Coalitions, institutions and big tents: the new strategic reality of armed intervention

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There is no question that the strategic management of armed interventions can be difficult. Rick Hillier—commander of NATO's Afghan International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2004 and later Canadian chief of defence staff—contends that 'it was crystal clear from the start that there was no strategy for the mission in Afghanistan', and he likens NATO to a 'decomposing corpse'.[1] The difficulty extends beyond alliances to national leadership, even by a Great Power such as the United States. For instance, the Afghan surge engineered by President Obama in 2009 was meant to be strategic but got entangled in the complexity of regional relations and force numbers. Therefore, if President Obama was driven to dismiss ISAF commander General McChrystal in mid-2010, it was not because General McChrystal challenged President Obama's strategy but because the General clamoured for a strategy the President had failed to deliver.[2]

We are observing an enduring problem of strategic leadership, but in a new guise that is of significant consequence to the conduct of war and peace. This article will establish the shape of this new challenge and pinpoint some of its implications. Strategy involves the dynamic or 'bridging' integration of political ends and operational art, which has never been straightforward.[3] The Napoleonic wars of the early nineteenth century may famously have inspired Napoleon himself to avoid fighting war by alliance, but the more durable effect was to motivate generations of strategic thinkers to ponder ways to rationalize the process of employing force to serve political goals—to snatch control of strategy from the jaws of chance, to paraphrase Clausewitz. It is this challenge of strategic control that today appears in new garb.

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[1] Rick Hillier, *A soldier first: bullets, bureaucrats and the politics of war* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2009), pp. 288, 477.

[2] Hew Strachan, 'Strategy or alibi? Obama, McChrystal and the operational level of war', *Survival* 52: 5, Oct.–Nov. 2010, pp. 157–82; also Tim Bird and Alex Marshall, *Afghanistan: how the West lost its way* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), and Sherard Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul: the inside story of the West's Afghanistan campaign* (London: HarperPress, 2011).

[3] Colin S. Gray, *The strategy bridge: theory for practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

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The early generations of strategic thinkers grappled in various ways with the challenge of creating a solid, durable and predictable framework for strategy-making, but gravitated towards the role played by decision-makers, or rather statesmen.[4] It became clear through the twentieth century that a number of complex issues—operational, logistical, social and technological—challenged the exercise of statesmanship and thus the creation of strategy; these circumstances in turn tended to focus strategic analysis on broader institutions and alliances that would reflect and represent this complexity.[5] The post-Cold War peace dividend that energized the big multinational institutions, the UN, the EU and NATO, as well as the promise apparently held out by globalization that global governance would be possible in a world beyond war and strategy, captured the minds of policy-makers and analysts but yet strategy remained a complex and elusive phenomenon. National leadership was overlooked but when such leadership came back into vogue in the early years of the twenty-first century it was in the context of such a controversial argument—that the mission must determine the coalition; that war by coalition would succeed where war by committee had failed[6]—that strategic studies once again found themselves bereft of oxygen. The pendulum is now swinging back. Analysts again emphasize the complexity of managing grand strategy, which leads them to promote a kind of institutionalized global outlook among the Great Powers that must provide for stability.[7] How such grand informal institutions relate to leadership in war is less well understood, but an engagement with the major campaigns of our time is revelatory.

Strategy cannot be anchored in any one framework, be it coalitions or institutions. On the contrary, it depends on the strength of the connections between no fewer than three political arenas: the fighting coalition—the sharp end of the spear; the institutions that normally make war their business, from NATO to the UN; and the informal wider communities of nations that form to affect the course of the war, the 'tents' of the campaign. The emerging lesson of modern wars is that strategy—as the bridging of political ends and operational art—depends on the diplomatic skill applied to connecting these three arenas.

The underlying argument here is that the twenty-first century and Clausewitz are being wedded in new ways—and that we have tended to overlook this emerging unity on the grounds of political controversy and compartmen-

4 Clausewitz saw governments as the fount of rational control but was in fact pulled to focus on the commander-in-chief. The 'commander-in-chief must also be a statesman', Clausewitz writes, and must possess 'a sense of unity and a power of judgment raised to a marvelous pitch of vision': *On war* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 112.

5 Michael Howard, 'The forgotten dimensions of strategy', in *The causes of war* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 101–15.

6 US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld outlined the coalition principle in the immediate wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks and treated it more systematically in 'Transforming the military', *Foreign Affairs* 81: 3, May–June 2002, pp. 20–32. See also Condoleezza Rice, 'Campaign 2000: promoting the national interest', *Foreign Affairs* 79: 1, Jan.–Feb. 2000, pp. 45–62; Robert Zoellick, 'Campaign 2000: a Republican foreign policy', *Foreign Affairs* 79: 1, Jan.–Feb. 2000, pp. 63–78.

7 This consensus or outlook comes in at least two versions. One is the market-based Great Capitalist Peace promoted by John Hulsman and Anatol Lieven in *Ethical realism: a vision for America's role in the world* (New York: Random House, 2007), and by Fareed Zakaria in *The post-American world* (New York: Norton, 2008). Another is the liberal-inspired Global Political Awakening put forth by Zbigniew Brzezinski in *Strategic vision: America and the crisis of global power* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).

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talized studies of globalization and war. The unprecedented complexity of the twenty-first-century world is visible in changing forms of connectivity, power and vulnerability as well as in the set of coalitions, institutions and tents that the management of war involves. Clausewitz remains relevant, though, because war in the twenty-first century still requires leadership and strategy. Modern war puts the onus on the coalition and its war effort. A coalition can make strategy on its own, unilaterally and in isolation, for sure; but strategy will be more manageable if the triad is brought into play. This goes for both small and big wars: wartime leadership in the twenty-first century is to a great extent about connecting coalitions, institutions and tents.

Coalition leadership must thus build bridges, and some guidelines on how this may be done are offered in the conclusion. Equally important, institutions can foster the connectivity between the arenas by way of institutional adaptation. Institutions are natural points of convergence for coalition and tent diplomacy, but it requires that they are capable enablers of concerted action, and the conclusion offers some suggestions as to how this can be made possible. The article will first establish the analytical relevance of the triad of coalitions, institutions and tents. It will look at how this triad took shape through the Balkan wars of the 1990s but largely went unrecognized. It will then examine in greater depth the cases of Afghanistan and Libya, where considerable differences in strategic management were evident. The concept of a triad—coalitions, institutions and tents—helps us understand why.

The slow coming of a new reality

In the annals of international diplomacy it has become conventional wisdom that President Bush in the early 2000s overreached himself. Having declared war on the perpetrators of the attacks of 11 September 2001, President Bush asked 'every nation to join us' and declared: 'Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.'[8] After some years had passed, tough wars and diplomatic frustration had apparently taught him that multilateralism was an overlooked asset.[9] However, the premise for the declared 'war on terror' was not wrong: power in the modern world has diffused greatly and to such an extent that established institutions find it difficult to regulate world affairs.[10]

This institutional crisis can be traced in the flourishing of improvised and ad hoc leadership councils in world politics. The informal club of finance and economics

[8] President Bush, speech to Congress on terrorism, 20 Sept. 2001, http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/terrorism/bush911c.html, accessed 13 Dec. 2012.

[9] Philip H. Gordon, 'The end of the Bush revolution', *Foreign Affairs* 85: 4, 2006, pp. 75–86.

[10] See e.g. Richard B. Haas, 'The age of nonpolarity', *Foreign Affairs* 87: 3, May–June 2008, pp. 44–56. Richard Haas was director of policy planning at the US State Department in 2001–2003. See also Parag Khanna, *The Second World: how emerging powers are redefining global competition in the twenty-first century* (New York: Random House, 2008); Zakaria, *The post-American world*; G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: the origins, crisis, and transformation of the American world order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Charles Kupchan, *No one's world: the West, the rising rest, and the coming global turn* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

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stakeholders used to be the G8 but has since 1999 become the G20. Climate change work is placed under a UN umbrella but is actually run by changing alignments among countries at various levels of development. The United States and China contentiously explore the limits of stakeholder responsibility to manage North Korea's nuclear weapons programme, while in the case of Iran's nuclear ambitions negotiations are run by an informal trio (the E-3: Britain, France and Germany) supported by the UN Security Council in flexible format (P5+1: the five permanent members plus Germany). Meanwhile, management of the crisis surrounding Syria's incipient civil war is in multiple hands, chief among them the special envoy of the UN and the Arab League, Lakhdar Brahimi, and the Egypt-led regional quartet of Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as a wider coalition of countries seeking the ousting of Syria's President Assad but also the inclusion of Russia into a 'tent' of Great Power management.[11]

When countries resort to armed force for the purpose of war or intervention (which for the troops often amounts to the same thing), there is therefore no fixed institutional framework to which appeal can be made. The countries that go to war will naturally be tempted to single out only trustworthy and battle-ready allies for their war council or coalition, but they will soon discover the attraction of greater inclusion: the sheer burden of the war will make international support desirable, and the frequently made claim to be fighting in the name of the common good demands it. They can appeal to institutions, but will also find it necessary to gather a wider and informal group of like-minded countries that are in accord on the main issues and can complement the flagging influence of institutions.

The pluralization of power is thus not an issue of emphasizing one political format over another—coalitions vs institutions—but an invitation to analysts of strategy to ponder how the two connect with one another in the big questions of war and peace. In hindsight this was already becoming clear in the 1990s, notably because the political formats failed to connect. In the context of the Yugoslav breakdown and civil wars of 1991–6, the most likely coalition would have been American-led, but institutional design and politics alike captured analysts and considerably delayed its formation. One source of disconnect was the clash between the EU and NATO, nourished by conflicting French and American ambitions; matters were further complicated by UN ambitions for overall coalition leadership. At a time when the EU momentum was dying, NATO was placed in the context of UN 'subcontracting'—a type of institutional dependency that NATO had always resisted. UN Secretary General Boutros Ghali's 1992 *Agenda for Peace* pushed in this direction for many good reasons, but failed to sort out the political preconditions for the initiative's success; and the costs were borne largely by the people on the ground who placed their faith in 'safe havens' and the effectiveness of the UN–NATO 'dual-key' decision-making arrangement.

[11] David Shorr and Thomas Wright, 'The G20 and global governance: an exchange', *Survival* 52: 2, April–May 2010, pp. 181–98; Andrew F. Hart and Bruce D. Jones, 'How do rising powers rise?', *Survival* 52: 6, Dec. 2010–Jan. 2011, pp. 63–88; Stewart Patrick, 'Irresponsible stakeholders? The difficulties of integrating rising powers', *Foreign Affairs* 89: 6, Nov.–Dec. 2010, pp. 44–53.

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What was missing was a fighting coalition that could shape strategy—the bridging of political ends and military means—and then also shape and mobilize the institutional environment. The institutional blockading of coalitions was to be repeated in NATO's air war over Kosovo in 1999. NATO went to war, which was different, but it went to war as an institution—giving rise to the 'war by committee' label—because it was too divided internally to give leeway to a coalition. The United States was in the operational lead but its leadership was contested. France had moved its fight for Europe inside NATO, where the big countries could not agree on the 'nature of the campaign'.[12] In consequence, the allies were condemned to discuss targets and strikes, not the big issues of war and peace; and it was the latter discussions that would have provided overall direction to a more agile striking coalition.

In Kosovo the allies sought to erect a campaign tent of supporters—which they did by activating the Contact Group (consisting of the five major NATO allies and Russia) from Bosnia. It was a valiant attempt at inclusion, but also an ill-conceived one. In the case of a coalition–institution deadlock, outside powers brought into the tent easily become spoilers. This is what happened. The allies backed themselves into the contradictory quest simultaneously for conflict resolution by coercion (of Serb President Milosevic) and agreement with Serbia's main backer (Russia).[13] They could not have both. The wider lesson here concerns the nature of the tent: rather than granting a diplomatic adversary a stakeholder veto, it would have been more useful to widen the tent and involve a greater number of like-minded countries. For a while, though, this lesson got lost in the war-by-committee controversy that seemed to make decisive leadership the beginning and end of successful campaign strategy.

The agony of adaptation in Afghanistan

In the Afghan case we witness a prolonged type of antagonism between the coalition—the US-led coalition carrying out Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)—and the institutional agent—NATO, at the head of ISAF. Though both have been in action since 2001, the allies did not manage to bring the two into close alignment until mid-2009. Still, this *rapprochement* of the coalition and the institution represents a success, however belated. The wider format of the tent is another matter. The concept was mobilized in the wake of 9/11 but never effectively put into practice, being used as a tool for managing the alignment of NATO and the US-led coalition but never made operational.

The aforementioned coalition-centric outlook in Washington, along with disagreement over the shape of the 'war on terror' and whether it should extend to Iraq, fed the antagonism that took root in NATO. This antagonism in turn got institutionalized in OEF and ISAF. It was a case of antagonism by design: NATO's

[12] Wesley Clark, *Waging modern war* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), p. 237.
[13] Ivo H. Daalder and Michael E. O'Hanlon, *Winning ugly: NATO's war to save Kosovo* (Washington DC: Brookings, 2000), pp. 24–7.

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deepened engagement in Afghanistan was a means through which the allies, bogged down in the Iraq issue, could salvage the alliance.[14] Germany's investment in ISAF expansion was critical in moving the process forward—so much so that some allies felt bullied by Germany on the Afghan issue. ISAF thus grew, but the United States continued to channel most of its efforts through its OEF command, and ISAF's footprint in Afghanistan's eastern provinces was entirely American. By January 2007 ISAF comprised 35,000 troops of whom 14,000 were American, and an additional 10,000 US troops were operating outside ISAF command.[15]

The potential for convergence—often overlooked—was there at an early point of the campaign because OEF veered towards stabilization, which was ISAF's mission, and ISAF veered towards more robust engagements, akin to those undertaken by OEF. Still, the potential remained confined to the tactical and operational levels because on strategic issues the allies remained divided. For instance, NATO's plan for moving into the troubled south and east—the revised Operational Plan (OPLAN) of November 2005—contained more 'robust' rules of engagement, which made for a more kinetic campaign, but tied them to a regime-centric end-state that differed from the OEF enemy-centric end-state.[16]

The depth of the antagonism can also be traced in the command organization. When the need for coordination emerged in 2005–2006, given ISAF's expansion, NATO's supreme commander, General James Jones, designed a mechanism for 'de-confliction'. This would entail the ISAF commander (COMISAF) double-hatting his deputy for operations as both ISAF and OEF, and tasking him with avoiding mission conflicts. It was a cumbersome arrangement that continued into 2009. One might argue that matters improved in mid-2008, when the double-hatting arrangement moved up from the level of deputy to chief: henceforth it was COMISAF (General McKiernan) himself who was both ISAF and OEF commander. This change eased the challenge of mission coordination and 'de-confliction', but it also represented a continuing political wish to embed the duality of vision in the campaign organization.

Real change happened in the course of 2009, when the two chains of ISAF and OEF were almost fully integrated and placed under a four-star commander (COMISAF), with operational command located within a new three-star HQ (International Joint Command: IJC). This four- and three-star organization had been tried and tested in Iraq by Generals Petraeus and Odierno; moreover, it was now placed in the hands of General McChrystal, who had made a name for himself as Special Forces commander, also in Iraq. None of this would have been

[14] Bird and Marshall, *Afghanistan: how the West lost its way*; Sten Rynning, *NATO in Afghanistan: the liberal disconnect* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

[15] ISAF placemat, 29 Jan. 2007, http://www.nato.int/isaf/docu/epub/pdf/placemat_archive/isaf_placemat_070129.pdf, accessed 13 Dec. 2012.

[16] The 2005 OPLAN defined the political end-state as 'a self-sustaining, moderate and democratic Afghan government able to exercise its sovereign authority, independently, throughout Afghanistan', and the military–strategic end-state as 'Afghan national security forces [able to] provide security and sustain stability in Afghanistan without NATO support': SACEUR OPLAN 10302 (Revise 1), unclassified version, 8 Nov. 2005, sections 1.d and 3.b.9. For the OEF, see United States Army, *A different kind of war* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2009).

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possible had the allies not come to accept that Iraq, the source of allied tension only a few years earlier, did provide valid lessons for their Afghan campaign. The relative success of the US counter-insurgency surge in Iraq in 2006–2008 helped to pave the way for this recognition. Moreover, the situation in Afghanistan cried out for new thinking, and President Obama was ready to work broadly with NATO.

However, the turnaround also happened, crucially, in the context of grand diplomatic gatherings (the 'tents' of the campaign) that had gained in relevance prior to the election of President Obama. Though tent diplomacy began at the Bonn conference in 2001, it became more visible in January 2006 when the international community—some 66 countries, including Afghanistan, and 15 NGOs—gathered in London under UN auspices to work out a national development strategy for the country now that the Bonn process—the setting up of a new Afghan government—had come to a conclusion. The 'Afghan Compact' ensued. However, it was so big and wide that you could drive a truck through it, as one diplomat, speaking on background, noted, and connections between development, governance and security remained tenuous at best. In the wake of this Compact, NATO therefore concluded in Riga in November 2006 that it needed to help foster these connections, though it was unsure how to set about it. This was the beginning of NATO's 'comprehensive approach', according to which it will remain focused on security but cooperate closely with other actors focused on governance and development. It was controversial within NATO partly because it could be taken to imply that NATO would take control of EU policy in some respects, something that France opposed, and partly because it meant that the steering wheel would not be in the hands of NATO but in those of an amorphous community, something which the United States hesitated to endorse.

In the end both gained satisfaction, to a degree. NATO agreed (in its Comprehensive Approach Action Plan: CAAP) to respect the mandates of existing institutions, which was a guarantee of sorts to the EU and comforting to France. It also agreed (in its Comprehensive Strategic Political–Military Plan or CSPMP for Afghanistan) to become the vehicle for a wider and sustained investment in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, which was comforting to the United States. Both documents—the CAAP and the CSPMP—were approved at the Bucharest summit in April 2008, a summit also characterized by its 'big tent' character: all ISAF partners participated, from the United Nations through the World Food Programme to the World Bank and the EU.

NATO's commitment to work horizontally—across the lines dividing security, development and governance—made it easy for the Obama team to channel the US surge for Afghanistan through NATO and ISAF. NATO's search for coordination rather than war command meant that the United States could be sure that its Afghan surge would remain relatively uncontested inside the alliance. NATO as an institution thus became an enabler of the coalition, providing additional troops for the mission, committing to the new label of counter-insurgency (COIN) and pulling in the wider community. The US drawdown of OEF thus represented

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not its ending, but rather its moving inside NATO: though NATO's chain of command was formally in charge, it was effectively Americanized and guided by the American chain of command. NATO's policy of horizontal 'comprehensive action' eased the pressure on allies reluctant to fight alongside the coalition struggling in Afghanistan's south and east; and it also provided an organized forum for dialogue between the coalition and the wider international community.

The pattern visible by 2010 was therefore as follows. The coalition operated from inside the alliance, and the alliance sought to pull together the international community in 'tent' format, not to take charge of it but to embed the coalition-led security effort in a wider framework of stabilization. The agony of the effort had been considerable, however, and the construction remained stitched together by fragile compromises. The wider tent in particular seemed to be working less well. It was at its best in terms of agenda setting—from the Afghan Compact (2006) to Transition (2010) and Transformation (2011). The second Bonn conference of November 2011 defined a 'decade of transformation' beginning in 2015. Its impact on the ground has been negligible, though, and expectations regarding Afghanistan's future have been lowered as a result. NATO has in consequence focused its attention on 'transition', not 'transformation', and has lost sight of its grand comprehensive approach of 2008.[17]

The coalition-inside-the-institution design seems to be holding up and also capable of underpinning the process of reconciliation that is taking place mostly outside the public realm.[18] This is a clear advance compared to the early Afghan campaign and also to the 1990s, when institutional rivalry paralysed the allies and prevented the formation of a coalition that could actually drive the campaign. As the institution, NATO, is on its way to withdrawal, we could soon be back to square one: a coalition in operation (training and supporting the Afghan army), a dormant institution (NATO with a small footprint in Kabul) and international controversy (notably in relation to Pakistan, Iran and the wider region). To avoid ending up in this situation the coalition should do more to shape the international 'tent' that could support it.

A division of labour in Libya

Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya offers a different perspective on the relationships between coalitions, institutions and tents. Where coalitions and institutions long coexisted contentiously in Afghanistan, their relationship in Libya was quickly settled, and they were straight away wrapped in a tent that was

[17] Sten Rynning, 'After combat, the perils of partnership: NATO and Afghanistan beyond 2014', NATO Defense College research paper no. 80, July 2012 (Rome, Italy).

[18] See 'How German diplomats opened channel to Taliban', *Der Spiegel*, 10 Jan. 2012, http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,808068,00.html, accessed 13 Dec. 2012. For the reconciliation debate, see Cowper-Coles, *Cables from Kabul*; Anatol Lieven, 'Afghanistan: the best way to peace', *New York Review of Books*, 9 Feb. 2012, and 'Shape a peaceful Afghan exit', *New York Times*, 15 March 2012; 'Gen. David Petraeus: the troops can't quit', *Washington Post*, 23 Jan. 2012; 'Obama will speed pullout from war in Afghanistan', *New York Times*, 22 June 2011, and 'US officials debate speeding up Afghan pullout', *New York Times*, 13 March 2012.

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broader than the inhibiting Contact Group of the 1990s but narrower and more agile than the amorphous tents constructed in Afghanistan.

The point in time when this relationship was defined was 29 March 2011—some ten days after the opening of the international intervention—and the occasion was a London conference on Libya drawing together political leaders, ministers and high officials able to speak on behalf of major states, the UN, the Arab League, NATO, the EU and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In London a Libya Contact Group was established to provide leadership to the international effort, a forum for coordination and a focal point for contact with Libyan parties. As for NATO, the conference noted that NATO's executive organ, the North Atlantic Council (NAC), along with coalition partners, would 'provide the executive political direction to NATO operations'.[19] This was, in other words, a division of labour. The tent (Libya Contact Group) would deal with the big issues, while the institution (NATO) dealt with execution; and, though this was left unsaid, the coalition of strike nations would wield influence in both contexts.

In other ways, OUP illustrates the same dynamic as in Afghanistan: a coalition that drives the initial phases of the campaign and an institution that gains in weight. The campaign was short, as campaigns go—it began in mid-March 2011 and was concluded on 31 October 2011—but its intense and dramatic beginning is where this changing balance became apparent. It was the same change of balance as in Afghanistan, except that it happened much faster and more smoothly.

France and Britain were the coalition drivers *par excellence*. On 25 February 2011 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1970 referring Libya to the International Criminal Court and imposing an arms embargo, and President Sarkozy, in what amounted to a call for regime change, used the occasion to declare that Colonel Gaddafi had to go. On 10 March France became the first country to recognize the intermittent National Transitional Council opposing Gaddafi as Libya's legitimate government. On 19 March, two days after the UN Security Council's decision to tighten the arms embargo, establish a no-fly zone and authorize all necessary measures to protect civilians (Resolution 1973), France undertook Opération Harmattan and began the military phase of the crisis; other countries soon joined in. NATO's engagement came after this opening phase and in increments. NATO joined the arms embargo on 22 March, decided to enforce the no-fly zone from 24 March and then finally, on 31 March, took sole command of the international effort over Libya—which in effect became an air war.

It was during this phase that the aforementioned London Conference division of labour became established, and it turned out to be less neat than appearances suggested. One reason for this was the predominantly French desire to continue the coalition-centric policy and to give NATO little or no part in proceedings. This became clear in the run-up to Opération Harmattan as the allies debated the issue of command and control. NATO's prudent planning was gaining traction, but France's preferred solution was nonetheless to run the war through an ad hoc

[19] Chair's statement, London conference on Libya, 29 March 2011, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_03/20110927_110329_-London-Conference-Libya.pdf, accessed 13 Dec. 2012.

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'special committee' of coalition members; in contrast, the United States, Britain and others wanted a key role for NATO.[20] France skilfully delayed a decision even once UNSCR 1973 had been adopted because it wanted to favour the coalition track at a summit on Libya to be held in Paris on 19 March—a summit to which NATO's secretary general was not invited, that was immediately followed by French military action and whose concluding communiqué does not mention NATO.[21]

Matters were complicated by the German and Turkish positions. Germany had abstained on UNSCR 1973 and hesitated to accept any responsibility, however indirect, for a possible NATO operation. Accordingly, Germany pulled its forces—amounting to 40 per cent of the personnel—out of NATO's Airborne Warning and Control System, and generally held up the allied planning process.[22] Turkey, concerned with its standing in the Arab and Muslim world, at first rejected a military intervention in any format, then sought to contain it by opposing a coalition framework and moving the mission inside NATO to maximize its influence on operations, including targeting.[23] It did not help matters that France failed to invite Turkey to the Paris summit of 19 March where the coalition was supposed to fall into place, at least as far as French policy was concerned. France and Turkey managed to settle on a compromise that strikes would be 'limited' (though the NAC would not be involved in targeting), which allowed NATO to go ahead with command of the no-fly zone on 24 March.[24] The remaining question now concerned strike missions beyond the establishment of the no-fly zone, and this became the subject of the London conference mentioned above.

France was pushed into accepting full NATO command and control not only by American and British insistence on a fairly traditional line-up of forces in Atlantic affairs but by the alignment of numerous allies with the US–British position. Countries including Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and, significantly, Belgium and Luxembourg—traditionally closer to French policy—supported NATO *vis-à-vis* a coalition because they felt more comfortable with the institution: NATO had slots for all countries in predictable and prepared command structures.[25] Active participation in OUP did not extend to all NATO allies: half of them (14) provided air or naval forces (Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Denmark,

[20] 'Libya command structure divides US, NATO allies', AFP, 23 March 2011. Each country participating in the early days of the military mission had a label for its mission. The US chose Odyssey Dawn; the British, Ellamy.

[21] Communiqué, Paris summit for the support to the Libyan people, 19 March 2011, http://www.elysee.fr/president/root/bank_objects/11-03-19-Paris_Summit_for_the_support_to_the_Libyan_people.pdf, accessed 13 Dec. 2012.

[22] Germany's strong neutralism on the Libya issue provoked controversy in Germany, where not everyone agreed with Foreign Minister Westerwelle, the architect of the policy. Chancellor Merkel elucidated the policy of compensating the allies by enhancing German contributions to the Afghan campaign, and Germany sought to be accommodating beyond this while sticking to its line. NATO's operational plan for the strike campaign (OPLAN 4) was quite permissive in so far as it defined as legitimate targets any capacity 'likely' to do harm to civilians. Germany accepted this permissive OPLAN but attached a unilateral declaration stating that subsequent OPLANs were expected to be less permissive.

[23] 'Turkey blocks NATO mission in Libya', *Der Spiegel*, 21 March 2011.

[24] 'NATO takes command of part of Libya operation', AP, 24 March 2011; 'NATO to control no-fly zone after France gives way to Turkey', *Guardian*, 25 March 2011.

[25] This paragraph is based on interviews conducted by author at NATO HQ, 6 April 2011.

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France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Turkey, the UK and the US) but only eight participated in strike missions (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, the UK and the US). Virtually all of them, however, did support a NATO-led mission; so coalition-centric France had run out of alternative command and control options. Even so, given the limited number of strike countries, it was clear that in the skies over Libya as on the ground in Afghanistan the institution operated with a strike coalition inside it. France did threaten this connection, but it fell into place much more quickly than in Afghanistan.

The wider tent—the Libya Contact Group—was active and contributed to both the legitimacy and military punch of the campaign. It was perhaps above all an important forum for political coordination: it helped shape policy on the big issues regarding the pace and nature of regime transition; it offered support both to insurgents and to the idea that regime transition had to be achieved locally, which was soothing to Russia, China and other wary powers; and it established a trust fund to provide finance for the insurgents' local efforts. Its first meeting took place in Doha, Qatar, and later it met in Abu Dhabi within the United Arab Emirates and twice in Istanbul, in addition to meetings in Rome and Paris—all in recognition of the important role played by the Arab League, the African Union, and individual countries such as Qatar and the Emirates.

Some members of the Contact Group were active within the strike coalition, notably the monarchies of Qatar and the Emirates. Qatar offered four Mirage strike fighters for the air campaign and the Emirates offered six Mirage and six F-16 fighters. In addition, Qatar offered extensive aid to the rebels on the ground, in the shape of money, military hardware and a large number of military advisers, and was vocal inside the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council in the effort to mobilize institutional support for the rebels. This aid fell outside the UN 'responsibility to protect' resolution but mirrored the response of some of the leading western powers that also saw a need for such assistance.[26] At a time when 'Arab Spring' upheaval was spreading in the region, engulfing Egypt and threatening the regime of Bahrain, this activism inside the coalition paid off: both Qatar and the Emirates could effectively use the threat of withdrawal from the coalition to force the United States to back down from criticizing a controversial Arab intervention in favour of the Bahraini regime.[27]

The London agreement thus held up, and this raises the question of how to evaluate the division of labour between coalition, institution and tent over time. The tent grew less operational as time passed. It started out as an effort to rally the Arab League to the cause of intervention and ended up as a 'big tent' affair aimed at building up international legitimacy. The initial purpose was soon achieved, and the transformation to something bigger then happened gradually over several months, culminating in the Paris meeting in September when China and Russia

[26] 'Tiny kingdom's huge role in Libya draws concern', *Wall Street Journal*, 17 Oct. 2011; 'France secretly armed Libya's rebels for push on Tripoli', *Independent*, 30 June 2011; 'Rebels claim the victory, but did the British win it?', *Independent*, 23 Aug. 2011.

[27] 'In Arab Spring, Obama finds a sharp test', *New York Times*, 24 Sept. 2012.

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were admitted into the Contact Group—which was then re-baptized Friends of Libya. The campaign to strike at those regime capacities that threatened civilians, and especially at those which were close to the advancing rebel forces, lay in the hands of a strike coalition that operated from inside the NATO command and control institution. NATO's weakness in this context was the obvious disparity between allies' contributions; but its strength was its character as an institutional stepping-stone for allies seeking influence within the coalition.

The situation in Libya differed in notable respects from that in Afghanistan. A functioning division of labour between a strike coalition, an enabling alliance and a supportive contact group was soon established, and the interconnections among this triad were adapted as the intervention ran its course. In Afghanistan it took the better part of a decade to connect the coalition and the institution, and the tent never got effectively organized. We turn next to the broader implications of these trends.

Strategic management in a complex world

The case of Libya demonstrates that strategic management is possible even in an age of multilateralism and complexity. Of course, Libya in early 2011 was not Afghanistan in 2001: Afghanistan presented a tougher challenge, given its geographical location, its living experience of decades of war, and powerful neighbours bent on intervention. However, this is incidental to the argument that in every case—however easy or difficult—strategic management will be eased if it involves the triad of coalitions, institutions and tents. With this in mind, some guidelines for strategic management can be offered. They concern coalitions first and then institutions. Coalitions are drivers of strategy: they are in control of the war aims, and they can reach out to institutions and build tents. Institutions are durable and can be shaped to elicit and foster such cooperation.

Coalitions lend themselves to strategy because they are formed for concrete political purposes, but strategy must be cultivated. The first of three guidelines is straightforward and can be labelled *decision shaping*. It involves the core members of the coalition, which must ensure that they understand each other's national interests and the reasons for moving forward. In international affairs this happens sometimes via consultations among the 'quad' (the United States, Britain, France and Germany) or among the 'quint' (the four plus Italy).[28] These cores are real and operate inside all the major institutions of current world politics. Decisions are shaped informally, and deliberations in the formal arenas such as the NAC follow the path thus charted. If informal high-level consultations among major players are a reality, it still needs emphasizing that these consultations must first of all be maintained (the 'war on terror' derailed them for a while) and moreover must be tailored to accommodate active allies' claims on influence, which can be met by way of their involvement in regular debriefings.

[28] Hans Binnendijk, 'Talking security', *New York Times*, 20 April 2005.

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The second coalition guideline can be summed up as *mission framing*. This concerns the mobilization of a wider group of like-minded countries into a campaign 'tent'. Here the coalition core must open a debate on the wider political implications of the campaign. The tent does not lend itself to strategic management: it is too broad and diverse for this, too disconnected from the command and control of operations. However, the tent can be useful for connecting policy to strategy, as in clarifying how disparate countries can contribute to the political objectives of the war.[29] This was the case in Libya, where the overt role of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia along with the less visible support offered by Morocco and others helped shape the regional parameters of the campaign. In Afghanistan, the issue of regional containment has been more difficult, but nevertheless it is notable that the key allies were slow to realize the importance of organized regional outreach and never managed to develop it as an effective tool for strategic management—and thus a tool for narrowing the ends–means gap that the campaign was experiencing.

The third coalition guideline of *geopolitical management* follows from here. This concerns those stakeholders that may not think along the same lines as those within the 'tent', but whose engagement is nevertheless important to obtain. It is useful to distinguish between the tent and a dialogue engaged to manage relations with these stakeholders, and to highlight the difference between a 'tent' and a Great Power 'concert', a well-known concept in international relations. Concerts tend to happen in relation to systemic threats (for example, from a revisionist Great Power such as Napoleon's France or Hitler's Germany); they are short-lived and have limited capacity for structuring a new order. Coalitions should make it their business to open dialogue on geopolitical management when war beckons, but also to take care to dissociate the tent from this dialogue: the tent is for like-minded nations and as such a tool with which the dialogue with peers can be structured.[30] It is a means to shape multilateralism by way of linking arguments relating to legitimacy and efficacy.[31] Peers can be brought into the tent if, as in the case of Libya, policies converge sufficiently. If tents are constantly improvised, as in the case of Afghanistan, this distinction and its political benefits become harder to manage—a shortcoming that must be attributed in no small part to a deficit of political vision on the part of the coalition.

This brings us to the institutional environments of coalitions. Institutions are not mere reactive containers that await coalition initiative. They can entice coalitions to act through them, in turn gaining a degree of influence over those coalitions, partly because coalitions must take into account institutional interests when shaping the mission, partly because the coalition may have to negotiate

[29] A point reflected in Hew Strachan's discussion of how policy tends to substitute for strategy, 'The lost meaning of strategy', *Survival* 47: 3, 2005, pp. 33–54.

[30] This is how western and Arab states managed a meeting in Qatar in November 2012 that led to the formation of a united Syrian opposition coalition. Most governments then recognized the coalition as the legitimate representative of Syria's people, though this move was opposed by Russia and China.

[31] Martha Finnemore, 'Fights about rules: the role of efficacy and power in changing multilateralism', *Review of International Studies* vol. 31, supplement S1, 2005, pp. 187–206.

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access to institutional assets during the campaign or appeal to their employment in the post-conflict phase.

As in the case of coalitions, there are three guidelines that institutions could follow. The first is to install and act within a sense of *restraint and realism*. The institution—the members driving it—must know what it is capable of and act within these confines. In the Libya case we see how the EU got into trouble on this account. In early April it agreed to a mission (EUFOR Libya) but failed to agree to a strong policy (a Common Security and Defence Policy mandate). EUFOR was therefore made contingent on UN initiative, which never came because reality had moved the mission into the hands of NATO and the Contact Group.[32] NATO in Libya was, by contrast, realistically focused on defining issues related to the campaign—partnering, targeting, the OPLAN end-state, and so on. This does not mean that NATO cannot overreach itself. In Afghanistan the security assistance mission set too wide a goal for itself, leading to a comprehensive action blueprint—in support of an Afghan Compact and National Development Strategy—that cannot be realized. In Afghanistan NATO has lacked a sense of what it could hope to achieve and how this potential could be translated into a mission of both restraint and impact.

Institutions do not have to act to be relevant. They may serve as a hub for coalitions, as a kind of platform for preparing and training the force packages on which coalitions will rely. This can most easily be illustrated with reference to NATO. What NATO could do more clearly—and this is the second guideline—is to *game the future*: that is, to test future scenarios of conflict more thoroughly and with greater effect. Gaming refers to the kind of war games that are used for challenging and testing planning assumptions: NATO currently has no such gaming capacity, nor do other institutions. Gaming is effective because it dramatically illustrates the kind of pain a nation can suffer if it lacks adequate forces: thus it could shake up lethargic defence planning processes (in NATO, the Defence Planning Process). Some nations will not want to be shocked in this way because they lack the defence budgets to follow through on what the games show them; but nations driven by combinations of security and industrial interests could nonetheless develop NATO's collective capacity to make transparent the costs of inaction (or the benefits of action) to individual allies. This type of collective capacity should be institutionalized as a NATO asset but open to partners as a coalition-enabling mechanism.

The third guideline—*exercising to innovate*—concerns the commitment to a sustained training regime. Training, it is widely recognized, makes for real options in coalition making. It is also gaining new urgency following the US decision of early 2012 to withdraw two of four combat brigades from Europe and to compensate by deploying a fully equipped combat brigade up to twice a year to Europe (in fact, Germany) for allied exercises. The message is clear: to prevent America's further disengagement from Europe, and to catch up militarily, European allies

[32] Ana Gomes, 'Was Eufor Libya an April fool's joke?', *EU Observer*, 13 July 2011, http://euobserver.com/opinion/32624, accessed 13 Dec. 2012.

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must invest in training. The allies have demonstrated good will, as they have adopted the 'NATO Forces 2020' document that the United States put on the table as a force blueprint for the May 2012 Chicago summit. However, good will must now result in the revival of a kind of NATO Response Force transformational tool—exercising to prepare for tomorrow's wars—rather than a return to collective investments in command structures for territorial defence. The debate on this decision is getting under way against the knowledge that NATO's 'operational tempo' will decrease after ISAF and after 2014.[33]

Restraint and realism, gaming the future, exercising to innovate—these are the steps an institution such as NATO could take to become a more attractive framework for coalition action. The same guidelines also apply to the EU and other institutions. In the case of the EU and NATO, their claim to relevance as frameworks would be enhanced if they developed some gaming and training facilities in common, because in many cases their combined assets and competencies will be in demand and must be coordinated. If they could draw in NGOs or UN specialized agencies in substantial ways, this would further strengthen their claims to relevance.

Conclusion

Strategy is about connecting policy to military operations. The skill required to manage strategy, as the early generations of strategic analysts knew well, is above all a personal quality. One can erect bureaucracies to work across boundaries—a national security council comes to mind—but bureaucracy is about routine, whereas strategic bridge-building is about judgement and vision.

The debate of recent years pitting coalitions against institutions in many ways echoes these original strategic concerns, with proponents of coalitions emphasizing the personal skill of a leader and proponents of institutions emphasizing the need to rein in complexity and routinize decisions. The review of the debate and investigation of some cases of military intervention undertaken in this article suggest that leadership remains in demand but that political formats have multiplied as a reflection of the complexity of contemporary world politics. Leadership resides in coalitions but they must connect to both institutions and tents to maximize the scope for strategic management.

The claim made here is a modest one. It is that the concept of a triad—coalitions, institutions and tents—enhances our understanding of the dynamics of armed intervention and the fate of strategy. The claim is not that states will necessarily succeed in their war aims if they connect all three political formats, or that they will necessarily fail if they do not. War is too complicated for that. What can be ventured, though, is that states that intervene will be better off if they try to connect the political formats than if they do not. The guidelines offered in the last section of the article follow from here.

The strategists of old were right to emphasize the fundamental conflict between

[33] This passage draws on various background interviews with NATO officials conducted in the autumn of 2012.

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adversaries that lies at the heart of strategy. To manage strategy is to manage conflict and power. In the cases of both Afghanistan and Libya the temptation was to eschew questions of power because these missions were about assisting a legitimate regime and protecting civilians, respectively. However, power cannot be denied but must be managed. The triad of coalitions, institutions and tents is a conceptual tool to comprehend power in war. It is a tool—as a fine analyst of power, Henry Kissinger, might have said—to assess whether a congruence on values coincides with a balance of power.

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