resign immediately. A month later, the president removed himself from power and left the country.<sup>61</sup> The uprising in Tunisia set in motion similar protests in Egypt, starting on January 25, 2011 and ultimately resulting in President Hosni Mubarak stepping down on February 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>62</sup> These events provided the roots for an uprising to begin in the country that is located between Tunisia and Egypt, Libya.

The movement reached Libya on February 15, when protests began in Benghazi. The demonstrators prompted additional revolutionary uprisings throughout Libya, resulting in regime sympathizers being driven into hiding throughout the country.<sup>63</sup> Unlike the protests in the other two countries, the Libyan protestors were unable to hold onto their momentum; they were ultimately met with extremely harsh reprisals from forces loyal to Qaddafi.<sup>64</sup> These troops responded through various means including dropping bombs on

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<sup>59</sup> MacFarquhar, "An Erratic Leader, Brutal and Defiant to the End."

<sup>60</sup> NPR Staff, "The Arab Spring: A Year of Revolution," *National Public Radio*, December 17, 2011, <https://www.npr.org/2011/12/17/143897126/the-arab-spring-a-year-of-revolution>

<sup>61</sup> NPR, "The Arab Spring."

<sup>62</sup> NPR, "The Arab Spring."

<sup>63</sup> Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Zineb Abdessadok, "Libya Today: From Arab Spring to Failed State," *Al-Jazeera*, May 30, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/5/30/libya-today-from-arab-spring-to-failed-state>

protestors from military aircraft, resulting in the deaths of over 300 civilians.<sup>65</sup> As Qaddafi's forces moved in on the Benghazi area, the regime threatened that they would go house-to-house in search of protestors.<sup>66</sup> On February 22, Qaddafi addressed the country, assuring the population that he would remain in power and that he would hunt down rebels "like rats."<sup>67</sup> The threatening nature of Qaddafi's speech, along with what was occurring within the country, caught the attention of the international community; many states recalled their representatives and citizens from Libya.<sup>68</sup>

Additional criticism and calls for Qaddafi to step down came from U.S. President Barack Obama, who criticized Qaddafi's actions against his populace, saying, "The United States strongly supports the universal rights of the Libyan people...like all governments, the Libyan government has a responsibility to refrain from violence, to allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need, and to respect the rights of its people. It must be held accountable for its failure to meet these responsibilities, and face the cost of continued violations of human rights."<sup>69</sup>

Within a month of the protests beginning in Libya, the UN began to work toward a resolution to protect Libyan civilians from the atrocities being directed at them by the Libyan government. The UN's initial move, detailed in UNSCR 1970, called on all member states to impose an arms embargo against Libya, implementing a travel ban on officials from the Libyan regime, and freeze the Libyan regimes financial assets.<sup>70</sup> As the UN worked to enact UNSCR 1970, members of the international community began to discuss how and when an intervention in Libya might occur.

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<sup>65</sup> Abdessadok, "Libya Today: From Arab Spring to Failed State."

<sup>66</sup> Allin and Jones, "As Good as it Gets?" 206.

<sup>67</sup> Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 12.

<sup>68</sup> Mueller et al., 12.

<sup>69</sup> "Remarks by the President on Libya," The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, February 23, 2011. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/02/23/remarks-president-libya>

<sup>70</sup> Resolution 1970, United Nations Security Council, 2011. [https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1970%20\(2011\)](https://www.undocs.org/S/RES/1970%20(2011))

## C. VARYING REASONS FOR AN INTERVENTION

The discussions among European powers and the United States regarding intervening in Libya began to heat up in late February into March. During this time, 6,000 Libyan civilians were killed during Qaddafi's crackdown on the populace.<sup>71</sup> France and the United Kingdom were among the most ardent supporters of a military intervention in Libya, with France speaking out the loudest and earliest.<sup>72</sup> In the early stages, two distinct camps emerged regarding whether to intervene or not. France and Britain emerged as proponents of an intervention, while the United States (initially) and Germany were against intervening in Libya. The reasoning for each country's answer to the question varied but followed similar lines.

### 1. France and Britain: Proponents for an Intervention

As noted above, both the French and British supported a military intervention in Libya due to their concern of Qaddafi's threat to massacre the dissidents. The common theme between the two included a desire to avoid a repeat of the Srebrenica massacre of 1995, especially in a country located close to Europe.<sup>73</sup> This shared concern added to the individual concerns that each country experienced in early 2011, which ranged from support of the domestic populace to having an operation occur in an election year.

#### a. France: Setting the Stage for a European Response

The French wanted to commit forces in Libya extremely early into the insurrection in Libya. However, feelings differed within the French government regarding the situation. Even though French President Nicolas Sarkozy was a fervent supporter of an intervention, the French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe disagreed, stating, "France, for its part, does not think that in the current circumstances military intervention, NATO forces, would be

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<sup>71</sup> Francis E. Ramoin, "Why Intervention in Libya was Justified," *E-International Relations*, January 25, 2012, 2, <https://www.e-ir.info/2012/01/25/why-intervention-in-libya-was-justified/>

<sup>72</sup> Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 12.

<sup>73</sup> "The Shame of Srebrenica," 60 Minutes II, video 15:06, [https://cle.nps.edu/access/content/group/05fb9d4b-620a-43c0-be4d-e6b8b34a59fa/Media/cde\\_8116m/cde\\_8116m.html](https://cle.nps.edu/access/content/group/05fb9d4b-620a-43c0-be4d-e6b8b34a59fa/Media/cde_8116m/cde_8116m.html)

welcomed in the south of the Mediterranean and could be counterproductive.”<sup>74</sup> While these two members of the French government differed on France’s course of action, the desires of the French president ultimately won the day. Sarkozy found the situation in Libya as a means to a political end, especially with an opportunity to show strength with an election on the horizon.<sup>75</sup> By getting involved in Libya, Sarkozy hoped to show that Europeans could interject themselves into a crisis, take the lead, and deal with it appropriately – without the United State in a leading role (and by proxy NATO due to the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) always being a U.S. flag officer).<sup>76</sup> In addition, Sarkozy wanted to help fix France’s image, which had been tarnished by its response to the Arab Spring uprisings in Tunisia. By intervening in Libya, Sarkozy hoped to show the Arab Spring was aligned with France’s values of liberty and human rights.<sup>77</sup>

One of the key factors that drove the French was a massacre that occurred in 1995 at Srebrenica, in the former Yugoslavia. The massacre involved the Bosnian Muslim community, which saw 8,000 people killed by Bosnian military forces and an additional 23,000 Muslims deported.<sup>78</sup> The legacy of Srebrenica is a tragedy where a European force under the auspices of the United Nations was unable to hold off an overwhelming adversary, resulting in the systematic execution and deportation of thousands of innocent civilians. This event had a lasting effect on the psyche of the French, with Grand noting, “digging deeper into France’s motivations, the memories of Srebrenica and other atrocities committed during the Balkan wars played an important role.”<sup>79</sup> The French government and the domestic population (especially among Libyan exiles) agreed that the country should act to avoid another massacre, providing legitimate reasoning for the French to

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<sup>74</sup> Gaub, “The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Libya,” 1-2.

<sup>75</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention,” 14.

<sup>76</sup> Camille Grand, “The French Experience: Sarkozy’s War?” 184.

<sup>77</sup> Christopher S. Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention,” 14.

<sup>78</sup> “The Shame of Srebrenica,” 60 Minutes II.

<sup>79</sup> Grand, “The French Experience: Sarkozy’s War?” 184.



become involved in Libya.<sup>80</sup> However, President Sarkozy had additional reasons for wanting to involve France in the conflict. According to the United Kingdom's House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee's report "Libya: Examination of Intervention and Collapse and the UK's Future Policy Options," Sarkozy had the following reasons for involvement:

A desire to gain a greater share of Libya oil production, increase French influence in North Africa, improve his internal political situation in France, provide the French military with an opportunity to reassert its position in the world, and address the concern of his advisors over Qaddafi's long-term plans to supplant France as the dominant power in Francophone Africa.<sup>81</sup>

Armed with his reasoning for intervention and backed by initial domestic public approval (approximately 66 percent favored an intervention), Sarkozy moved forward with his desires for committing France's military forces.<sup>82</sup> To bolster his stance, Sarkozy worked to leverage the support of the United Kingdom, which had also called for an intervention and with whom France had recently signed a defense treaty in November 2010.<sup>83</sup>

**b. *The United Kingdom: An Urge to do Something***

To the British, on the one hand, Libya presented itself as a conflict that was outside of the parameters laid out in its National Security Strategy (NSS). Michael Clarke writes that "of the fifteen generic 'priority risks' the NSS sets out as a basis for strategic action to defend and promote British interests, the Libya scenario could just about be covered by half of one of the generic cases, and one that was put firmly in the midst of the second of

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<sup>80</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Libya: Examination of Intervention and Collapse and the UK's Future Policy Options*, HC 119 (London: House of Commons, 2016), [https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2016/libya-intervention\\_uk-commons\\_fac\\_20160914.pdf](https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/2016/libya-intervention_uk-commons_fac_20160914.pdf)

<sup>81</sup> House of Commons, *Libya*.

<sup>82</sup> House of Commons, *Libya*.

<sup>83</sup> Alastair Cameron, "The Channel Axis: France, the UK and NATO," in *Short War, Long Shadow*, ed. Adrian Johnson and Saqeb Mueen (London: Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2012), 20. [https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201203\\_whr\\_short\\_war\\_long\\_shadow\\_0.pdf](https://rusi.org/sites/default/files/201203_whr_short_war_long_shadow_0.pdf)

three tiers of priority risks to be addressed.”<sup>84</sup> In short, Libya was not a situation in which the government would normally want to involve itself. In the weeks leading up to the intervention, some military planning had begun but many within the British government and military leaders believed that the United Kingdom would not participate in a Libya operation; indeed, Prime Minister David Cameron had previously stated his opposition to any sort of “liberal interventionism” that had occurred during his predecessor’s (Tony Blair) time in office.<sup>85</sup>

In the end, however, Prime Minister Cameron pushed his support for an intervention down onto parliament (instead of a vote of support coming up through Parliament), which was well outside of normal operating procedure.<sup>86</sup> His decision came due to the rapidly changing situation in Libya and his belief that something had to be done.<sup>87</sup> In addition, Cameron, like his French counterpart, found himself recalling the horrors of Srebrenica and wanted to avoid a similar occurrence from happening again, privately mentioning that he did not want Benghazi to become another Srebrenica<sup>88</sup>

Cameron’s minister of defence, Liam Fox, warned the prime minister that the country was already heavily invested in operations in Afghanistan and that any operation in Libya would be at great expense to the British military for very little in return.<sup>89</sup> While Cameron agreed with Fox regarding the need to keep Afghanistan as the main-focus, he ordered the military to begin formulating plans for initial operations in Libya to include a naval blockade and no-fly zone.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Michael Clarke, “The Making of Britain’s Libya Strategy,” in *Short War, Long Shadow*, ed. Adrian Johnson and Saqeb Mueen (London: Royal United Service Institute for Defence and Security Studies, 2012), 7.

<sup>85</sup> Christina Goulter, “The British Experience: Operation Ellamy.” In *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 157.

<sup>86</sup> Clarke, “The Making of Britain’s Libya Strategy,” 8.

<sup>87</sup> Goulter, “The British Experience: Operation Ellamy.” 157.

<sup>88</sup> Clarke, “The Making of Britain’s Libya Strategy,” 8.

<sup>89</sup> Goulter, “The British Experience: Operation Ellamy.” 157.

<sup>90</sup> Goulter, 157.

Cameron shared Sarkozy's vision that an intervention was a way to showcase European strength within the region at a time when the United States was hesitant to involve itself in another conflict outside of the operations it was already committed to.<sup>91</sup>

## **2. The United States and Germany: Weary of Involvement**

The United States and Germany found themselves as bedfellows regarding their initial reluctance regarding an intervention in Libya. Both nations were already heavily involved with operations in the Middle East, with the United States involved in conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and off the coast of Somalia. The Germans were also involved in operations in Afghanistan, operations that were extremely controversial among the German public.<sup>92</sup> While the two countries shared a common concern for additional embroilment of its forces, the United States eventually diverged from its German partners to support an operation in Libya while the Germans remained against an intervention.

### ***a. The United States: Sitting on the Fence***

In early 2011, many within the Obama administration were strongly against the United States getting involved in another conflict with resources already stretched thin, especially another conflict in a Muslim country. That is, the United States was already dealing with conflicts in two Muslim countries, and it had an ongoing dispute with a third Muslim country (Iran).<sup>93</sup> As noted by Ramoin, "like most Western powers, the United States has been caught on the wrong side of history on more than one occasion. The history of U.S. foreign policy in the Arab world has been plagued with ulterior motives and diplomatic hypocrisy."<sup>94</sup> The situation in Libya, was quickly evolving from a humanitarian crisis into a full-blown civil war.<sup>95</sup> In addition, the United States (like most of the world)

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<sup>91</sup> Grand, "The French Experience: Sarkozy's War?" 184.

<sup>92</sup> Kent Oglesby, "Germany, NATO's Out-of-Area Operations, and the CSDP: The German Defense Policy Dilemma," (master's thesis, University of Washington, 2014), 33-34.  
[https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/26779/Oglesby\\_washington\\_02500\\_13224.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/bitstream/handle/1773/26779/Oglesby_washington_02500_13224.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

<sup>93</sup> Allin and Jones, "As Good as it Gets?" 205.

<sup>94</sup> Ramoin, "Why Intervention in Libya was Justified," 10.

<sup>95</sup> Allin and Jones, "As Good as it Gets?" 206.

was still recovering from the recession of 2008, which had caused serious ramifications to the nation's budget.<sup>96</sup> While the president was unsure of how to proceed, he had laid groundwork for an intervention during his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize that he won in 2009:

More and more, we all confront difficult questions about how to prevent the slaughter of civilians by their own government, or to stop a civil war whose violence and suffering can engulf an entire region. I believe that force can be justified on humanitarian grounds, as it was in the Balkans, or in other places that have been scarred by war. Inaction tears at our conscience and can lead to more costly intervention later. That's why all responsible nations must embrace the role that militaries with a clear mandate can play to keep the peace.<sup>97</sup>

These comments seemed almost prepared specifically for the Libya situation, although these events were a little over a year away.

Despite its initial hesitancy, The United States eventually decided to respond to the Libya situation with force. Several high-ranking officials adamantly opposed any action, including then-Vice President Joe Biden, National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who stated, "Can I finish the two wars I'm already in before you guys go looking for a third one?"<sup>98</sup> Gates stated that Qaddafi, "was not a threat to us anywhere. He was a threat to his own people, and that was about it."<sup>99</sup> With the administration divided on its opinion of what to do, President Obama dispatched then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to meet with a member of the rebellion, Mahmoud Jibril.<sup>100</sup> Jibril, who attended college in the United States, convinced Clinton of the opposition's ability to lead Libya if Qaddafi was removed from power. The Secretary relayed her information to the president, which influenced his final decision (which

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<sup>96</sup> Ramoin, "Why Intervention in Libya was Justified," 11.

<sup>97</sup> Michael Scherer, "Barack Obama's Nobel Prize Speech Transcript," *Time*, December 10, 2009. <https://swampland.time.com/2009/12/10/barack-obamas-nobel-prize-speech-transcript/>

<sup>98</sup> Jo Becker and Scott Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/us/politics/hillary-clinton-libya.html>

<sup>99</sup> Becker and Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall."

<sup>100</sup> Becker and Shane, "Hillary Clinton, 'Smart Power' and a Dictator's Fall."

President Obama noted as being a personal 51–49 percent decision in favor of involvement).<sup>101</sup>

The next issue the United States needed to address was what kind of operation would occur and what the U.S. role would be. According to former U.S. Ambassador to NATO Ivo Daadler,

Cameron and Sarkozy were the undisputed leaders, in terms of doing something. The problem was that it was not clear what that something was going to be. Cameron was pushing for a no-fly zone, but in the United States there was great skepticism. A no-fly zone was not effective in Bosnia, it was not effective in Iraq, and would probably not be effective in Libya. When President Obama was confronted with the argument for a no-fly zone, he asked how this was going to be effective. Qaddafi was attacking people. A no-fly zone was not going to stop him. Instead, to stop him we would need to bomb his forces attacking people.<sup>102</sup>

While the exact nature of the operation remained uncertain, the president expressed his desire to have the U.S. role reduced as soon as possible, with someone else taking over the major command and control role.<sup>103</sup>

***b. Germany: Hesitant to Embroil Itself in Further Conflict***

The Germans, as previously noted, had been hesitant to get involved in another conflict due to the increasingly negative view of its role in Afghanistan. Extreme domestic negativity to foreign operations by the *Bundeswehr* began to escalate after the 2009 Kunduz airstrike incident in Afghanistan, when a German Colonel ordered an airstrike on a Taliban target that resulted in the deaths of over 100 innocent civilians.<sup>104</sup> The negativity toward the deployment of German forces intensified due to another incident in 2010 where German

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<sup>101</sup> Becker and Shane, “Hillary Clinton, ‘Smart Power’ and a Dictator’s Fall.”

<sup>102</sup> House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *Libya: Examination of Intervention and Collapse and the UK’s Future Policy Options*.

<sup>103</sup> Daadler and Stavridis, “NATO’s Victory in Libya,” 3.

<sup>104</sup> Von Spiegel Staff, “The German Air Strike Has Changed Everything,” *Spiegel International*, September 14, 2009, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/world/the-end-of-innocence-in-afghanistan-the-german-air-strike-has-changed-everything-a-648925.html>

forces killed six Afghani troops in a friendly fire incident.<sup>105</sup> These accidents highlighted the shift the *Bundeswehr* had experienced while in Afghanistan, a transition from what Sascha Bleibohm calls “aid workers in uniform,” to a military force at war.<sup>106</sup> Bleibohm notes, “the Afghanistan conflict, however, showed that debates in society and in the Bundestag on the use of violence and deployments abroad changed significantly, and hence, the German people critically questioned the foreign policy of projecting national interests with military means.”<sup>107</sup>

The quick reversal by the United States gave no time for the Germans to change their mind due to the political maneuvering and discussion required within the Bundestag (German parliament).<sup>108</sup> The German government had already convened to discuss the Libya question, making decisions against military participation and against political authorization.<sup>109</sup> Brockmeier writes, “The first decision was largely made before the government had considered how to vote on a UN resolution. Indeed, such a position is consistent with the traditional German reluctance to consider the use of military force abroad, which has been reinforced by entrenched public dissatisfaction with the war in Afghanistan.”<sup>110</sup> However, these decisions could have been revisited if the United States notified the Germans earlier that it had a change of strategy in its attitude toward Libya. If more notice were given, the Bundestag could have reconvened and allowed for more discussion on the topic, possibly leading to the Germans changing their position on the Security Council vote, and possibly even agreeing to allow its military to participate in operations against Libya. Ultimately, the Germans decided to abstain from voting during

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<sup>105</sup> Andreas Illmer, “German Troops Kill at Least Five Afghan Soldiers in Friendly Fire Incident,” *Deutsche Welle*, March 4, 2010, <https://www.dw.com/en/german-troops-kill-at-least-five-afghan-soldiers-in-friendly-fire-incident/a-5429577>

<sup>106</sup> Sascha Bleibohm, “On Contemporary War and the German Armed Forces: The Afghan War and Its Consequences,” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 2014), 94. <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/42584>

<sup>107</sup> Bleibohm, 94.

<sup>108</sup> Sarah Brockmeier, “Germany and the Intervention in Libya,” *Survival* 55, no. 6 (December 2013): 65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2013.862937>

<sup>109</sup> Brockmeier, 64.

<sup>110</sup> Brockmeier, 64.

the Security Council meeting, which caused consternation among its allies within NATO.<sup>111</sup>

In addition to not wanting to commit forces to another conflict, the Germans were hesitant to have their forces get involved in a situation where they may be placed in harm's way and where civilian casualties were seen as an inevitability.<sup>112</sup> In addition, the German government was concerned with the question of what the political ramifications be in Libya once the conflict ended.<sup>113</sup>

#### **D. THE MOVE TOWARD UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1973**

As the major players of France, Great Britain, the United States, and Germany worked through their internal machinations toward their options regarding Libya, ministers representing the various NATO members met in Brussels for a previously scheduled meeting. Chivvis writes that during this meeting, "NATO had begun so-called 'prudent planning' – a form of contingency planning conducted at the discretion of the Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR)."<sup>114</sup> This step provided information for the alliance, while maintaining the stance that there were no immediate plans for NATO to get involved. It was during this meeting of ministers that the initial seeds for Operation Unified Protector were planted. However, the journey to come to a decision for NATO to act was far from over, with the decision moving to a G8 conference that was planned for March 14<sup>th</sup>.<sup>115</sup>

The lack of consensus among the alliance members was showcased during the meeting of ministers. The disagreement among the members started with the hottest topic,

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<sup>111</sup> Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 20.

<sup>112</sup> Mark Hallam, "Berlin Defends Abstention on Libya Action, Considers Alternative Aid," *Deutsche Welle*, March 18, 2011, <https://www.dw.com/en/berlin-defends-abstention-on-libya-action-considers-alternative-aid/a-14922890>

<sup>113</sup> Richard Rousseau, "Why Germany Abstained on UN Resolution 1973 on Libya," *Foreign Policy Journal*, June 22, 2011, <https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2011/06/22/why-germany-abstained-on-un-resolution-1973-on-libya/>

<sup>114</sup> Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," 12.

<sup>115</sup> Brockmeier, "Germany and the Intervention in Libya," 69.

which was the option to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. The French, who were ardent supporters of no-fly zone, wanted to impose it outside of NATO's control and use a coalition of the willing instead (even though the French had recently rejoined the integrated military structure of the alliance) due to its desire to circumvent the United States from getting involved.<sup>116</sup> The coalition of willing would act in a manner similar to the coalition of nations aligned with the United States' anti-terrorism operations in Afghanistan.<sup>117</sup> France's reasoning for having a coalition of the willing stemmed from their desire to reduce the influence of other members of the alliance that were not in favor of a NATO intervention, specifically the influence of Turkey.<sup>118</sup> The French ultimately realized that a no-fly zone would not be enough to stop the Qaddafi regime's forces on the ground, which would mean that targeted strikes against Qaddafi's forces would be required.<sup>119</sup> While the British were aboard with the implementation of a no-fly zone, the United States and Germany were against implementing one.<sup>120</sup> U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, while testifying in front of Congress, observed that offensive strikes by the United States against Libyan air defense systems could be seen as another attack by the United States against a Muslim country.<sup>121</sup> While the British supported a no-fly zone, they were not in favor of the coalition of the willing that France had mentioned, instead arguing that NATO would be the best option for taking the lead in an operation.<sup>122</sup>

At the G8 meeting of foreign ministers in Paris convened, the debate over the no-fly zone continued. At this point, the French and British were attempting to obtain an agreement on implementing a no-fly zone, while the United States and Germany were still aligned on their decision against any action against Libya (as President Obama had not yet

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<sup>116</sup> Mueller et al., *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*, 20.

<sup>117</sup> Campbell, Horace, *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2013).

<sup>118</sup> Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," 25.

<sup>119</sup> Grand, "The French Experience: Sarkozy's War," 186.

<sup>120</sup> Grand, 186.

<sup>121</sup> "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," 15.

<sup>122</sup> Benoit Gomis, "NATO: Lessons from Libya," *The World Today* 67, no. 5 (May 2011): 8. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41962651>



changed his mind).<sup>123</sup> Brockmeier notes that there was some disagreement between the United States and Germany at this point, centered on the fact that the United States had begun to develop military options while the Germans had not (the Germans had only asked the internal question of whether they had the necessary resources to participate in a no-fly zone, which they did).<sup>124</sup> The disagreement became a moot point on March 15<sup>th</sup>, when the decision reversal from the Obama Administration was announced, which included support for a no-fly zone and the use of targeted strikes against Libyan forces.<sup>125</sup> These options gave the United States the ability to protect civilians in Libya in case the Qaddafi regime attempted any hostilities against Benghazi. Of note, the updated resolution included language that prevented the use of ground forces as an occupying force.<sup>126</sup>

The movement toward a no-fly zone quickly picked up steam, with draft legislation for a no-fly zone already prepared. With input from the Lebanese, French, British, and Americans, the final draft was presented with language included to use all necessary force in order to protect civilians from Libyan attacks. The change in attitude by the United States, as previously noted, caught the Germans completely off guard. Vice Chancellor Guido Westerwelle discovered the news right after he had given a speech to the Bundestag denouncing any sort of military action against Libya.<sup>127</sup> Brockmeier observes that the strong language used in his speech to the Bundestag essentially gave him no option to attempt to change course and that a proper notification by the United States. could have given him time to attempt some political massaging within the Bundestag for possible German participation.<sup>128</sup> According to Brockmeier, “it is equally significant that earlier notification of the American change of heart would have created an opportunity for an informed discussion of the matter among members of parliament.”<sup>129</sup> In fact, it would only

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<sup>123</sup> Brockmeier, “Germany and the Intervention in Libya,” 69.

<sup>124</sup> Brockmeier, 70.

<sup>125</sup> Brockmeier, 70.

<sup>126</sup> Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention,” 19.

<sup>127</sup> Brockmeier, “Germany and the Intervention in Libya,” 71-72.

<sup>128</sup> Brockmeier, 72.

<sup>129</sup> Brockmeier, “Germany and the Intervention in Libya,” 72.

be 34 hours from the time the Germans were informed of the U.S. switch until the vote in the UN would occur. The final vote for UNSCR 1973 occurred on March 17<sup>th</sup>, with ten members of the Security Council passing the resolution, with the remaining five members (Brazil, Germany, India, and Russia) abstaining.<sup>130</sup>

The German's decision to abstain from UNSCR 1973 caused unexpected blowback between Germany and the United States. While the Germans had been put into a tough situation due to the last-minute U.S. change of mind, their ensuing decision to abstain was seen as a slap in the face to the other members of the alliance. Chivvis writes that the vote, "created one of the most serious rifts in United States-German relations since the 2003 Iraq War. It was a clear break with Germany's closest European and American allies, and to make matters worse, it appeared to put Germany on the Russian side against them."<sup>131</sup> While the perception of the German vote was wildly unpopular at the time, the German domestic political process behind it was not well understood by the other NATO partners. Importantly, the Germans did not attempt to block a NATO action or remove their forces from NATO headquarters during the conflict. As the conflict went on, the Germans ultimately chose to increase their financial and diplomatic support of the mission while also providing German military personnel at NATO headquarters to participate in the planning of the operation.<sup>132</sup>

#### **E. THE BEGINNING OF OPERATIONS AND THE SHIFT TO NATO CONTROL**

With UNSCR 1973 passed, the United States, France, Great Britain, and Canada quickly moved to launch their own respective operations against Libyan forces. These operations were: Operation Odyssey Dawn (United States), Operation Harmattan (France), Operation ELLAMY (Great Britain), and Operation MOBILE (Canada).<sup>133</sup> These various operations were conducted and commanded by their respective countries, but were

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<sup>130</sup> Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," 20.

<sup>131</sup> Chivvis, 20.

<sup>132</sup> Chivvis, 20.

<sup>133</sup> "Libya: What Do the Military Operation Names Mean?" *BBC*, March 24, 2011. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-12831743>

coordinated by the United States.<sup>134</sup> The French were the first members of the coalition to begin operations, launching two aircraft to strike Qaddafi's forces near Benghazi.<sup>135</sup> The United States and United Kingdom began operations soon thereafter by launching Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles from naval vessels in the Mediterranean against Libyan air defense forces.<sup>136</sup> As noted by the then SACEUR and Commander of U.S. European Command (EUCOM) James Stavridis, the initial strikes, "reduced the capability of Libya's air defense systems within the first seventy-two hours."<sup>137</sup> These strikes severely degraded the Libyan integrated air defenses, which allowed coalition aircraft to enter Libyan air space, achieve air superiority, and establish the no-fly zone.<sup>138</sup>

As the four separate operations took place, the preparations for NATO to assume operational control of the action, bringing everyone under a single command and control structure. The decision to have NATO assume this role had been championed by the United States shortly after UNSCR 1973 had passed.<sup>139</sup> The reasoning behind this was the belief that only NATO had the established command and control to support such a large operation, and had credibility with the Arab League states that were also participating in the operations against Libya.<sup>140</sup> This decision was widely supported by the other members of the operation, with France continuing to be the lone dissenter with their idea for a coalition of the willing.<sup>141</sup> After several days of political maneuvering between the American, British, and French diplomats at NATO HQ in Brussels, the decision was reached for NATO to assume operational control upon the U.S. drawdown of forces.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Steven Erlanger, "Confusion Over Who Leads Libya Strikes, and for How Long," *The New York Times*, March 21, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/22/world/africa/22nato.html>

<sup>135</sup> Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," 21.

<sup>136</sup> Chivvis, 21.

<sup>137</sup> James Stavridis, *The Accidental Admiral: A Sailor Takes Command at NATO*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 53.

<sup>138</sup> Robert C. Owen, "The U.S. Experience: National Strategy and Campaign Support," in *Precision and Purpose: Airpower in the Libyan Civil War*,

<sup>139</sup> Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," 24.

<sup>140</sup> Chivvis, 24.

<sup>141</sup> Chivvis, 25.

<sup>142</sup> Chivvis, 25.

The transition of command-and-control functions from the United States ended up going relatively smoothly, as Admiral Stavridis was already heavily employed with supporting U.S. Africa Command, who had been given the initial role of the in-charge combatant command. Stavridis notes that U.S. leadership, “was uncomfortable being the face and principal fist behind the operation. Even as NATO took over the continuing operations, we sought to give them a broader international flavor.”<sup>143</sup> The U.S. decision to step back paved the way for other partners from the alliance to take the operational lead in the ensuing combat operations while giving NATO the lead in command-and-control operations. The allowed NATO to showcase its ability to function in a new conflict near its traditional operating area.

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<sup>143</sup> Stavridis, *The Accidental Admiral*, 55.

### **III. NATO AND OPERATION UNIFIED PROTECTOR**

The political maneuvering between the pro-intervention countries ultimately resulted in NATO consolidating the various country-led campaigns into a single NATO-led operation. While the domestic politics of the respective members varied and continued into the assumption of kinetic operations, the consolidation of military and civilian representatives under NATO HQ's roof allowed for enhanced cooperation and coordination. The assumption of command by NATO allowed for the alliance to spearhead the operation in Libya with UNSCR 1973 acting as its operational guidance. NATO's decision to take on the command and control for Libya operation stemmed from its desire to prevent another humanitarian crisis from occurring, while attempting to fix the political divide and fracturing of its members in the leadup to Libya. While NATO worked to assume command, it looked back to a previous operation that was conducted along similar lines. The blueprints it could look back on resided in the plans for NATO's 1999 Operation Allied Force in Kosovo. Operation Allied Force provided a template in how an air war could be conducted by the alliance, while preventing the deployment of ground forces into the conflict.

The deployment of NATO air and naval forces against Libya brought up pros and cons of NATO's role in the intervention against Libya. While NATO's involvement assisted in a successful campaign and an opportunity for European military leadership to lead the fight, detractors feel NATO overstepped its boundaries and has continued to stretch itself thin in a time when it was engaged with other responsibilities in Europe and out of area/regions such as Afghanistan.

#### **A. NATO'S REASONING FOR INVOLVEMENT**

NATO's decision to get involved in Libya partly stemmed from its perception that the alliance was beginning to fracture.<sup>144</sup> This concern manifested itself in the years preceding the Libyan campaign. A key factor in this stemmed from the heavy cuts in

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<sup>144</sup> Stanley Kober, "Cracks in the Foundation: NATO's New Troubles," *CATO Institute*, January 15, 2008, <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/cracks-foundation-natos-new-troubles>

defense spending by most NATO members in the years after the end of the Cold War. While many European countries became more affluent after the Iron Curtain fell (gross domestic product of European nations grew by 55 percent), their contributions to defense spending fell by 20 percent.<sup>145</sup> The financial contributions to NATO from the European partners were approximately 34% during the Cold War, with the United States and Canada footing the rest of the bill.<sup>146</sup> By 2009, the contributions by the European members had fallen to just 21%.<sup>147</sup> This drop in funding occurred over the course of nearly two decades, with the bottoming out culminating with the Great Recession of 2008.

The fracturing that NATO feared became more apparent after the Great Recession. In the aftermath, Germany had further cemented itself as a regional economic hegemon, with its GDP in 2010 exceeding that of France and the United Kingdom by more than \$700 billion and nearly one trillion dollars.<sup>148</sup> While Germany remained in the top spot for European countries, the United Kingdom (which had been second prior to the recession) swapped spots with France as it struggled to recover from the recession. With Germany's economic prowess relatively intact, it hoped to maintain the status quo with NATO and with the United States.<sup>149</sup> However, Germany's desire to maintain the status quo was in jeopardy due to the United States' decision to begin "pivoting" its focus to the Pacific.<sup>150</sup> The intention to reposition military forces away from other areas of concern and to place them in the Pacific caused concern among U.S. allies and was exploited by its adversaries.<sup>151</sup> Regarding the consequences of the pivot to Asia, Ford writes, "American

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<sup>145</sup> Stephen Larrabe, Stuart E. Johnson, John Gordon IV, Peter A. Wilson, Caroline Baxter, Deborah Lai, and Calin Trenkov-Wermuth, "NATO and the Challenges of Austerity," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012), [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2012/RAND\\_MG1196.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2012/RAND_MG1196.pdf)

<sup>146</sup> Larrabe et al, "NATO and the Challenges of Austerity."

<sup>147</sup> Larrabe et al, "NATO and the Challenges of Austerity."

<sup>148</sup> "Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at Current Prices of Europe's Largest Economies from 1980 to 2025," Statista, last accessed: March 3, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/959301/gdp-of-europes-biggest-economies/>

<sup>149</sup> Uwe Hartmann, personal communication, March 1, 2021.

<sup>150</sup> John Ford, "The Pivot to Asia Was Obama's Biggest Mistake," *The Diplomat*, January 21, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/01/the-pivot-to-asia-was-obamas-biggest-mistake/>

<sup>151</sup> Ford, "The Pivot to Asia Was Obama's Biggest Mistake."

neglect of Europe was followed by Russian adventurism in Ukraine, an increased threat to the Baltic states, and the erosion of democracy in Poland and Hungary.”<sup>152</sup>

Another area of concern regarding the possible fracturing of the alliance occurred in 2010, when the United Kingdom and France agreed to new defense and security treaties.<sup>153</sup> These treaties occurred concurrently with the United States moving further away from Europe and at a time when the two countries needed each other’s assistance during the post-recession economic recovery.<sup>154</sup> However, instead of using the opportunity to reinforce its place in NATO, the French used the treaties as a means to get closer to the United Kingdom even though it had reintegrated itself into NATO’s Military Command the prior year.<sup>155</sup> This became evident during the leadup to OUP when, as previously noted, France attempted to form a coalition of the willing. Using this construct would have allowed France to utilize its alliance with the United Kingdom as a means to bypass NATO (and by proxy involving the United States due to SACEUR being a U.S. flag officer).<sup>156</sup> Even during negotiations, France attempted to have itself placed in charge as the leader of the operation, which was strongly rejected by the other members who believed NATO’s leadership was critical for success.<sup>157</sup>

In light of the growing factions, NATO decided it would be in the alliances best interest to assume the command-and-control function, even with the ongoing commitments in Afghanistan.<sup>158</sup> By doing this, NATO would be able to showcase the alliance’s ability to cooperate together and show the alliance’s ability to conduct a large-scale, multi-nation operation while operating under the same roof. Even though the operation went ahead

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<sup>152</sup> Ford, “The Pivot to Asia Was Obama’s Biggest Mistake.”

<sup>153</sup> Benoit Gomis, “Franco-British Defence and Security Treaties: Entente While it Lasts?” *Chatham House*, March 2011, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/International%20Security/0311pp\\_gomis.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/International%20Security/0311pp_gomis.pdf)

<sup>154</sup> Gomis, 8.

<sup>155</sup> Gomis, 7.

<sup>156</sup> Uwe Hartmann, personal communication, March 1, 2021.

<sup>157</sup> “NATO Coalition Fractures of Libya,” *CBS News*, March 21, 2011, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/nato-coalition-fractures-over-libya/>

<sup>158</sup> Stavridis, *The Accidental Admiral*, 58.

without the full participation of all members, Stavridis observed, “the key is not whether every ally does everything – the key is that taken together the allied effort provides the right combination of resources to accomplish the mission.”<sup>159</sup>

## **B. NATO ASSUMES COMMAND**

On March 27, 2011, NATO assumed operational command of the operation against Libya concurrently with the United States’ pulling back from major offensive operations.<sup>160</sup> The decision by NATO to agree to take over operational control was predicated, according to Ramoin, on the conditions of a clear need to intervene, legal backing, and support from neighboring countries.<sup>161</sup> Each of these caveats were met through UNSCR 1973 and the backing of Arab countries throughout the area. NATO was able to assume command and develop the operational plans for the operation far more quickly than it had done so during previous engagements in Bosnia and Kosovo.<sup>162</sup> Part of this was due to the ability of the alliance to utilize plans already implemented by the U.S. through European Command and Africa Command, which had led the U.S.’ Operation Odyssey Dawn prior to NATO’s assumption of command.<sup>163</sup> Regarding NATO’s reason for getting involved, Stavridis observes, “only NATO has the standing command structure and integrated capabilities necessary to quickly plan and execute such complex operations.”<sup>164</sup> The launching of Operation Unified Protector marked the first time NATO had led a conflict against an Arab country, even though it had participated in other conflicts against Arab entities.<sup>165</sup> According to Gaub, Operation Unified Protector ultimately, “turned out to be one of NATO’s shorter, and seemingly also less controversial, missions”

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<sup>159</sup> Stavridis, *The Accidental Admiral*, 58.

<sup>160</sup> Benoit Gomis, “NATO: Lessons from Libya,” *The World Today.org* (May 2011): 8, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2011-05/nato-lessons-libya>

<sup>161</sup> Ramoin, “Why Intervention in Libya was Justified.”

<sup>162</sup> Stavridis, *The Accidental Admiral*, 55.

<sup>163</sup> Stavridis, 55.

<sup>164</sup> Stavridis, 59.

<sup>165</sup> Florence Gaub, “The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Libya: Reviewing Operation Unified Protector,” *Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press*, June 2013, viii, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/respre11532>.



and “a success NATO badly needed after its decade-long engagement in Afghanistan.”<sup>166</sup> In terms of NATO’s mission in Afghanistan, the alliance began operations in Afghanistan in 2003 while undertaking the United Nation’s mandate to stop terrorist operations in Afghanistan and to prevent future terrorist entities from using the country as a base of operations.<sup>167</sup> NATO became the leader of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), whose mission was to assist Afghanistan in becoming a democracy, provide stabilization in the area, and to train Afghani troops to be able to conduct security operations throughout Afghanistan.<sup>168</sup>

Under NATO’s purview, the members of the alliance (and participants outside of NATO) came together to launch Operation Unified Protector (OUP). Stavridis notes that 14 members of NATO provided forces for OUP, with four non-NATO countries providing military assets as well.<sup>169</sup> According to Stavridis, the following countries provided assets to the campaign, including:

- United States: Intel, aerial refueling, targeting, ordnance,
- France and the United Kingdom: tactical aircraft (flying over 40% of the sorties and destroying more than a third of all targets),
- Italy: reconnaissance aircraft,
- Greece and Spain: access to air bases,
- Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates: tactical air assets,
- Jordan, Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and Qatar: reinforcements to secure the no-fly zone.<sup>170</sup>

Many of the states listed above, combined with Bulgaria and Qatar, deployed naval assets to the Mediterranean to enforce the arms embargo against Libya.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Gaub, “The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Libya: Reviewing Operation Unified Protector,” vii.

<sup>167</sup> “Afghanistan,” NATO Parliamentary Assembly, last accessed: February 24, 2021, <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/afghanistan>

<sup>168</sup> Christopher Hasselbach, “Let Afghanistan Be a Lesson to US, NATO,” *Deutsche Welle*, November 9, 2020, <https://www.dw.com/en/opinion-afghanistan-9-11-us-nato/a-54873855>

<sup>169</sup> Stavridis, *The Accidental Admiral*, 57.

<sup>170</sup> Stavridis, 57.

<sup>171</sup> Stavridis, 57.

During the operation, NATO's latitude for operations was restrained by the language of UNSCR 1973, which focused on protecting the people of Libya from Qaddafi's harsh reprisals. When discussing UNSCR 1973's intention, Stavridis observes that the alliance, "interpreted to mean we could not directly target Qaddafi or members of his regime, put special forces on the ground or bring in the big guns. We were not authorized to do everything necessary to ensure regime change because that was not our mission."<sup>172</sup> These restrictions harkened back to the Kosovo campaign of 1999, another NATO operation that was essentially a large-scale air campaign against an overmatched force.

### C. REMEMBERING KOSOVO

NATO's involvement in Kosovo in 1999, known as Operation Allied Force, was seen as the next test for NATO in the post-Cold War era that had seen to alliance involved in other operations in Europe (to include Bosnia).<sup>173</sup> NATO intervened in Kosovo because it, according to Sperling and Webber, "was compelled to act (and then to see the action through), at least in part, out of an appreciation that its credibility was at stake."<sup>174</sup> Many of the reasons for getting involved in Kosovo would resurface in the leadup to the intervention in Libya, including the ugly memories of Bosnia and Rwanda.<sup>175</sup> U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stated, "we would have been judged very harshly if we allowed something like to happen again."<sup>176</sup> This view was shared by European leaders, who were keen on finding a way to make up for their failures in Bosnia.<sup>177</sup> Ultimately, like in Libya, the alliance initiated an intervention based on humanitarian grounds.

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<sup>172</sup> Stavridis, *The Accidental Admiral*, 56-57.

<sup>173</sup> Sperling and Webber, "NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul," 495,

<sup>174</sup> Sperling and Webber, 495.

<sup>175</sup> David Brown, "Kosovo and Libya: Lessons Learned for Limited Humanitarianism?" *Comparative Strategy* 38, no. 5 (September 2019):469, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2019.1653039>

<sup>176</sup> Sperling and Webber, "NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul," 495.

<sup>177</sup> Sperling and Webber, 495.

Operation Allied Force was an operation that included 14 NATO members conducting a 78-day air campaign aimed at forcing Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic to stop an ethnic cleansing campaign and come to the negotiating table in order to prevent further atrocities from occurring, such as the Racak massacre in January 1999.<sup>178</sup> The Racak massacre was an atrocity where 45 ethnic Albanians were murdered by Yugoslavian security forces near the town of Racak in southern Kosovo.<sup>179</sup> The massacre, according to U.S. diplomat William Walker, was a, “crime against humanity,” and was a catalyst for the NATO’s Operation Allied Force.<sup>180</sup> The Kosovo campaign offered NATO a chance to justify its continued importance in the post-Cold-War world while showing that the alliance’s association was balanced among the various members.<sup>181</sup> During the air campaign, the alliance split up the air sorties among the 14 participants with 60 percent being flown by the U.S. forces with the other 13 members allocating, according to Sperling and Webber, “about the same share of their available aircraft for prosecuting the campaign and virtually all the basing facilities, air traffic coordination, and supporting elements to keep the air armada of over 1,000 aircraft functioning throughout the conflict.”<sup>182</sup> While a ground campaign had been essentially completely ruled out by U.S. and European leaders, NATO’s extraction force was comprised solely of European soldiers.<sup>183</sup> While Operation Allied Force is a template for what the NATO partner’s wanted for OUP, the alliance wanted to avoid the deployment of ground troops as experienced in the latter stages of Allied Force.

During Operation Allied Force, the inter-workings among the allies became difficult at times, especially during the target list development stages.<sup>184</sup> As noted by

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<sup>178</sup> Sperling and Webber, “NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul,” 497.

<sup>179</sup> Valerie Plesch, “‘Memories Still Fresh’: Villagers Remember 1999 Racak Massacre,” *Al Jazeera*, January 16, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/1/16/memories-still-fresh-villagers-remember-1999-racak-massacre>

<sup>180</sup> Plesch, “‘Memories Still Fresh’: Villagers Remember 1999 Racak Massacre,”

<sup>181</sup> Brown, “Kosovo and Libya: Lessons Learned for Limited Humanitarianism?” 471.

<sup>182</sup> Sperling and Webber, “NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul,” 498.

<sup>183</sup> Sperling and Webber, 498.

<sup>184</sup> Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention,” 28.

General Wesley Clark (SACEUR during Operation Allied Force), “some countries wanted to add new targets and strike harder at the Serb ground forces. Other countries wanted to find reasons to announce a bombing pause for Easter. No consensus had emerged on the ultimate objective of NATO’s efforts or the extent of our resolve to prevail.”<sup>185</sup> Along similar lines arose due the various nations’ governments being able to individually review target lists prior to them being executed.<sup>186</sup> Clark notes that of this confusion regarding targeting was against the original plan, writing,

The original plans had presumed that SACEUR would have the authority to strike targets within overall categories specified by NATO political leaders, but Washington had introduced a target-by-target approval requirement. The other Allies began to be increasingly demanding, too. It was British law that targets struck by any aircraft based in the United Kingdom had to be approved by their lawyers, the French demanded greater insight into the targeting and strikes, and of course there had to be continuing consultation with NATO headquarters.<sup>187</sup>

The disconnect between the various nations on how to best conduct the air campaign dragged on well into the conflict, causing consternation with the NATO military leadership. However, as noted by Sperling and Webber, an alliance of 19 (at the time) nations were going to have serious disagreements on the use of military force.<sup>188</sup> Yet, the alliance appeared to be closer than it appeared due to the alliance remaining united (even if some members were against the operations) throughout the duration of the campaign.<sup>189</sup>

Kosovo was an important campaign for NATO to learn from, especially when looking into the lessons learned and how they could be applied in the Libya campaign. Operation Allied Force showed how NATO could be successful in a humanitarian crisis. As noted by then U.S. Secretary of Defense William Cohen, “had NATO not responded to Milosevic’s...campaign of ethnic cleansing, its credibility would have been called into

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<sup>185</sup> Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2001), 224.

<sup>186</sup> Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention,” 28.

<sup>187</sup> Clark, *Waging Modern War*, 224.

<sup>188</sup> Sperling and Webber, “NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul,” 499.

<sup>189</sup> Sperling and Webber, 499.

question.”<sup>190</sup> One of the key lessons learned in the air campaign was that no individual member of NATO could conduct such a large operation alone.<sup>191</sup> This gave additional credence to the often maligned effort of burden sharing, showing that the various air forces of NATO could come together to make one cohesive force capable of conducting a large air campaign. In the absence of a ground war, the implementation of strategic air strikes against Yugoslavian infrastructure (especially the strikes on critical industrial and economic centers) eventually forced Milosevic to enter peace negotiations.<sup>192</sup> However, Lambeth argues that the air campaign was not the full reason for Milosevic’s change of heart, writing that,

It had become clear that NATO had increasingly accepted the need to go ahead with a ground invasion in the event that its air effort alone failed to bring about a decisive outcome. Although senior officials in Washington remained highly resistant to proceeding with that course right up the very end, Milosevic cannot have failed to apprehend the implications of such a possibility.

In the end, Operation Allied Force revealed that solely using air power may ultimately achieve the desired results, but the results will take an extended of time to achieve compared to a ground assault.<sup>193</sup>

#### **D. NATO’S OPERATION AGAINST LIBYA**

Beyond the concern of NATO’s perceived fracturing, one of the main reason NATO decided to get involved in Libya was to protect the general population of Libya from harsh reprisals from Qaddafi’s forces.<sup>194</sup> Since ground operations were off the table, Operation Unified Protector would pit NATO’s planned force of 195 aircraft and 18 ships

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<sup>190</sup> Brown, “Kosovo and Libya: Lessons Learned for Limited Humanitarianism?” 470.

<sup>191</sup> Sperling and Webber, “NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul,” 497.

<sup>192</sup> Benjamin S. Lambeth, *Operation Allied Force: Lessons for the Future*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2001, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB75.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB75.html)

<sup>193</sup> Sperling and Webber, “NATO: From Kosovo to Kabul,” 497.

<sup>194</sup> Mikael Eriksson, “A Fratricidal Libya: Making Sense of a Conflict Complex,” *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 5, (August 2016): 817-836, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2016.1208794>

versus Qaddafi's 40 jets and 12 ships.<sup>195</sup> The extreme imbalance of forces was slightly countered by Qaddafi's ground forces, which included 160 tanks.<sup>196</sup> However, due to the rise of ideological ideas throughout the Libyan population, Qaddafi could no longer trust his troops, and this forced him to hire 25,000 mercenaries to supplement his force.<sup>197</sup> While NATO's initial aim was to protect civilians, as the operation continued the mission slowly and unintentionally began to transition into an operation to implement a regime change in Libya.<sup>198</sup> This shift occurred in April, when stakeholders in the operation (known as the Contact Group) convened and declared, "Qaddafi and his regime had lost all legitimacy and he must leave power... Qaddafi's continued presence would threaten any resolution of the crisis."<sup>199</sup> These calls for his removal continued, with the Contact Group reiterating his call for removal in May, which coincided with an endorsement for Qaddafi's removal by NATO's Secretary General.<sup>200</sup> While NATO had entered the conflict with Kosovo's air campaign as a playbook, the dynamic in country began to change due to the presence of Qaddafi's ground forces and mercenaries. Without its own ground force, NATO had to rely on the opposition's (the National Transitional Council [NTC]) ground elements to provide human intelligence on where NATO's air assaults could provide the best benefits.<sup>201</sup>

The situation on the ground between Qaddafi's forces and the opposition caused NATO's operational tempo to be slowed due to the fighting between the two being in close proximity to urban areas and infrastructure.<sup>202</sup> According to Barry, "NATO initially concentrated on countering the direct threat posed by government troops, particularly their

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<sup>195</sup> Ramoin, "Why Intervention in Libya was Justified," 14.

<sup>196</sup> Ramoin, "Why Intervention in Libya was Justified," 14.

<sup>197</sup> Ramoin, 14.

<sup>198</sup> Gaub, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Libya: Reviewing Operation Unified Protector," 21.

<sup>199</sup> "Libya Contact Group: Chari's Statement," London, UK: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, April 13, 2011, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/libya-contact-group-chairs-statement>

<sup>200</sup> Gaub, "The North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Libya: Reviewing Operation Unified Protector," 21.

<sup>201</sup> Ramoin, "Why Intervention in Libya was Justified," 14.

<sup>202</sup> Daalder and Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya," 3.

heavy weapons.”<sup>203</sup> Barry notes that by July 2011 the British and French began to interpret UNSCR 1973’s language differently, resulting in increasingly aggressive strikes against Qaddafi’s forces in an attempt to protect civilians.<sup>204</sup> As the operation continued, NATO air cover assisted in the attrition of Qaddafi’s ground forces, allowing NTC forces to slowly gain the upper hand.<sup>205</sup> By late August, NTC forces were able to take control of the major cities (and Qaddafi strongholds) of Tripoli and Sirte, resulting in Qaddafi going on the run and ending with his ultimate capture and execution by NTC elements in October 2011.<sup>206</sup>

## **E. ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST NATO’S INVOLVEMENT IN LIBYA**

Before and after the engagement in Libya, supporters and critics offered their opinion of NATO’s involvement in an intervention. While many believe that NATO’s involvement was justified due to UNSCR 1973’s mandate to protect Libya’s civilians from Qaddafi’s wrath while allowing the European militaries to take the lead, others (such as Gomis) felt NATO overstepped its boundaries and overstretched itself by taking on an additional mission set in addition to its already heavy presence in Afghanistan.<sup>207</sup> These arguments and others form the main talking points regarding NATO’s Operation Unified Protector.

### **1. The Argument for NATO’s Intervention**

The successful deployment of NATO forces in Libya showed that a consortium of European partners could successfully lead and win a relatively short military campaign. NATO’s response to the situation was largely successful due to the alliance’s ability to address the requirements it was charged with in UNSCR 1973, which was to establish a no-fly zone, enforce an arms embargo, and protect civilians on the ground.<sup>208</sup> Stavridis noted the operation was successful due to this accomplishment, which allowed, “the time

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<sup>203</sup> Ben Barry, “Libya’s Lessons,” *Survival* 53, no. 5 (October-November 2011): 5, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2011.621622>

<sup>204</sup> Barry, “Libya’s Lessons,” 5.

<sup>205</sup> Barry, 6.

<sup>206</sup> Daalder and Stavridis, “NATO’s Victory in Libya,” 3.

<sup>207</sup> Gomis, “Lessons from Libya,” 7.

<sup>208</sup> Resolution 1973, United Nations Security Council.

and space necessary for local forces to overthrow Muammar al-Qaddafi.”<sup>209</sup> The role of NATO was critical in achieving the three tasks of UNSCR 1973, especially with the support provided to the NTC, which was reliant upon NATO’s involvement in order to achieve victory.<sup>210</sup> These accomplishments provided NATO with tangible evidence for its supporters who advocated for its employment in Libya, and quieted critics that felt NATO should remain on the sidelines. The accomplishments included the integration of the participating NATO members and regional partners under a unified chain of command, and an ability for European nations to take a leading role in the operation.

The assumption of command by NATO allowed for the combination of the various nation led campaigns to be brought under the same umbrella. Stavridis writes, “NATO is uniquely positioned to respond quickly and effectively to international crises” and, “only NATO can provide the common command structure and capabilities necessary to plan and execute complex operations.”<sup>211</sup> Stavridis compares NATO’s capabilities to that of a cobbled together alliance (such as a coalition of the willing), who,

Have no common doctrine for conducting military operations, no common capabilities or command structure for quickly integrating national forces into a cohesive campaign, and no standing mechanisms for debating and then deciding on an agreed course of action. Such ad hoc coalitions therefore almost always rely disproportionately on a single nation to bear the brunt of security burdens that ideally should be more equally shared.<sup>212</sup>

Operation Unified Protector showed how the alliance can function and bring in the majority of its members into the operational planning process, while also allowing each member to bring their specific portion of the alliance to bear against an adversary (an example of burden sharing at work). This allowed 14 members of the alliance to integrate with one another and coordinate with four additional regional partners while working

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<sup>209</sup> Daalder and Stavridis, “NATO’s Victory in Libya,” 2.

<sup>210</sup> Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention,” 41.

<sup>211</sup> Daalder and Stavridis, “NATO’s Victory in Libya,” 3.

<sup>212</sup> Daalder and Stavridis, 2.



together under same roof and military framework.<sup>213</sup> In addition, OUP proved the alliance had the ability to bring the unique capabilities of each participating country into an integrated structure, and showed the alliance had additional flexibility outside of the U.S. equipment; this demonstrated that NATO was a military and political alliance.<sup>214</sup>

The second positive factor in NATO's involvement in Libya was the opportunity for the European nations, especially Great Britain and France, to have an opportunity to take the lead in directing operations. Hallams and Schreer note, "the mission demonstrated that key European allies such as France and Britain were willing to 'step up' and take on a greater share of the burden," and, "in this battle, Europeans took the lead, demonstrating that they can and will use force when they have the political will to do so."<sup>215</sup> In addition, OUP allowed for European military hardware and capabilities to be showcased while allowing the European members an opportunity to identify areas where its military had gaps that could be addressed in the future. As noted by Chivvis when discussing the European's leading role, "given the relative success of the operation, the experience of Libya is one the alliance should reflect and seek to build upon."<sup>216</sup>

The success of NATO's military operation in Libya reinforced the belief by NATO's supporters that the alliance has successfully been able to metamorphosize from its original goal of providing deterrence against the Soviet Union to, as Stavridis states, becoming "the partner of choice for international security operations."<sup>217</sup> All of this was done with no losses to NATO personnel throughout the course of Operation Unified Protector.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Ellen Hallams and Benjamin Schreer, "Towards a 'Post-American Alliance? NATO Burden-Sharing After Libya," *Chatham House* 88, no. 2 (March 2012), 322-323, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41428608>

<sup>214</sup> Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," 41.

<sup>215</sup> Hallams and Schreer, "Towards a 'Post-American Alliance? NATO Burden-Sharing After Libya," 323.

<sup>216</sup> Chivvis, "Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention," 42.

<sup>217</sup> Daalder and Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya," 5.

<sup>218</sup> Barry, "Libya's Lessons," 7.

## 2. Criticism Against NATO's Intervention

NATO's involvement in Libya opened itself to criticism by a plethora of sources who believed the alliance was wrong to intervene in another situation outside of Europe, especially with the alliance heavily embroiled with operations in Afghanistan (even though NATO had the capacity to conduct multiple engagements).<sup>219</sup> Critics pointed to the quote from NATO's first secretary general, Lord Hastings Ismay, who said NATO's purpose was to, "keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down."<sup>220</sup> The criticism levied by detractors indicated that the alliance had moved too far beyond its intended function and that it has reached a moment when it must conduct a review of the alliance's role moving forward.<sup>221</sup>

Regarding its participation in Libya, the first major criticism levied against NATO was the concern that the alliance had overstretched itself from both a command and resource point of view.<sup>222</sup> This view stems from the economic struggles the members were facing after the global recession of 2008, which resulted in the cutting of defense budgets of the alliance's members.<sup>223</sup> As noted by Gomis, "defense spending by the European alliance members declined by more than 45 billion dollars between 2009 and 2011, which led U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates to warn that NATO was facing 'very serious, long-term, systematic problems' because of 'Europe's demilitarization'."<sup>224</sup> Gomis notes that the United States was also in a budget crisis, noting that then Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen had stated, "the U.S. national debt was the country's single biggest security threat."<sup>225</sup>

Another issue with NATO's role (and along economic lines) in Libya is the perception that NATO had become the protector of the West's economies, specifically the

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<sup>219</sup> Gomis, "Lessons from Libya," 7.

<sup>220</sup> Gomis, 7.

<sup>221</sup> Gomis, 7.

<sup>222</sup> Gomis, 8.

<sup>223</sup> Gomis, 8.

<sup>224</sup> Gomis, 8.

<sup>225</sup> Gomis, 8.

protector of Wall Street.<sup>226</sup> Campbell observes that the mass expansion of NATO from 12 members in 1991 to 28 members in 2009 was done as a means to protect the globalized economies of the larger members and to give the west, “a transnational military force capable of intervening in any part of the world to protect ‘investments’ and ‘free markets’.”<sup>227</sup> Campbell claims that NATO’s main reasoning for getting involved in operations outside of Europe is a ruse for western nations to gain a foothold in additional territories for financial gain via economic means or new resource acquisition.<sup>228</sup>

In terms of the ability for the alliance to take on such a large endeavor without the full military support of the United States, some critics point out that the other members of NATO had major issues filling in the void left by the United States’ pullback.<sup>229</sup> Allin and Jones note that the remaining participants were running out of precision guided munitions (PGMs) by mid-April, resulting in the U.S. sending in unmanned strike assets (drones) to supplement gaps in the alliance’s strike portfolio.<sup>230</sup> Erlanger observes that Libya, “has been a war where the Danes and Norwegians did an extraordinary number of the combat sorties, given their size. Their planes and pilots became exhausted, as the French finally pulled back their sole nuclear-powered aircraft carrier for overdue repairs and Italy withdrew its aircraft carrier to save money.”<sup>231</sup> These topics are concerning if looking at it from the angle that the European powers cannot operate a large offensive without full U.S. support, especially among critics who feel some NATO partners have taken on an ‘a la carte strategy when committing military capabilities to the alliance.<sup>232</sup> While burden-sharing is meant to fill in the gaps of capabilities across the spectrum of the alliance, the lack of specialized assets by some countries may lead to an over reliance on the United

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<sup>226</sup> Campbell, Horace, *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya*, 41.

<sup>227</sup> Campbell, Horace, *Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya*, 40.

<sup>228</sup> Campbell, Horace, 42-43.

<sup>229</sup> Allin and Jones, “As Good as it Gets?”

<sup>230</sup> Allin and Jones, “As Good as it Gets?”

<sup>231</sup> Daniel Erlanger, “Libya’s Dark Lesson for NATO,” *The New York Times*, September 3, 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/sunday-review/what-libyas-lessons-mean-for-nato.html>

<sup>232</sup> Hallams and Schreer, “Towards a ‘Post-American Alliance? NATO Burden-Sharing After Libya,” 322.

States, which may not be able to provide the required amount of assets if a similar multi-campaign situation were to occur in the future.

In 2011, the United States, like its European partners, was dealing with financial woes of its own. The United States faced a challenge itself when it came to PGM allocation, especially with the high demand for these weapons in the other conflicts (Iraq and Afghanistan) the United States was embroiled in. The common theme of economics comes back into the discussion, with the U.S. government struggling to keep the stockpiles full of PGMs. Allin and Jones note, “apart from the potential human cost of any combat operations, cruise missiles and precision-guided munitions deployed from existing stockpiles all have to be replaced. The accuracy such weapons offer comes at a frightening time when Democrats and Republicans are threatening to shut down the government over a difference of a few billion dollars.”<sup>233</sup>

The final major criticism of NATO’s intervention in Libya is the lack of consensus among the alliance members on whether each would participate or not. Critics note that of the 28 members (at that time) of NATO, only eight actively engaged in offensive operations against Libya.<sup>234</sup> As discussed in Chapter II, Germany decided not to participate but allowed its forces within NATO to assist with the operation as necessary. In terms of Poland, Chivvis notes that it refrained from employing its fleet of F-16s due to its concern over its pilots having the proper training for such an operation.<sup>235</sup> Chivvis believes that Poland’s excuse not to participate emboldened the other members to find excuses of their own to refrain from having to participate.<sup>236</sup> This lack of cohesion may have undermined the credibility of the alliance on the international stage, possibly showcasing to other potential adversaries that NATO was fractured and may be hesitant to fully commit to other combat operations.

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<sup>233</sup> Allin and Jones, “As Good as it Gets?”

<sup>234</sup> Daniel Erlanger, “Libya’s Dark Lesson for NATO.”

<sup>235</sup> Chivvis, “Strategic and Political Overview of the Intervention,” 29.

<sup>236</sup> Chivvis, 29.

## **F. JUDGING THE ARGUMENTS**

Each side of the argument for and against NATO's intervention in Libya provide valid arguments. Based on the objectives laid out in UNSCR 1973, NATO's decision to intervene was the correct choice. If NATO decided to stay on the sidelines, the four separate operations may have led to confusion among the players as there would not have been a single command-and-control infrastructure in place to organize the aircraft and other assets. This may have increased the chances of a blue-on-blue situation or resulted in unnecessary collateral damage (to include civilian casualties). In addition, the consolidation of participating nations under NATO's roof allowed for the members to see that the fragmentation was a negative thing in the long run, as the coalitions of the willing that may have formed would not have the same level of cooperation or infrastructure to work with.

The critics of the campaign offer valid points as well. The concern that NATO was overstretching itself was largely dismissed as the assets required for the operation were available. The strongest criticism, the concern that the European military budgets did not allow for a prolonged operation, proved to be somewhat valid. However, this criticism may be used as a learning point for the future. Shortages of PGMs can be addressed for possible future operations, especially with the knowledge base that offers data on the rate of expenditure of these munitions and the probability that an operation may take longer than initially planned. Finally, the concern that the alliance entered the conflict without a consensus can also be dismissed. The operation showed that NATO's role is critical in having a central location where the issues of the day, both political and military, can be discussed and addressed. If a coalition of the willing conducted the operation, the discussions would have taken place in several different locations, possibly in several countries and/or time zones.

Ultimately, the operation was a success and reinvigorated NATO. Nation's attempting to distance themselves from the alliance found that it would be detrimental to their security,

especially as the security environment in Europe and the surrounding areas would deteriorate with the ongoing Syrian Civil War and Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> John Simpson, "Russia's Crimea Plan Detailed, Secret and Successful," *BBC*, March 19, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26644082>

## IV. CONCLUSION

The legacy of the intervention in Libya remains to be determined as the outcome of the removal of the Qaddafi regime continues to evolve. However, the lessons provided from the intervention are important for the members of NATO as these lessons can be applied to future NATO operations. This thesis worked to answer the question of what compelled the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and ultimately NATO to get involved in an intervention against Libya. The research conducted for this thesis revealed the political motivations of the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany and revealed how political motivations played into their ultimate decision of whether or not to participate in the intervention in Libya. For those who chose to participate, their reasons to do so ranged from the desire to gain political clout in an election year to preventing a repeat in history regarding another humanitarian crisis. For Germany, its reasons to abstain stemmed from its domestic population's lack of enthusiasm for further military operations by Germany's armed forces, especially as Germany's role in Afghanistan had gotten increasingly unpopular. The lack of domestic support, combined with the previously discussed eleventh hour change of heart by the United States, forced the Germans to abstain from the operation. The research also identified the reasoning for the United States and the United Kingdom to spurn France's desire to conduct an intervention using a coalition of the willing vice NATO. While France was keen on leading such a coalition due to its own political reasons, the United States and United Kingdom felt the most efficient means to conduct the operation were through the use of NATO's established command and control capabilities, while allowing the United States the opportunity to shift the responsibility onto its European partners. NATO accepted the task of assuming the command-and-control functions of the operation due to its own political reasons, including its desire to stop the fracturing of the alliance and bring the members together under NATO's auspices as a way to conduct political coordination and cooperation.

The domestic political maneuvering conducted by the various members of NATO will continue to pose challenges to the NATO construct as each nation has a different set

of challenges to deal with regarding their respective populations. As seen in the lead up to Libya, neighboring nations such as France and Germany had populations that were on opposite ends of the spectrum regarding the matter, thus influencing the course their respective nations took. These situations are where NATO can be extremely useful and can showcase its superiority over coalitions of the willing, especially if the alliance provides a forum for its members to conduct political coordination and cooperation. In addition to dealing with the political motivations of its various members, NATO can use this forum to bring the alliance closer together in an effort to stamp out talk of separate coalitions of the willing that may undermine the larger alliance. Finally, NATO can apply the lessons learned of how burden sharing affected operations in Libya and how these lessons can be used to identify the utility of burden sharing going forward and how it may be adjusted to the betterment of the alliance.

#### **A. UTILIZING NATO FOR POLITICAL COORDINATION**

As the research demonstrated, the lessons learned from the intervention against Libya are important to remember for future operations. One of the most glaring issues with Operation Unified Protector was the lack of a clear strategy. As noted in Chapter III, the initial aim of the intervention in Libya was to prevent the Qaddafi regime from conducting genocide against the opposition, using UNSCR 1973 as the guiding principle. In the leadup to the intervention, the French desire to lead a coalition of the willing showed the fragmentation that was apparent among the alliance at that time. If the French had been successful in their venture, even if it was a coalition between the French and the British through their defense treaty, the outcome of the operation may have been in doubt due to the lack of resource available to them for an extended operation.

The use of a no-fly zone demonstrated the limitations of an all-air campaign. As noted by Metz, air power is limited in a campaign because, “an irregular force can disperse, go to ground, and wait out the storm, then reconstitute and resume operations. Nor can air



attacks be sustained at a ‘shock and awe’ level for a protracted length of time.”<sup>238</sup> In addition, Metz observes, “airpower cannot control territory or populations on its own or stabilize a post-conflict state to pave the way for long-term stability.”<sup>239</sup> He notes that the only effective means to accomplish these goals is through the deployment of ground troops. If the participating countries believed that Qaddafi’s forces would be persuaded to seize their actions due to a shock and awe over the course of a few days their hopes were dashed quickly, leading to an extended period of bombing and ultimately to shortages of munitions among the European members.<sup>240</sup>

The discussion over the utility of a no-fly zone is a perfect example of how the alliance can use NATO as a forum to discuss such matters. Instead of allowing the debate to occur within the various members’ war rooms and instead occur within the chambers of NATO HQ. This would have nipped the conversation in the bud much sooner, showcasing how any sort of no-fly zone would require the participation of a majority of the alliance due to its reliance on burden sharing. A coalition of the willing may not have had the prerequisite equipment to effectively defeat Libya’s air defense systems without the participation of the United States, which is able to bring specialized equipment to a conflict that the other members do not have.<sup>241</sup>

Another attribute to using NATO as a forum for coordination and cooperation is the ability to develop strategy for operations under the same roof. This would prevent a repeat of the early phases of the intervention, when the four concurrent operations were being conducted by the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Canada. The deployment of military forces by several countries, without coordination, can lead to mishaps in the field and increase potential collateral damage risks to innocent civilians on the ground. By coordinating with each other at NATO HQ, operations can be streamlined

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<sup>238</sup> Steven Metz, “For U.S., Ignoring the Limitations of Airpower a Recipe for Disaster,” *World Politics Review*, January 29, 2016, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/17806/for-u-s-ignoring-the-limitations-of-airpower-a-recipe-for-disaster>

<sup>239</sup> Metz, “For U.S., Ignoring the Limitations of Airpower a Recipe for Disaster.”

<sup>240</sup> Allin and Jones, “As Good as it Gets?”

<sup>241</sup> Obama, *A Promised Land*, 658-65

beforehand and allow for an operation to be conducted under the purview of a unified chain of command. This contrasts greatly with a coalition of the willing, which would not have the same level of coordination and integration and may lead to more gaps in military capabilities due to the concept of burden sharing not being effectively implemented among the willing members.

The idea of using NATO as a means for political coordination and cooperation are key recommendations in NATO's report titled, "NATO 2030: United for a New Era."<sup>242</sup> The report notes that it may become more difficult for the alliance to reach a consensus due to the variety of threats that each member faces individually (and may not be shared by other members).<sup>243</sup> However, it notes that variety of threats faced by each member makes the existence of NATO more relevant due to the protection the alliance offers. The report also addresses the dangers of fracturing among the alliance due to the ability of adversaries to take advantage of these fragmented sections, thus reducing the effectiveness of the collective defense.<sup>244</sup> The report's main finding states,

The overarching political objective for NATO must be to consolidate the transatlantic Alliance to ensure that it possesses the tools, cohesion, and consultative attributes to provide collective defense in this more challenging landscape. NATO's political dimension must adapt in order to maintain and strengthen its efficiency as well as ensuring its relevance for all allies.

## **B. ADDRESSING THE SHORTCOMINGS OF BURDEN SHARING**

Operation Unified Protector offers the most recent evidence of how burden sharing is working within NATO. As previously discussed, OUP came on the heels of the global recession of the late aughts. Each member nation faced budget shortfalls due to the recession, exacerbating the funding shortcomings of some members prior to the recession. The extended operations caused by the refusal of the Qaddafi regime to relent and the ultimate shift from a humanitarian mission to a regime change mission, brought these

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<sup>242</sup> NATO, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era*, NDC Policy Brief 23-20 (Brussels, Belgium: NATO, 2020), [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/12/pdf/201201-Reflection-Group-Final-Report-Uni.pdf)

<sup>243</sup> NATO, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era*.

<sup>244</sup> NATO, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era*.

shortcomings to light. As noted in Chapter III, the stockpiles of PGMs were exhausted and several participating nations had to recall forces due to funding concerns.<sup>245</sup> It can be argued that the prevalence of burden shifting among the alliance led to such shortcomings. OUP was unique in that the United States did not provide offensive forces for much of the operation, and only rejoined offensive operations once the European members began to run low on PGMs.

The question of burden sharing among NATO allies will continue to be a hotly debated topic. However, the initial portion of Operation Unified Protector proved that burden sharing did work. It was not until the operation extended beyond what was initially expected did the issue of munition expenditure and overall finances become an issue. These issues bring back the comparison to France's initial desire to conduct a coalition of the willing. If France had succeeded in obtaining such a coalition, the issues of munition expenditures, wear and tear on equipment, and pilot fatigue (as mentioned in Chapter III) would have increased exponentially due to the operation being conducted by a smaller force. In addition, if a coalition had been formed without the United States' participation, the ability to ask for drone support may not have been possible (or at least severely delayed).

Despite the shortcomings of burden sharing, OUP showed the benefits of the construct and offered data points to the alliance on where there were shortcomings in the collective defense construct. These lessons would be important due to the events of 2014, when Russian forces conducted a surprise invasion into the Ukraine.<sup>246</sup> This action was an impetus for the alliance to agree to stop the decline in defense funding and to pledge two percent of their respective gross domestic product toward defense.<sup>247</sup> This pledge allows for the fielding of new technology throughout the alliance, such as Britain's two Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers (the second ship, the HMS Prince of Wales, was on the

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<sup>245</sup> Erlanger, "Libya's Dark Lesson for NATO."

<sup>246</sup> NATO, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era*.

<sup>247</sup> "Allied Leaders Pledge to Reverse Defense Cuts, Reaffirm Transatlantic Bond," NATO, September 4, 2014, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_112461.htm?](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_112461.htm?)

chopping block prior to the summit).<sup>248</sup> While the United Kingdom has traditionally spent above the two percent goal, other countries such as Germany have increased defense spending in recent years, with its 2021 expenditures on defense rising to 1.57% of GDP compared to 1.36% in 2020.<sup>249</sup> The positive effects of the Wales Summit on burden sharing was mentioned in NATO 2030, “the pledge represents an unwavering commitment of each Ally toward collective defense, and the Allies have made substantial efforts toward fairer burden-sharing since these goals were set.”<sup>250</sup>

Ultimately, the alliance must continue to work together to identify the best way to make burden sharing work for the future. If the alliance is to survive and thrive in the future, it would be wise for the members to identify what the collective defense should look like and leverage the burden sharing construct to ensure that the alliance can field a formidable force against aggressors and without glaring holes that could be exploited or shortcomings that may undermine the effectiveness of the alliance.

### C. FINAL THOUGHTS

With the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of OUP occurring this year, the current political situation among the alliance’s members bears similarities to the political situation of 2010. The onset of the global coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic may pose similar issues to the bottom line of the defense departments of the various alliance members as they address the financial fallout of the pandemic in the coming years. The financial recovery experienced by the European members from 2015–2019 may ultimately be for naught if the fallout from the pandemic results in new cuts to defense spending. As noted by Marcos, “it took until 2018, 10 years after the outbreak of the crisis, for defense expenditures in Europe to recover

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<sup>248</sup> *UK Aircraft Carrier Prince of Wales to go Into Service*, BBC, September 5, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-29075307>.

<sup>249</sup> Leah Carter, “Germany Reports Record €53 Billion in NATO Defense Spending,” *Deutsche Welle*, February 7, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-reports-record-53-billion-in-nato-defense-spending/a-56491017>

<sup>250</sup> NATO, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era*.

their pre-crisis levels, which were already low.”<sup>251</sup> These low levels were the result of post-Cold War budget reductions, which former NATO Secretary General Rasmussen equated to “a point when you are no longer cutting fat; you’re cutting into muscle, and then into bone.”<sup>252</sup> However, the political environment faced in a post-COVID world may make it difficult for the alliance to continue on the path toward the two percent goal as some political organizations work to shift defense funding into other social programs to help their citizens recover from the effects of the pandemic.<sup>253</sup>

NATO’s 2030 report offers an opinion on COVID-19 and how it may affect the alliance, stating that

the COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated, in dramatic and unexpected fashion, the deleterious effects that pandemics can have not only to the public health of NATO citizenries but to social resilience and security, both by reorienting policy attention and scarce resources, and fueling international rivalry and confrontation. It has accelerated the digitalization of NATO societies and, in the coming years, could reduce defense spending.<sup>254</sup>

The ramifications of COVID-19 may cause a lasting effect on the bottom line of the alliances various defense departments as the Great Recession did previously. However, the threat of a resurgent Russia is the main difference from what NATO was facing in 2010. This leads to some additional questions for further research. First, will NATO’s members be able to reach the defense spending goals established at the 2014 Wales Summit, or will the post COVID-19 world make it too difficult or politically challenging to allocate the appropriate funds to the alliance? Second, will the alliance’s members utilize burden sharing effectively to identify the best ways to appropriate funds toward filling in gaps in the collective defense the alliance provides? These questions are important in identifying

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<sup>251</sup> Pierre Morcos, “Towards a New ‘Lost Decade’? Covid-19 and Defense Spending in Europe,” *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, October 15, 2020, [https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/201015\\_Morcos\\_Toward\\_Lost\\_Decade.pdf](https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/201015_Morcos_Toward_Lost_Decade.pdf)

<sup>252</sup> Marcos “Towards a New ‘Lost Decade’?”

<sup>253</sup> Rozana Tiron and Anthony Capaccio, “Progressives Face Tough Road in Bid to Cut Biden Defense Budget,” *Bloomberg*, February 23, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-02-23/pentagon-spending-may-escape-deep-budget-cuts-key-senator-says>

<sup>254</sup> NATO, *NATO 2030: United for a New Era*.

how the alliance can adjust to the new environment and address the ongoing question of how to properly fund and align the collective defense of the NATO alliance.

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