Italy's Role In a New European Disorder

The burden of leadership is an unbelievably complex and cumbersome role these days. Every day we see evidence of ineffectual direction in the world, and at a time when the world needs guidance most. Perpetual conflicts, paradigm shifts in politics and policy, and the role of corporations in the military policy mix all exacerbate and curtail otherwise honorable men and women. Meanwhile, war and the rumors of it haunt the public consciousness. We are in danger, and we all know it. Good soldiers and decent politicians cannot even perform, in betwixt the wearying tribulations conjured from behind the scenes of détente. Here’s one more view on Arab Spring, the Libya debacle, and the plight of millions lost in a sea of uncertainty.

“The promise given was a necessity of the past: the word broken is a necessity of the present.” - Niccolo Machiavelli

Dealing Death - It’s in Vogue

Every week I receive email notifications from any number of defense oriented organizations. It’s part of my job as a reporter to be informed, in order to inform others. One of these, and organization called Defense iQ, provides an eerie stream of informative Emails and website reports on weaponry, weapons developments, military strategies, and still more weaponry. For the lack of a better characterization, the medium is the Vogue Magazine of death and destruction on a worldwide scale. Disturbing as selling war can be, an interview with Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force, Lt. Gen. Giuseppe Bernardi’s on Defense News, offers us all a closer look at how honorable soldiers are often impaled on the spikes of the civilian power brokers.

Lieutenant General Giuseppe Bernardi is one of Italy’s most experienced and honored military officers. A graduate of Italy’s Air Force Academy, Bernardi also attended the USAF’s Air War College early in his career. Once a member of the elite Frecce Tricolori Italian aerobatics squadron, Bernadis is one of the world’s most experienced pilots, an expert in aircraft tactics on a par with anyone in the world. But please take my word on the General’s obvious expertness at combat aviation, the larger point will be made apparent soon.

This Huffington Post Italy article shows Italy’s crucial part in Libya, which was the cornerstone for the larger scope of “Arab Spring.” Bernardi’s role as the top arms procurement person in the armed forces, and his obvious disdain for the “business” end of war, they frame my argument for honorable military leaders. Bernardi’s answer to the question, “Is there a danger of Libya becoming more a marketing opportunity for aircraft than a military operation?” illustrates this well:

“We are built to mount operations - we are not built for demonstrations. Le Bourget (referring to the Paris Air Show) should stay in Paris and Farnborough (UK variant) should stay in the U.K. One can start talking about being combat-proven at the end of the operation, but not during. An operation is a serious thing.”

The general’s caustic tone on hardware salesmanship and marketing in a hostile combat atmosphere bears reading and re-reading. Recalling the Huffington Post (Italy) piece, Bernardi part in the book by the Italian Air Force, “Missione Libia 2011. Il contributo dell’aeronautica militare” reveals Italy’s part in
operations Odyssey Dawn and Unified Protector. My point here is simple, the right commanders and soldiers have always been in place, what’s lacking is the political leadership. The whole Libya affair, from Benghazi and then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, to the refugees we see flooding into the EU today - it’s one of the biggest tragedies in modern times. And it’s not tragic because of soldiers on any side.

While the Supreme Commander of the coalition against Gaddafi, Admiral Jim Stavridis called the Libya operations “a model intervention,” a cadre of other military leaders in non-NATO uniform dissented. As for politicians, French MEP and president of the National Front, Marine Le Pen talked about the French Armed Forces being subjugated. Meanwhile civilian experts from Noam Chomsky to people in social media and in cafes shops around the world chided in utter disbelief at the so apparent overthrow of Gaddafi.

Why, Why, Why Italy?

Assuming my assertions about Bernardis are correct, a look at the reactions of civilians to the aforementioned book ads further weight to my argument too. Searching the articles and forums at the time of the Libya incursion by NATO we find something less than public outrage, and a lot more than adherence to the Washington line on taking out Gaddafi. This Guardian article solidifies the arguments that point to the Obama administration’s play for Arab Spring, and even the more recent anti-Russia exploits. Italy’s position changed dramatically once longtime Vladimir Putin friend, Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi was “neutralized”:

“Franco Frattini, Italy’s foreign minister, announced on Sunday night that the friendship and co-operation treaty with Tripoli had been "de facto suspended."

Berlusconi, under intense pressure up until his resignation later in 2011, is a key person for understanding how deep and widespread the American and UK interests figure in world strategic issues today. Intercepted US State Department Cables revealed back then hint at a mission to discredit the Italian leader, or to at least leverage him owing to his weakened position. Spiegel International reported on these intercepts, revealing US State Department machinations using contacts like the Georgian ambassador in Rome, of particular note in these cables is the conflict in South Ossetia, yet another “democratization” by Washington’s definition. But the real focus here should be on the “why” of Italy in central roles? For this, please read until the end.

Playing Ball

I chose General Bernardi for a part in this story for the reasons I mentioned earlier, and for the clarity of his rhetoric too. In short, as men of honor go, he is easy to see through, and easy to understand. Critical, when the need for criticism is necessary, he is like many surgeons of air combat, cutting to the bone out of necessity. One can see clearly, his priorities for those missions in Libya, in his remarks afterward:

“We operated without incurring any accident, and without causing collateral damage." "The only regret that I have had, is that of not having been able to provide to the public a detailed account of our work, in order to avoid any possible exploitation. This volume fills part of that void."

Zero collateral damage! Transparency and clarity of mission! An honest soldier’s assessment of what any military mission should be, to conduct an exacting and successful campaign, with the absolute minimum of civilian casualties. That is what honorable military leaders discern, the simply military victory, but there’s the larger battle to discuss.

When we turn to the political or civilian side though, the wisdom of ousting Moammar Gaddafi’s government was short sighted in the extreme. Now millions of refugees flood the borders of the an already economically beleaguered EU. The flames of war and far reaching strife now lick at the once isolated citizenry of a multitude of nations. Today we can see the vehement support of politicians like Norway’s Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and others for NATO intervention in 2011, as akin to some form of idiotic madness. We live in a world where there are two factions afoot, those that “play ball” with Obama, and those that do not.

Taking into account the roles of key players such as the US president, Hillary Clinton, and especially Senator John McCain, a trail of breadcrumbs leads from Washington, straight through Libya, into Egypt, across Syria, and ultimately up to Kiev in Ukraine. If the mission to assist these “Arab Spring” uprisings was to destroy order, and to stab anybody who disagrees with the method in the back, then it has been a blistering success.
Speaking of back stabbing, we can look at Germany shouldering the brunt of refugee migration these days. After having been the only EU nation to have abstained the UN Security Council vote on Libya back then, Frau Merkel’s government is also plagued by the Greece affair, and the Ukraine mess. Germany joined China, Russia, Brazil and India is a “no vote,” taking the “high ground” on Gaddafi and Libya in 2010 and 2011, but it was the Washington think tanks that declared Obama strategies Victorious! to the world.

This Brookings Institute piece was particularly Obama-like in condemning any who would interfere. Brookings Senior Fellow kissed the US president’s behind like nobody’s business:

“... we should be careful not to overstate the strategic benefits of President Obama's chosen course of action the past six months. Foreign Policy's Blake Hounshell argues that the administration's strategy of "leading from behind" now "seems utterly vindicated."

“Leading from behind” – we’ve all seen far too much of that. Now that the Mediterranean Sea is full to the brim with Africans in exodus, and with Russia and China the huge Red Scare redux, can we not see the wisdom of old soldiers and effective leaders shining forth now? What of Italy’s role, you ask? The answer is fairly simple actually. Italy is essential for the cliché Lisbon to Vladivostok idea to take shape. This article by Ivan Timofeev at Russia Direct does a nice job of framing what I would call the “Europe Spring” of EU-Russia discord, or the evaporation of any possibility a cooperative greater Europe. Italy’s role in all this can be cemented using many variables, but geography plays as big a role as any. With German and Swiss banks locking in with partners in New York and London, Italy is all that stands in between a greater Russia to Portugal geo-connect. As nebulous as this concept may seem, it’s a reality Washington and Moscow recognize. To synthesize this reality one need look only as far as this Spiegel story detailing Mr. Putin’s plans from 2010. To quote the Russian leader concerning a vast and far reaching partnership:

"The renewed principles of our cooperation could be anchored in the partnership agreement between the EU and Russia, an accord which is currently under negotiation. We should approach this treaty from a strategic perspective. We should try to think 20, 30, even 50 years into the future."

Imagine you pull the strings on the current American president. Can you envision what a this “greater Europe” means for America and the United Kingdom? Or at least for the dinosaurs in Washington think tanks? I can. Germany has to be blackmailed into playing ball, Georgia has to be in NATO, Ukraine too, and by no means can Italy’s Silvio Berlusconi continue to lead Italy. No friend of Vladimir Putin can control the wider Mediterranean arena. This Russia International Affairs Council (RIAC) article by Olga Potyomkina from 2014 mentions Italy’s role in the plans of Gazprom.

As further evidence, this The Economist article is representative of what I call “reverse rationale proof” Berlusconi and all those loyal to him were targets. The piece mystifies or makes villains of Italy’s Northern League, just to name one viable political entity aligned with Russia on a common Europe. This is a subject meant for far more in depth research, but my points are accentuated in mentioning an Italian role in strategies from Cairo to Kiev and beyond. Need I point out; The Economist is owned by the Rothschild family, as well as Agnelli family of Northern Italy? Maybe bitter enemies play a traditional role in all this? I know I’ve given you food for thorough thought, at least I hope I have.

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