

AIR POWER AS AN INSTRUMENT OF COERCIVE DIPLOMACY

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An airplane was first used in war on October 23, 1911, in the Italo-Turkish War in Libya.¹ As we approach this momentous date that marks a century of the use of manned aircraft in conflict, it is indeed ironic and fortuitous, that air power is being used in anger in, of all the places, Libya, once again. Some writers have started writing the obituary of air power and, indeed, of air forces.² This paper examines the prognosis for war taking place in a unipolar world (which is the likely scenario for the coming decade or two) and leads on to studying the effectiveness of air power as an instrument of coercive diplomacy, taking the ongoing Libyan crisis as a test case.

The world became a more peaceful place after nuclear weapons came into being! This sounds odd, but is true. With two nuclear groupings, the US-led Western alliance being one and the Soviet Union the other, the number of conflicts was restricted unless the vital interests of one of the two protagonists were infringed upon. Solutions were obtained through armed action by nations that acted as proxies of the two superpowers. The violence too was controlled

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1. <http://www.britannica.com/facts/11/1070981/Italo-Turkish-War-as-discussed-in-air-force>, accessed on July 10, 2011.
2. For example, see Martin van Creveld, *The Age of Airpower* (New York: Public Affairs Group, 2011), pp. 423-441.

Why has there been such an outburst of violent behaviour in a world that is supposedly turning increasingly 'civilised' with the passage of time, globalisation and propagation of democratic belief?

and modulated by them through remote control;³ due to the leverages that the two superpowers had with their client states, they were in a position to coerce them to do their bidding.

The demise of the Soviet Empire and the creation of a unipolar world disturbed the equilibrium in the world order and the United Nations (UN) had its hands full with conflicts to resolve. The UN Special Committee on the Balkans (1947-52) was the first mission to be set up after the formation of the UN.⁴ Between 1947 and 1990, 21 UN operations were instituted but

in just the decade after the end of the Cold War, i.e. till the beginning of the 21st century, 32 new missions were launched! Between 1987 and 1994, the Security Council increased by a factor of four the number of resolutions it issued, tripled the peace-keeping operations it authorised and multiplied by seven the number of economic sanctions imposed per year.⁵ These figures pale in comparison to the violence seen in some of the bloodiest and long enduring engagements that the world has been witness to — Iraq and Bosnia in the 1990s, Afghanistan, and then Iraq again in this century.

Why has there been such an outburst of violent behaviour in a world that is supposedly turning increasingly 'civilised' with the passage of time, globalisation and propagation of democratic belief? Will things cool down if the world sees a return of the two or multi-bloc system, where a balance of power and calculated and coordinated strategies of the two/three powerful leading nations rein in violence? Possibly so,⁶ and if so, will it be the return of the Russian glory or the continued rise of a resurgent China that will provide the compensatory force?

3. Richard H. Shultz Jr, "Compellence and the Role of Airpower as a Political Instrument," *Comparative Strategy*, vol. 1, no. 1, January-March 1992 (London: Russak), p. 21.
4. Michael Doyle and Nicholas Sambanis, "Peace-Keeping Operations," in Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws, eds., *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 328.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 333.
6. Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company Inc, 1979), pp. 161, 192.

Russia would take a finite time to set its house in order before providing the balancing power.⁷ It is China which is the endurance runner in the game, as it follows Deng Xiaoping's policy of peaceful development and peaceful rise in the 21st century. Jiang Zemin summarised this as the oft quoted "28 character directive" which downplays China's ambitions but affirms a long-term strategy to build up its comprehensive national power with a view to maximise its options *in the future* (emphasis added).⁸ There is, thus, a void that existed in the past twenty years and is likely to continue for at least the next decade or so till bipolarity or multipolarity is reestablished in the world order. Consequently, the challenges to deterrence in practice are broader and deeper now than they were during the Cold War.⁹ The loss of the balancing force has resulted in a multitude of intra-state conflicts, starting from those in the Balkans in the last century to the ones that the world is witnessing today in Africa and the Arab world. It is these latest upheavals that are engaging the attention of the international community, as the yearning for democracy and the desire to overthrow totalitarian regimes grip the masses.

The conflict in Libya has played out differently and has brought into sharp focus the limitations of deterrence and compellence, as we know them.

The jasmine revolution in Tunisia and the subsequent one in Egypt have resulted in a change of regimes and the method of governance through the power of the people. Though the right diplomatic noises were made by the democratic nations of the world, especially the Western powers, no external military armed help was provided. The conflict in Libya has played out differently and has brought into sharp focus the limitations of deterrence and compellence, as we know them. The primary instrument used for coercion has been air power, an instrument which has achieved an almost seductive status

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7. Gp Capt Tim D. Q. Below, "US Nuclear Deterrence – An Opportunity for President Obama to Lead by Example," *The Air and Space Power Journal*, vol. XXIII, no. 4, Winter 2009 (Alabama: Maxwell AF Base), p. 91.
 8. Xu Xin, "The Chinese Concept of Twenty Years Strategic Opportunities" in N. S. Sisodia and V. Krishnappa, eds., *Global Power Shifts and Strategic Transition in Asia* (New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2009), p. 61.
 9. Janice Gross Stein, "Rational Deterrence Against Irrational Adversaries?" in T. V. Paul, Patrick M. Morgan and James J. Wirtz, eds., *Complex Deterrence Strategy in the Global Age* (Cambridge University Press India Ltd, 2009), p. 75.

among the power wielders; this is in line with the increasing overreliance by the United States (and as a corollary, the Western nations) on military actions to further national goals.¹⁰ Following the internal upheaval that began in Libya on February 15, 2011, the first air strike by the United States took place on March 19, 2011, followed by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) taking over the responsibility; it has been five months since then, with no end to the conflict in view. This paper will examine whether, after its spectacular showing in the Gulf War in 1991, air power is losing its credibility as a primary tool for military deterrence and compellence in a world that is becoming increasingly more volatile.

COERCIVE ACTIONS

Deterrence and compellence are not necessarily only of the military kind; in fact, economic and political sanctions, along with a host of other measures, constitute the 'bouquet' of actions that can be brought to bear on an adversary. But deterrence as theory and strategy by itself has been under a cloud, with regard to the low efficacy shown in the Seventies and Eighties and later when new nuclear weapon states came into being.¹¹ To study the link between deterrence and compellence with air power, it would be necessary to evaluate how their salient characteristics intermesh.

In simple terms, deterring means to persuade an adversary to desist from initiating an action and not take a step that he is contemplating; and if he does that, then to initiate action toward that end along with a threat of further actions to come — all this, while the main military body is kept in reserve as the deterrent force to prevent the adversary from expanding the scope of the conflict.¹² Compellence is the *actual* application of force to make an adversary *do* something or stop and/or retrace his steps if he has already commenced doing what he was being warned against. There is, thus, passivity in deterrence but affirmative action in compellence. These two diverse actions

10. Cathy Downes, "Unintentional Militarism: Over-Reliance on Military Methods and Mindsets in US National Security and its Consequences," *Defence and Security Analysis*, vol. 26, no. 4 (Routledge Publication), p. 371.

11. T. V. Paul, "Complex Deterrence" in T. V. Paul et al., eds., n. 9, pp. 3-4.

12. Glenn H. Snyder, *Deterrence and Defense* (New Jersey: Princetown University Press, 1961), p. 11.

form the root cause of many irrational decisions taken by adversaries, bringing into question the basic factor of rationality required for deterrence and compellence to follow the 'designated' sequence; this has a bearing on the outcome of the use of air power, which, as will be argued, is modulating the actions of the Gaddafi regime.

PREREQUISITE OF RATIONALITY

Deterrence and compellence require both sides to have 'rational' responses, where cost benefit analyses form the basis of decision-making. Thus, a challenger in a situation of being deterred weighs the losses or 'punishment' that he would endure were he to take actions contrary to what the deterrer wants. This is for a rational adversary, but what if he does not calculate the costs involved and is motivated instead by reasons that persuaded him to take steps inviting retribution? These causes can be many and could be due to weak bureaucracies, internal strife or ideological and religious reasons. Historically, states faced with imminent defeat or those that are subject to significant punishment from stronger rivals do not do a rethink on the costs that they are being subjected to. Similarly, political leaders who are deeply wedded to a cause or have staked their reputation to a stand they have taken, dig in their heels even in the face of irrefutable evidence that the military odds are stacked against them. Irrationality, thus, does not find place in the deterrence theory and brings in an element of ambiguity in charting or forecasting the future turn of events. The contradictory nature of instrumental and value rationality is resident in the fact that while in the former, events are governed by rationalisation of the thought process, the latter has intangibles like dignity, self-respect, cultural and ideological groundings dictating the course of events, irrespective of the end result.¹³ Additionally, compellence has to be put in motion for the opponent to yield, as Thomas Schelling theorised;¹⁴

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13. Paul, n. 11, p. 7.

14. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 72.

it implies that deterrence, which is slightly abstract in nature and does not require a visible response to be shown by the deterred, is more acceptable to a rational entity (as he has a veil of plausible denial), than compellence wherein a retracing of steps involves a loss of face and prestige.

An element of subterfuge on the part of the deterrer has entered the equation of conflict prevention or, as will be reasoned, conflict assurance! In the Gulf War of 1991, the Iraqis are reported to have tried to convince the world that they had issues with Kuwait and that they needed 'help' to prevent them from resorting to armed actions. Iraq's economy was deteriorating and it was not in a position to pay for its food imports. Exasperated that the West was not seeing Iraq's viewpoint, Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi Foreign Minister, is reported to have said, "When do you use military power?" According to him, Saddam Hussain had no plan of invading Kuwait and attempted compellence instead, by sending troops to the Kuwaiti border in July 1990. At this stage, a vigorous attempt at deterrence along with inducement by way of refinancing Iraq's debt could have averted the invasion.¹⁵ However, this did not happen and one school of thought feels that "....the United States did not want coercive diplomacy to succeed and planned to trap Saddam into war..... by withholding inducements necessary to persuade Saddam to concede and *ease* the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from the Kuwaiti border. Tariq Aziz lamented that his government had tried repeatedly to find a diplomatic exit but had invariably found itself trapped by the *determination of the United States to wage war*"¹⁶ (emphasis added). If, in the final analysis, it is concluded that the failure of the strategic, military and political judgment of Saddam and his inability to estimate the impact of air power caused the war, it can also be argued that it was the failure of coercive diplomacy (of which air power was but one ingredient) and the determination of the Western alliance to go to war, that failed to avert the conflict.¹⁷ Did we see 'conflict assurance' in the lead up to the present Libyan crisis?

15. Janice Gross Stein, "Deterrence and Compellence in the Gulf," *International Security*, vol. 17, no. 2, Fall 1992, Harvard University, MIT Press, pp. 158-159.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 166, 171.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 176-179.

LIBYAN CRISIS

So, how is Libya in 2011 different? It has not committed aggression against any sovereign country nor has it encroached upon any commercial or economic interests of any nation. After the winds of democratic change swept through Tunisia and Egypt, Libya came into its slipstream, resulting in a wave of discontent affecting the people. One violent incident in February 2011 led to many more and the West saw an opportunity to dislodge Col Gaddafi from power. Demonstrations in Benghazi and other eastern towns were followed by allegations of violence against civilians and the start of a civil war. The West decided to intervene. The United States did not want to enter another regional conflict zone as it was deeply entangled in Iraq and Afghanistan; however, to prevent bickering among NATO members regarding who would take the leadership role, it started the air campaign — with the explicit understanding that after some time, NATO would have to assume responsibility.¹⁸ The intervention has dragged out over months and the tenacity of the Gaddafi regime has astonished all observers. Coalition air power knocked out Gaddafi's air defences and attacked heavy equipment like tanks, Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs) and vehicles — in fact, any hardware that moved. However, pro-Gaddafi forces have been able to fight a see-saw battle, with the frontlines moving east to west in quick succession. The rebels are a rag-tag bunch and though Western advisers have been positioned in eastern Libya to mould them into fighting units, the results have been pitiful. The opposition's continued weakness on the battlefield has resulted in a stalemate. Slowly, the truth is hitting home and with neither the defeat of the rebels being an option nor Gaddafi staying in power an alternative, the ground is being prepared to add muscle in various forms to the rebel forces, short of inducting ground troops; will this succeed, is the moot question, as Iraq, and Afghanistan have shown that without boots on the ground, a regime change cannot be effected. This political objective of removing Col Gaddafi from power, incidentally,

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18. "Europe's Confused Response," International Institute for Strategic Studies, available at <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/volume-17-2011/april/war-in-libya-europes-confused-response/?locale=en>, accessed on June 26, 2011.

This political objective of removing Col Gaddafi from power, incidentally, has not been mandated by the Security Council Resolution 1973, which brings in the question of legitimacy of the methods being employed by the coalition.

has not been mandated by the Security Council Resolution 1973,¹⁹ which brings in the question of legitimacy of the methods being employed by the coalition. The aim, it appears now, is to slowly finish the supplies of the pro-Gaddafi forces and "...tighten the noose around him" as Gen Charles Bouchard, the Canadian head of NATO operations put it.²⁰

That Col Gaddafi's military resistance is no match for the coalition power is almost axiomatic, considering the forces arrayed against him.²¹ But military power does not bring political control — it never has; "conquering and governing are two different processes," as Kenneth Waltz puts it,²² a situation that the Americans are realising to their discomfiture in Iraq and Afghanistan. So, will it be different in Libya or will the world see another quagmire caused by an intervention of Western powers, albeit in the garb of a coalition?

PROGNOSIS

The Bosnian conflict of 1995 (Operation Deliberate Force) is an excellent example of political ineptness on the part of the international community, wherein lack of clear political guidelines made the overwhelming NATO military power impotent in response to Serbian intransigence. The Serbs took full advantage of it and the massacres that followed — Srebrenica being the most infamous of all — showed the international community in very poor light; introduction of clarity in the chain of command and redefining the mandate brought about an end to the conflict through the Dayton Peace

19. Ibid.

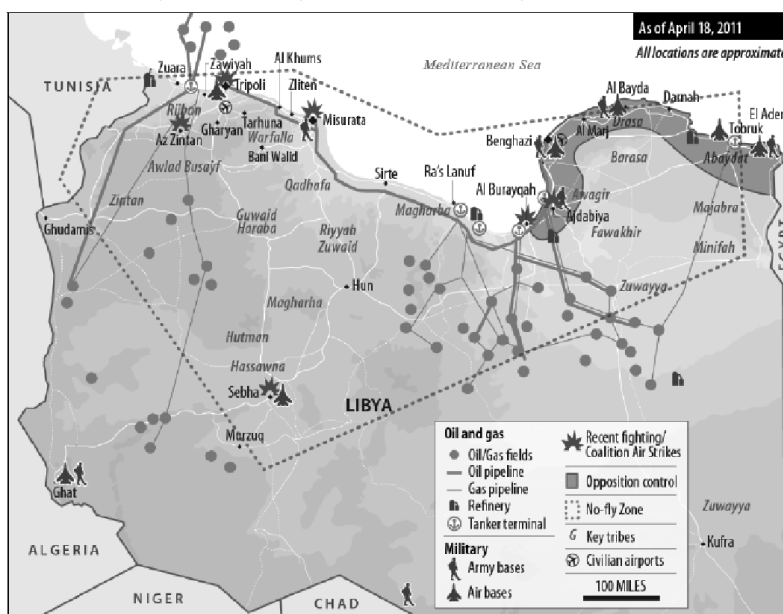
20. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/natos-libya-campaign-drags-on/2011/06/23/AGSm27kH_story.html, accessed on June 26, 2011.

21. That overwhelming power would finally subdue a materially less endowed opponen was seen in World War II also. John Ellis, *Allied Strategy and Tactics in Second World War* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1990), referred with details by Peter W. W. Wijninga and Richard Szafranski, "Beyond Utility Targeting: Towards Axiological Operations," *Air Power Journal*, vol. III, no. 2, Summer 2006 (New Delhi: Centre for Air Power Studies), n. 15 & 16, p. 138.

22. Waltz, n. 6, pp. 161, 191.

Accords. The second intervention through air power in the region, Operation Allied Force, was more successful but it needs to be accepted that the threat of a ground invasion by Bosnian Croat forces was a major factor that forced Milosovic to cut his losses and bring the conflict to a close. In Libya too, the anti-Gaddafi forces are not militarily strong; no amount of targeting by NATO air forces can make them push back the Gaddafi loyalists decisively. Gaddafi may have lost the air battle, but the rebel opposition never had any air power of *its own*. The mechanised elements of the Gaddafi forces may not move but their troops can, as no Western combatants are on the ground. Libya is a huge country and presently the fighting is continuing only along the northern coastal road. Though Tripoli, the capital, is the centre of gravity of the Gaddafi regime, the major part of the country is not affected by the turmoil and may retain government influence.²³

Fig 1: Map of Libyan Military Facilities, Energy Infrastructure and Conflict



Sources: *The Guardian* (UK), Graphic News, US Department of Defence, US Energy Information Administration, Global Security; Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *The Making of Modern Libya* (State University of New York Press, 1994). Edited by CRS.

23. Christopher M. Blanchard, "Libya Unrest and US Policy," Congressional Research Paper, accessed at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL33142.pdf>, on April 25, 2011.

In the Italo-Turkish War of 1911 too, the rag-tag Ottoman troops retreated to the interiors of the vast country when Tripoli fell in October 1911. As long as the operations were within 40 miles of the coast, the Italians could capture any place at will; but, the elusive and highly motivated enemy retreated to the desert whenever it faced any mass concentration of the enemy.²⁴ What stops Gaddafi from taking similar steps?

The aim of the NATO air campaign seems to be more to weaken the Gaddafi regime by engineering defections (by application of brute force), rather than attain military victories. If the challenger, the Gaddafi regime, is willing to pay the ultimate cost, whom can the rebels and the West deter or compel? The regime is irrational, going by the traditional definition of rational action — and the actions of an irrational opponent who is cornered do not abide by ‘accepted’ rules. Anwar Sadat knew the overwhelming military power of Israel but he never ‘normalised’ to the loss of Sinai to Israel in 1967 — Sadat remained undeterred²⁵ and launched the 1973 War to make a political statement, knowing fully well that the military gains, if any, would be extremely limited. In the case of Libya, the issuance of arrest warrants by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for Gaddafi and two other key regime figures makes it more difficult for them to go into exile in another country. While this further increases the incentive to resist, as he has nothing to lose,²⁶ Gaddafi as the challenger would wish for further escalation in order to facilitate greater casualties on the ground due to targeting mistakes that are bound to occur.²⁷ We are seeing this happen in Afghanistan where the Americans, to have an honourable exit, have been forced to discuss a solution by talking to the Taliban.²⁸ Gaddafi, is aiming to split the international community as evident from the statement of the African Union (AU) that, “... AU will not cooperate with the (ICC) arrest

24. van Creveld, n. 2, pp. 17-20.

25. Stein, n. 9, p. 67.

26. “Gaddafi Vows to Fight to Death and Beyond,” *The Times of India* (New Delhi), June 24, 2011, p 18.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 75. Also “NATO Steps up Pace in Libya,” available at <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/volume-17-2011/june/nato-steps-up-the-pace-in-libya>, accessed on June 25, 2011.

28. “Britain in Peace Talks with Taliban, Says Foreign Secy,” *The Times of India* (New Delhi), June 24, 2011, p. 18.

warrant as....it jeopardises efforts to negotiate peace.”²⁹

So far, there is no sign of NATO or the West shifting the Libyan campaign³⁰ into a new gear by inserting troops on the ground — however, this choice may have to be exercised sooner than later. We have already seen the operations getting more ‘intimate’ with initial stand-off strikes by Tomahawk cruise missiles giving way to precision munitions being launched from fighter aircraft to assaults by Apache attack helicopters — implying that the Western combatants were within 6-8 km of the frontline; arms for the rebels have been air dropped by France *due to slow progress on the ground* (emphasis added).³¹ The insertion of ground troops is just a matter of time, as without them, the fractious and amorphous rebels would not be able to bring to bear the concentrated and disciplined force that would be required to subdue troops loyal to the regime. A sobering thought to this is that, as brought out earlier, all the action is taking place only along the coastal road linking Benghazi with Tripoli — leaving the rest of the vast countryside in the centre and south of the country still available for Gaddafi to move to.

Five months and counting! NATO air action has not been able to subdue or strategically affect an opponent that has shown resilience and pragmatism of remarkable proportions. Col Gaddafi has lost control of his skies and cannot move any heavy vehicles which are armed. His command and control centres have been pulverised by precision strikes in the heart of Tripoli; many trusted ministers and senior army officials and diplomats have deserted him — but Gaddafi labours on.

The aim of the NATO air campaign seems to be more to weaken the Gaddafi regime by getting defections (by application of brute force), rather than attain military victories.

29. CNN News, July 04, 2011, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/africa/07/03/libya.war/index.html>, accessed on July 08, 2011.

30. “NATO Steps up Pace in Libya,” available at <http://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/past-issues/volume-17-2011/june/nato-steps-up-the-pace-in-libya>, accessed on June 25, 2011.

31. “In Libya, France Air Drops Arms for Rebels,” *Reuters* report in *The Times of India* (New Delhi), June 30, 2011, p. 20.

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Is it a failure of air power or a limitation of air power? Or has the air power not been applied correctly? Col John Warden, the architect of the air campaign in the Gulf War and famous for his “five concentric rings” of targeting, would have wanted the centres of gravity of the rings to be “addressed” for arriving at a quick solution. However, this targeting need not only be of the military kind, as the West is seeing to its dismay in Libya; the multitude of focussed attacks on all military targets of importance have not expedited

the cause of the rebels. The argument of ‘timeline’ has got skewed — ‘how long should it take’ was the question that should have been asked prior to the launch of the air campaign meant to compel;³² what is now being asked is, ‘how long will it take.’ The difference in these two variations holds the answer to the stretch of the time domain in Libya — and the culpability does not lie in the capabilities of air power.

THE GADDAFI SYSTEM

An adversary has to be seen as a ‘system’ and the correct facet(s) of power, and not necessarily all of them, need to be brought to bear on that system in a timely manner; each component of power has a rightful place in the overall strategy to engage the adversary. There are theories that propound that it would be better to analyse and target what an enemy leadership holds dear (value or Information Age targeting, thus, hinting at ‘bloodless solutions’) rather than being driven by utility or industrial age kinetic targeting.³³ However, others state that the history of warfare shows that politicians have mostly resorted to the use of force and it is

32. Col John Warden, “Strategy and Airpower,” *The Air and Space Power Journal*, vol. XXV, no. 1, Spring 2011 (Alabama: Maxwell Air Force Base), p. 70-72.

33. Wijninga and Szafranski, n. 21, pp. 135-136. Axiology is a combination of the Greek word ‘axios’ meaning ‘worthy’ and ‘logos’ which means ‘theory’. The authors argue that, based on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory, the adversary leadership should be evaluated for the values it cherishes and these should be addressed by suitable, and not necessarily, air power, means.

futile to think of 'bloodless force' solutions.³⁴ The 'Gaddafi system' draws its sustenance from tribal loyalties, state coercion, personal devotion and fidelity due to the showering of state benevolence and a subservient military apparatus.³⁵ There is an east-west fault line that divides Libya in terms of geography (a vast desert separates the two regions), tribal allegiances, wealth distribution and overall social and infrastructural development. The sense of alienation and stepmotherly treatment has always pervaded the psyche of the people of eastern Libya; hence, one sees the recalcitrance mainly in the east, with the protagonists of the uprising trying to take the 'revolution' westwards towards Tripoli. The defections of high ranking officials that have come about are also of those who are from the east. The main tribes in the west and the elite of Tripoli have not deserted Gaddafi, at least till now. There is a fundamental difference between what happened in Tunisia and Egypt and the uprising in Libya — the buffer provided by the national armies between the civil society and the ruling junta in Tunisia and Egypt does not exist in Libya, thus, leaving a void which no intermediary entity can fill.³⁶ Thus, the moot point is whether, before the start of the air campaign, the Western powers studied the 'Gaddafi power apparatus' with due diligence or were they themselves 'coerced' into intervening due to public pressure, without a proper targeting analysis and philosophy? Have they also been afflicted by the syndrome pervading the Israeli leadership where, "...defending their reputation for deterrence becomes a value independent of other consequences."³⁷ Was the West seduced into thinking that just the way events played out in Tunisia and Egypt, Libya would follow suit once air power was brought to bear on the Gaddafi loyalist army? The way the script and events have played out in slow motion since February 15, certainly seems to suggest so.

34. Warden, n. 32, pp. 73-74.

35. Alison Pargeter, "Rebels with a Cause," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, April 2011, p. 9.

36. Ibid., pp. 9-12.

37. Stein, n. 9, p. 66.

CULPABILITY OF AIR POWER?

So, does air power carry the proverbial cross for the 'stalemate' that one sees in Libya today? Though the rebels in the east have started organising themselves into a political group to provide leadership, albeit with the generous advice and prodding of Western 'advisers', splits have already started emerging in their ranks.³⁸ When Gaddafi goes, as one day he will, due to the enormous military odds stacked against him, will the elimination of the cohesiveness afforded to the rebels by his presence result in societal fissures of the type one has witnessed in Iraq and Afghanistan? Will it see a return of the impatience and lawlessness that has started rearing its head again in Tunisia and Egypt?³⁹ If there is further bloodshed or public strife due to the absence of governance *a la* Iraq and Afghanistan, is it a pointer to the inefficiency of air power to deter and compel? The answer is NO — the blame lies elsewhere!

It is well nigh impossible to indefinitely face up to the kinetic power of a coalition which has more than 100 aircraft and ships from 16 nations flying and sailing unchallenged, all equipped with the modern war-fighting technology of the Western forces. As we go to the press, the Gaddafi regime may well have fallen, militarily defeated or its leaders gone into exile. If a Gaddafi denouement has not happened by then and he has clung on to power, then it is further proof of the overreliance of the Western world on military methods and mindsets and not having properly analysed the cultural and psychological make-up of an adversary from a dissimilar socio-ethnic background — air power's capability to deter and compel does not carry the burden for such a failure.

Air power is a sub-set of the larger picture of a deterrent/compellent ecosystem brought to bear on an adversary, orchestrated along with political, economic and other such tangible and intangible components. In Libya, it cleaned up the air space segment of the environment, allowing the rebels to advance on the ground without any threat from the air. Armoured vehicles of all types and artillery of various hues have been removed from the balance

38. Pargeter, n. 35, p. 13.

39. "4 Months on, Cairo's Tahir Square Turns a Battlefield Again," AFP report in *The Times of India* (New Delhi), June 30, 2011, p. 20.

of the firepower equation. Command and control centres, underground command shelters and such, like the locations of military importance in Tripoli and other cities were treated as legitimate targets and duly addressed. The morale (of the rebels), that intangible with disproportionate positive influence, has shot up. Thus, air power has lived up to its promise and performed at par *with its capabilities*. Inadequate analysis of the enemy as a system is the root cause of the time stretch that has occurred.

Col Gaddafi has his centre of gravity in tribal and clan loyalties, in his ruthlessness and in a mindset that is typical of a cornered adversary, in which no outlet is available for an honourable exit. The mindset has another major constituent, an attitude of martyrdom, against which there is no credible deterrent. The rational theory of deterrence is based on the premise that adversaries would avoid death at any cost — and causing death and devastation is how air power applies its destructive dominance capability by coercing the adversary's psyche. But how does air power deter or compel a mindset based on cultural factors where death is preferable to dishonour?

It is further proof of the overreliance of the Western world on military methods and mindsets and not having properly analysed the cultural and psychological make-up of an adversary.

CONCLUSION

Context matters in actions meant to influence, modulate and channelise the actions of an adversary — cognitive styles of leaders matter too⁴⁰ and can be ignored only to one's own disadvantage. There are other hotspots in the world where similar dissatisfaction among the populace exists, as in Libya. Syria has been on the boil for almost a similar length of time as Libya — but the international community has not intervened. This may be due to geopolitical compulsions (power equations of Syria-Iran versus Israeli regional interests) but demands are already being made and the media orchestrated to ask for military intervention. If President Assad is not able to get his house in order in quick time by some deft diplomacy (and not just state

40. Stein, n. 9, p. 65.

muscle), then the rising clamour of interventionist voices may well overtake the reticence shown so far by the international community. If this happens, then going by recent trends, the onus to bring military power to bear on the Syrian junta may befall air power again. Hopefully, lessons would have been imbibed from the Libyan imbroglio and a systematic and coordinated approach through all organs of power, and not just air power, would be taken.

This brings us to the prophecy of some writers who divine that manned combat aircraft are on their way out; Martin van Creveld has titled his last chapter as “Conclusions: Going Down, 1945?” and concludes that the world’s air forces are “..... going home.”⁴¹ However, earlier in the book, it has been acknowledged that “... usually the effect of air operations has to be evaluated as part of a much larger complex, a difficult and often all but impossible enterprise.”⁴² Therein lies the rub — air power is not down and out. Would Osama bin Laden have been taken out through Operation Geronimo, without the use of air power? Along with the helicopters that took part in the raid, there must have been a full package of the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS), Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAVs), fighter escorts orbiting at a safe distance and combat search and rescue groups available in the air. It’s a point to ponder over for the detractors of air power.

41. Creveld, n. 2, p. 441.

42. Ibid., p. 316.