



# Conference of Defence Associations Institute

## OPENING STATEMENT

TESTIMONY OF

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TO THE

**HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENCE**

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Chair, Honourable Members:

It is a privilege to be asked to appear before you today as part of your study of NATO's Strategic Concept and Canada's Role in International Defence Cooperation. In my opening remarks I will be drawing from a study, *Leading from Behind is Still Leading*, recently published by the Conference of Defence Associations Institute, where I am a Defence Analyst. In my comments, I will focus on the lessons that can be drawn from the Libyan operation regarding future NATO-led military deployments.

### Operations in Libya

In February of last year, the Arab Spring spread to Libya, prompting large scale protests on the streets of Benghazi. The regime of Col. Muammar Gaddafi responded with escalating levels of

violence, ultimately threatening to show no mercy to the protestors. In response, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1973 on March 17th, authorizing all necessary measures to protect Libyan civilians. Two days later, American, British and French forces launched Operation *Odyssey Dawn*, striking Libyan air defences.

NATO quickly launched what became Operation *Unified Protector* to enforce the UN mandate. A naval mission to support an arms embargo was launched March 22<sup>nd</sup>, and on March 31<sup>st</sup> Canadian Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard assumed command of the NATO-led No-Fly Zone over Libya. NATO's goals were threefold:

1) An end to attacks against civilians;

- 2) The return to base of all regime military, paramilitary, and mercenary forces, and;
- 3) Unhindered humanitarian access for all Libyans

By the conclusion of the mission on October 31, 2011, NATO had flown more than 26,000 sorties. Of these, Canada contributed 6% of the total, and roughly 10% of the strike sorties. In addition, our maritime forces made a crucial contribution to the defence of Misrata, preventing the city's fall to pro-regime forces at a crucial point in the campaign.

## **Lessons for NATO**

### Operational Success

Operation *Unified Protector* was highly successful, ensuring the protection of Libyan civilians while keeping collateral damage to a bare minimum. In doing so, it proved the value of NATO command and control, standardization and interoperability arrangements. As the brief timeline of events provided earlier demonstrates, the alliance was able to bring together disparate operational forces in a span of roughly two weeks, an achievement that no other multilateral organization could match.

Furthermore, the operation also demonstrated NATO's ability to work effectively with partner nations. Qatar,

the UAE, and other regional actors played a significant role in the mission, providing unique capabilities and serving as interlocutors with the anti-Gaddafi forces. This validates the cooperative security initiative articulated in the 2010 Strategic Concept.

In sum, *Unified Protector* demonstrated that under the right conditions, and enabled by special operations forces, NATO's air and maritime assets can conduct an effective intervention.

### Burden-Sharing Shortfalls

At the same time, Operation *Unified Protector* exposed a number of shortcomings with respect to NATO burden-sharing.

Despite statements that the United States demonstrated the virtues of 'Leading from Behind' in Libya, operations there demonstrated the extent of NATO's reliance on the American military. US forces conducted that largest share of strike sorties, including the majority of the initial strikes that disabled Libyan air defences, permitting NATO to enforce the No-Fly Zone over effectively undefended skies. More importantly, US forces contributed the majority of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and airborne warning and air control assets, suppressed enemy air defences, contributed 80% of refuelling flights, and provided combat search and

rescue. It was also the United States that re-supplied member nations after their initial stocks of munitions were exhausted.

In short, while the US military did not play a publically prominent role in Libya, without key American assets, the mission would not have happened. How the United States implements its defence reductions and pivot to Asia will therefore be highly consequential for future NATO operations.

This dependence upon the United States is important, because the contributions of other NATO members to Operation *Unified Protector* were highly uneven, a fact that US Defence Secretary Robert Gates attributed to shortcomings in capability and will. As a result, only 8 NATO members contributed to the air campaign, and some of those nations were not permitted to conduct strike sorties. The Libyan campaign may have also provided an early harbinger of how these burden sharing issues may worsen as the European financial crisis unfolds. Some contributors were forced to withdraw their assets early due to funding shortfalls.

Finally, the Libyan operation demonstrated both the potential benefits of NATO's Smart Defence initiative, but also the likely challenges inherent in realizing it. The alliance's dependence on American refueling

capabilities, for instance, points to the need for greater coordination between NATO's other members in obtaining a number of operational enablers. If Smart Defence can help increase NATO's capabilities in these areas, it will help reduce the alliance's reliance on the United States and improve its ability to conduct crisis management operations.

At the same time, Germany's decision to withdraw its pilots from the NATO AWACS contribution to Operation *Unified Protector* suggests that implementing Smart Defence will likely be highly challenging. Both the specialization and cooperation initiatives envisioned in a 'Smarter' NATO will ultimately require that contributing nations are willing to deploy their assets on operations. Otherwise, the alliance may gain enabling capabilities, but still experience burden sharing shortfalls when the time comes to deploy them operationally.

To conclude, Libya demonstrated NATO's vital operational benefits, including standardization, interoperability and command and control arrangements that are unmatched. Yet the Libyan operation also demonstrates that burden sharing challenges persist within the alliance. As a result, while NATO will remain an important element of Canada's role in international defence cooperation, we should be realistic about the

contributions individual members will make to crisis response operations. Not all nations will make an equal contribution to future missions, but this does not undermine the value gained by operating under NATO command.

As a result, Canada should work to develop even stronger working relationships with the subset of NATO

members, including France, Britain, and the United States, that we are likely to operate alongside in the future. Focusing any Canadian Smart Defence efforts at this key group of alliance members would provide the greatest net benefit for any future Canadian contribution to a NATO crisis management response.