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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

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## Libya: enough is enough

The Guardian

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I have recently returned from a visit to Tripoli and western Libya. As a parliamentarian I am concerned about conflict wherever and whenever it appears. There are many tragedies in an armed conflict, including suffering of civilians, particularly women and children and the elderly.

Parts of the British media have already mischaracterised my visit to Libya as a "peace mission to Gaddafi". This is untrue. It has now been two months, and 6,000 Nato air attacks, since [UN security council resolution 1973](#). I visited western Libya to see what was happening on the ground and I intend to visit eastern Libya in due course.

It is clear that we have started something in Libya which will be very difficult to finish. Poor intelligence and wishful thinking embroiled us in wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. We seem to be repeating this in Libya at an accelerated rate. We have gone from a "no-fly" zone, through regime change, to killing members of the Gaddafi family within a matter of days.

At the same time it has become painfully obvious that virtually every assumption upon which the French and British-led Nato action is predicated has been false.

One assumption was that Libya would be the same as Tunisia and Egypt. There are different dynamics and different national characteristics at play. It is similar to formulating policy towards Germany on the assumption that Germany is identical in temperament to Italy or Portugal.

A second assumption was that Colonel Gaddafi would agree to leave Libya. It is painfully clear that poor intelligence continues to dog our action. The British government's false claim that Gaddafi had fled to Venezuela is but one example. This naivety is on a par to John Reid (a former defence secretary) believing that Britain could intervene in Afghanistan "without [a single shot](#) being fired".

A third assumption was that Gaddafi is without popular support. It is foolhardy to believe that there may not be a degree of political and tribal support for Gaddafi, at least within western and southern regions of Libya.

A fourth assumption seems to have been that the Libyan "rebels" are all Facebook idealists. The reality is that the young people who start revolutions are seldom the ones who come to control it. In their more candid moments, western political and military leaders have admitted they know next to nothing about the gunmen for whom Nato is acting as a de facto air force and whom they are militarily training and equipping.

What is known is that the rebels are led by former Gaddafi henchmen and include considerable numbers of al-Qaida militants among them. Their human rights record in eastern Libya is troubling to say the least.

We are [now being told by General Sir David Richards](#), the head of the armed forces, that the UK must further "up the ante" by systematically destroying more civilian infrastructure in Libya in support of the rebels about which we know little.

It is interesting that Richards used a gambling analogy, because that is how I characterise much of the past two months. Britain has gambled on the Libyan issue. We bet on it all being over in 48 hours. When this did not happen, we doubled the bet, and then doubled it and doubled it again. We should have cut our losses some time ago.

To carry the gambling theme further, the Libyan debacle may become our foreign affairs equivalent of the European exchange rate mechanism's "[Black Wednesday](#)" in 1992. The only people to benefit from this misstep will be those who want to see the destabilisation of the Arab and Muslim world.

As for the alleged surgical precision of Nato bombing, a Nato bomb exploded 400 metres away from me during my visit. It was dropped on a parliamentary complex I had visited four hours earlier. Other Nato bombs had destroyed a lamppost on a pavement adjacent to the parliamentary office. They were hardly "command and control" centres.

While one could understand the push for a security council "no-fly" resolution, to term the way in which the resolution has been stretched "[mission creep](#)" understates the pace at which Britain is racing to full-scale war.

"Mission creep" is shorthand for an escalation in the number of dead civilians. For all the haste we have seen on Libya, we see no such urgency, for example, in the case of Syria, Yemen or

Bahrain. It appears to many observers that Libya is being singled out for political rather than human rights reasons.

What also concerns me is the message that the Libyan – and also the Egyptian – situation has sent out about western foreign policy. Several years of painstaking diplomacy brought Libya back into the community of nations: this effort was thrown away in 48 hours. What conclusions are to be drawn about British and western foreign policy by developing and emergent countries?

The involvement of the questionable international criminal court is an additional complication. I have seen through my own involvement in the [Darfur](#) peace process how enpug intervention skews any attempt at peacefully resolving conflicts. It encourages rebels not to engage in dialogue and hardens government positions. Libya will be no exception.

We are standing on the edge of an abyss. The hundreds of north Africans and black African refugees who have already [died in attempts to reach Europe](#) are the precursor to the chaos that may follow should western intervention lead to another Afghanistan in north Africa.

The concern I have about the Nato escalation of this conflict may be misconstrued as support for the Libyan government. It is not. It is rather an argument for common sense. Enough is enough. Plan A has failed, there must be another approach.