

# Napoleon's Dictum

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IT WAS Napoleon who said that it is better to fight against a coalition than to fight as part of one.

Coalitions mean trouble. To conduct a successful military operation, one needs a unified command and a clear, agreed upon aim. Both are rare in coalitions.

A coalition is composed of different countries, each of which has its own national interests and domestic political pressures. Reaching an agreement on anything needs time, which will be used by a determined enemy to his own advantage.

All this has become very apparent in the coalition war against Muammar Qaddafi.

THERE IS no way to get rid of this "eccentric" tyrant but by sheer military force. This seems to be obvious by now.

As the Hebrew joke goes, Qaddafi may be mad, but he is not crazy. He perceives the rifts in the coalition wall and is shrewd enough to exploit them. The Russians abstained in the Security Council vote – which in effect meant voting for the resolution – but since then have been carping about every move. Many well-meaning and experienced leftists around the world condemn everything the US and/or NATO do, whatever it is.

Some people condemn the "Libyan intervention" because there is no similar action against Bahrain or Yemen. Sure, it is a case of blatant discrimination. But that is like demanding a murderer go unpunished because other murderers are still free. Two minuses make a plus, but two murders do not become a non-murder.

Others assert that some of the coalition partners are themselves not much better than Qaddafi. So why pick on him? Well, it's he who provoked the world and stands in the way of the Arab awakening. The need to remove others must be dealt with, too, but should not in any way serve as an argument against solving the present crisis. We cannot wait for a perfect world – it may take some time to arrive. In the meantime, let's do our best in an imperfect one.

EVERY Day that passes with Qaddafi and his thugs still there, the coalition malaise gets worse. The agreed aim of "protecting Libyan civilians" is wearing thin – it was a polite lie from the beginning. The real aim is – and cannot be otherwise – the removal of the murderous tyrant, whose very existence in power is a continuous deadly menace to his people. But that was not spelled out in coalitionese.

It is clear by now that the "rebels" have no real military force. They are not a unified political movement and they have no unified political - let alone military - command. They will not conquer Tripoli by themselves, perhaps not even if the coalition supplies them with arms.

It is not the case of an irregular force fighting a regular army and gradually turning into an organized army itself – as we did in 1948.

The fact that there is no rebel army to speak of may be a

positive phenomenon – it shows that there is no hidden, sinister force lurking in the wings, waiting to replace Qaddafi with another repressive regime. It is indeed a democratic, grassroots uprising.

But for the coalition, it creates a headache. What now? Leave Qaddafi, a wounded and therefore doubly dangerous animal, in his lair, ready to pounce on the rebels the moment the pressure is off? Go in and themselves do the job of removing him? Go on talking and do nothing?

One of the most hypocritical – if not downright ridiculous – proposals is to "negotiate" with him. Negotiate with an irrational tyrant? What about? About postponing the massacre of the rebels for six months? Creating a state which is half democratic, half brutal dictatorship?

Of course there must be negotiations – without and after Qaddafi. Different parts of the country, different "tribes", different political forces yet to rise must negotiate about the future shape of the state, preferably under UN auspices. But with Qaddafi??

ONE ARGUMENT is that it should all be left to the Arabs. After all, it was the "Arab League" that called for a no-fly zone.

Alas, that is a sad joke.

That Arab League (actually the "League of Arab States") has all the weaknesses and few of the strengths of a coalition. Founded with British encouragement at the end of World War II, it is a loose – very, very loose – association of states with vastly different interests.

In a way, it represents the Arab World as it is – or was until yesterday. It is a world in which two (and perhaps three) contradictory trends are at work.

On the one hand, there is the perpetual longing of the Arab masses for Arab unity. It is real and profound, nourished by memories of past Arab glories. It finds its most concrete current expression in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Arab leaders who have betrayed this trust are paying the price now.

On the other hand, there are the cynical calculations of the member states. From the very first moment of its existence, the League has reflected the labyrinthine world of mutually antagonistic and competing regimes. Cairo always vies with Baghdad for the crown of Arab leadership, ancient Damascus competes with both. The Hashemites hate the Saudis, who displaced them in Mecca. Add to this the myriad ideological, social and religious tensions, and you get the picture.

The first major undertaking of the League – the 1948 intervention in the Israeli-Palestinian war - ended in an Arab disaster, largely because the armies of Egypt and Jordan tried to forestall each other, instead of concentrating their energies against us. That was our salvation. Since then, practically all Arab regimes have used the Palestinian Cause each for its own interests, with the Palestinian people serving as a ball in this cynical game.

The present Arab Awakening is not led by the League, by its very nature it is directed against everything the League is and represents. In Bahrain the Saudis are supporting the same forces the rebels are fighting against in Tripoli. As a factor in the Libyan crisis, the League is best ignored.

There is a third level of inter-Arab relations – the religious one. Islam has a strong hold on the Arab masses almost everywhere, but like every great religion, Islam has many faces indeed. It means quite different things to Wahabis in Riyadh, Taliban in Kandahar, al-Qaeda people in Yemen, Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon, royalists in Morocco and the simple fellah on the shores of the Nile. But there is a vague sense of community.

So any Muslim Arab feels that he or she belongs to three different but overlapping identities, with the borders between them ill-defined – the “watan”, which is the local nation, like Palestine or Egypt, the “kaum”, which is the pan-Arab identity, and the “umma”, which is the all-Islamic community of believ-

ers. I doubt whether there are two scholars who agree on these definitions.

SO HERE we are, people of March 2011, after having followed our basic human instinct and pushed for armed intervention against the threatened disaster in Libya.

It was the right, the decent thing to do.

With due – and sincere - respect to all those who criticized my stand, I am convinced that it was the humane one.

In Hebrew we say: He who starts doing a good deed must finish it. Qaddafi must be removed, the Libyan people must be given a decent chance to take their fate into their own hands. So, too, the Syrian people, the Yemenites, the Bahrainis and all the others.

I don't know where it will lead them – each of them in their own country. I can only wish them well - and hope.

And hope that this time Napoleon's dictum will not be proven right.