

Germany recognises Libyan opposition after US ultimatum

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The demand by outgoing US Secretary of Defence Robert Gates for Europe to take a greater share of the load in waging colonial-style wars in Libya, Afghanistan and elsewhere bore its first fruit with Germany's diplomatic recognition of the Benghazi-based Transitional National Council.

Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle's decision to interrupt his scheduled trip to the Middle East to visit Benghazi on Monday was clearly made in response to Gates' complaint that it was "unacceptable" that many European countries are committing very little to Libya. The offending countries were not named, but he was referring to Germany above all, but also to Poland, Italy and Spain, which have not participated in the NATO mission.

During his unscheduled stop, Westerwelle echoed the earlier phrase of French Foreign Minister Alain Juppe, stating that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi "had lost all legitimacy" and that the TNC—whose leading members include ex-Gaddafi ministers and CIA "assets"—was the "legitimate representative" of the Libyan people. Explicitly endorsing regime change, he declared, "We want a free Libya, in peace and democracy without Gaddafi."

Falling just short of granting official diplomatic recognition, Westerwelle nevertheless announced the opening of a German diplomatic representation in Benghazi. There are now 12 states that recognise the TNC, including the US, France, the UK, Australia, Italy, Spain, Gambia, Jordan, Malta, Qatar, Senegal and the United Arab Emirates.

The United States, while playing a leading role in the war on Libya, has stopped short of extending diplomatic recognition to the TNC, which it described recently as "a legitimate and credible interlocutor of the Libyan people".

Just as important for the US as Germany's diplomatic initiative, in a brief aside in its report on Westerwelle's decision, the *Wall Street Journal* reports:

"Germany is considering providing peacekeeping troops in Libya should it be invited to do so, according to German defense documents reviewed by The Wall Street Journal."

This appears to refer to something different than the

proposal made in April to deploy a "humanitarian" European Union naval and military mission to Libya, made up overwhelmingly of German troops. This was blocked by the United Nations and opposed by Washington, Paris and London because it would be de facto led by Germany and would act independently of the US and NATO.

UK Foreign Secretary William Hague insisted at the time, "We must maintain and intensify our efforts in NATO."

If the *Wall Street Journal* is citing German documents approvingly, it is likely they refer to participation in a NATO-led mission.

Germany has been placed under increasing pressure to come on board the Libyan military action, under conditions in which the so-called rebels have made little progress, even when backed by an escalating bombing campaign by NATO.

The pace of air strikes in Libya has been stepped up over the past days. Yesterday, yet another strike hit an area near Gaddafi's Bab al-Aziziya compound, the location of pro-government rallies, the latest of which included a number of foreign anti-war activists. NATO refused to rule out bombing the World Heritage site of Leptis Magna, a Roman city located between Tripoli and Misrata that the TNC has alleged is being used by the government to store military equipment.

But on several fronts, government forces have successfully thwarted attempted advances by the TNC. On Sunday and Monday, Gaddafi's troops reportedly killed over 30 anti-government fighters between Ajdabiya and Brega in eastern Libya—a strategic oil hub—and wounded dozens more.

In response to these difficulties, US Defense Secretary Gates significantly upped the ante against Germany and other European powers reluctant to fully engage in Libya, warning that "if current trends in the decline of European defence capabilities are not halted and reversed, future US political leaders ... may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost."

His warnings to Europe were naturally backed by the US media, with the *Washington Post* complaining, "European defense spending has fallen 15 percent since 2001, even as

that of the United States has doubled.”

But his stance was also endorsed by the UK press, which was particularly keen to contrast Britain’s readiness to fight to Germany’s refusal.

The Guardian editorialised, “The reality is that Nato feels like an anachronism, risk-averse, bloated and militarily inefficient, whose purpose increasingly has been usurped by so-called ‘coalitions of the willing’.”

The Scotsman complained that Gates was “too diplomatic to name names” and identified “Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Poland, Spain and Turkey” as “not upholding their end of the military alliance ... Germany is surely the worst single European offender.”

Rupert Murdoch’s *Sky News* was the most bellicose in demanding a stepping up of the war in Libya. Despite NATO conducting between 50 and 150 sorties a day, it complained, “Colonel Muammar Gaddafi’s troops continue to ignore the threats from above.

“Military campaigns are all about momentum. If the Nato-coalition and the rebels are to prevail and avoid the point of exhaustion and internal division they will have to substantially increase the level of attacks on the Libyan leader’s forces—and ignore the pretence that they are involved in ‘defending civilians’ rather than changing the regime.”

Germany’s shift paves the way for precisely such a turn and will encourage the US and NATO powers to ever greater acts of criminality and predatory imperialist meddling, not just in Libya but throughout the world.

On Monday, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton extended Gates’ shakedown of Europe to Africa’s leaders, instructing a meeting of the African Union in the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa that they must break relations with Gaddafi. “It has become clear by the day that he has lost his legitimacy to rule and that we are long past the day when he can remain in powers,” she said.

In an implied threat, she told the assembled delegates that they, too, might face overthrow like Gaddafi, Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak and Tunisia’s Zine Abidine Ben Ali. “Too many people in Africa still live under long-standing rulers, men who care too much about the longevity of their reign and too little about the legacy that should be built for their countries’ future,” she said.

Gates’ brinkmanship could, however, easily backfire by deepening divisions and convincing some within Europe that they can indeed no longer rely upon Washington as an ally.

Writing in the staunchly Conservative *Spectator* magazine, Daniel Korski, a Senior Policy Fellow of the European Council on Foreign Relations and previously a Senior Adviser in the U.S State Department, warned that Gates’

remarks were “ill-considered”.

After complaining that “Many European governments” will “rightly feel upset about the Pentagon chief’s words, having responded to the Obama administration’s request to send more troops to Afghanistan,” he warns:

“If, in a world of rising autocratic states like China the US prefers to alienate its European allies it will soon find itself in an awkward position. For all their faults—and there are many—key European governments are still the best kind of all-weather friends the US will find ... alliances like NATO work when there is either a shared sense of threat or sufficient solidarity to engage in burden-sharing.”

In addition, the US still finds its key allies in a stretched military position—to the extent that the UK’s First Sea Lord, Sir Admiral Mark Stanhope, utilised Gates’ complaints to declare that the Royal Navy’s Libya mission would be unsustainable if it went on longer than another six months. In a swipe against defence cuts, he asserted that the campaign would have been cheaper and “much more reactive” if Britain had still had an aircraft carrier and Harrier Jump Jets which were scrapped last year. The Navy would not be able to sustain its Libyan operation for another three months without making cuts elsewhere, he said.

The head of the armed forces, General Sir David Richards, was forced to intervene, insisting that “we can sustain this operation as long as we choose to. I am absolutely clear on that.”

Stanhope had confirmed Gates’ claim that Britain was among the countries forced to rely on US support and supplies in Libya. The Royal Navy had to ask the US to resupply Tomahawk cruise missiles used by its submarines.

The US, too, is making significant defence cuts of up to \$800 billion over the next decade or so, prompting the *Washington Post* to warn that “it’s hard to see Europeans responding to appeals like that of Mr. Gates at a time when the United States is reducing its military capabilities, scaling back its objectives and insisting on taking a back seat during a war.”



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