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Parallels of inadequacy: the G4 and Libya

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The greatest problem about humanitarian war is that, in the end, it is just that – war. The recent polemic armed intervention in Libya is spurring much anger and its commanding coalition is now the target of great criticism and condemnation. Many countries and international organizations point to the unfeasibility and lack of commitment in the coalition's agenda to assume the consequences and solve any future problems related to their involvement after the crisis. In the midst of this discussion, some retreat, others remain absent or even go as far as making analogies to the crusades.

The debate concerning the pros and cons of humanitarian armed intervention is one of the most complex of our time. It poses many practical, theoretical, logistical and philosophical questions, which the very young and unorganized international community is not yet capable of answering. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the motivations, national interests, immoral conceptions and egotistic significance of the intervention in Libya, there is truth in stating that it is in fact stopping a dictator from attempting against the lives of civilians. Muammar Gaddafi was, and is, an enemy of many in the west. His regime represents the distasteful repression most countries in the world condemn. However, even when some western countries appeared to have made peace with Gaddafi – an embarrassing political error –

the coalition decided to take action and with the United Nations' consent intervene and stop what seemed a probable massacre of innocent lives.

Nevertheless, these types of resolutions will probably not see the light of day if the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is reformed and the G4 countries – Brazil, Germany, India and Japan – are successful in becoming permanent members of this security body. Even though African countries also claim two permanent seats, and although South Africa approved UNSC Resolution 1973, there is much solidity in arguing that the world would not become a safer, more peaceful place if such a pro-inclusive reform takes place.

Reforming a top body like the UNSC is not an issue to be taken lightly. In fact, if by reform the G4 countries simply aim to have a permanent seat, then perhaps the word reform should not be used at all. Reforms entail a significant change in the functioning, scope, criteria and application of norms and rules of an organization. Yet, the Libyan crisis proves that Germany, India, Brazil and to an extent Japan, only seem to pursue this reform in order to enhance their position in the international community. Consequently, the system will not be truly reformed, but simply broadened. The rules and principles will remain the same as these countries are not top security actors, nor have they proven to be active pursuers of peace if the



chance to become a permanent member is given to them. Furthermore, the inclusion of these four countries in the UNSC would probably create even more obstacles to any future humanitarian intervention, with all its problems and flaws. Indeed, achieving peace often requires actions these four countries are not ready to undertake.

Although Germany was part of the initial coalition to impose a no-fly zone in Libya, the country decided to withdraw its forces from the Mediterranean due to a deep disagreement related to the scope of the mission and especially with NATO assuming the command of the task at hand. However, in support of the coalition, Angela Merkel's cabinet and the German Parliament approved the deployment of more troops to Afghanistan after withdrawing from the Mediterranean. This refusal to lead or even to take part in a new theatre of military operations but on the contrary to reinforce a current one, was described by German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle as a "rational policy of solidarity",¹ a means of easing the burden of its allies who are now involved in two fronts of combat. Germany, serving a term as non-permanent member of the UNSC also abstained when this body was voting the approval of Resolution 1973. Conversely, other countries of the G4 – namely Brazil and India – have also opposed the ongoing armed intervention in Libya. Both are serving terms as non-permanent members of the UNSC and both abstained during voting for the resolution to approve armed intervention in Libya. Brazil was joined by many Latin American countries in opposing this 'humanitarian war', the greatest criticism hailing from Hugo Chávez's Venezuela. India also disapproved of the coalition's air strikes in Libya, stating that it "views with grave concern the continuing violence, strife and deteriorating humanitarian situation in Libya" and "calls upon all parties to abjure violence and

the use of threat and force to resolve the differences".² However, India has not been able to provide a solution to deal with Gaddafi's actions, nor has its diplomacy addressed the fate of the rebels and of those civilians associated with them.

Wouldn't the participation of these countries form a much broader coalition which would act as the 'check and balance' system the mission so clearly needs? Indeed, by refraining from participating or supporting any concrete action, the G4 countries not only show they are not keen on intervening when necessary – or at least when the intervention bears fruit for national interests – but have also sent a signal to the Congolese, the Sudanese of Darfur and the Zimbabweans – to name a few – that any future reform of the UNSC will not attempt to resolve their situation.

Whatever solution India has to "solve the differences" through peaceful means – much like Brazil – it has not yet been revealed. On the other hand, Japan is too busy dealing with its tragic humanitarian crisis and nuclear perils to take any concrete position on this matter, even though a solid statement would be expected by a country claiming a permanent seat at the UNSC.

Obviously, all of the G4 countries have the right to criticize and withdraw from any missions or political associations they do not consider viable. Yet, such actions have ramifications when the countries condemning the air strikes, which ultimately will save lives – or at least innocent lives – are the same countries arguing for a more preponderant position in dealing with the world's security issues. Even though their reasoning points to the flaws in the mission objectives of the intervening coalition, it is difficult to understand the disregard for the daily events and loss of life in Libya. Wouldn't the participation of these countries form a much broader coalition which would act as the 'check and balance' system the mission so clearly needs? Indeed, by refraining from participating or supporting any concrete action, the G4 countries not only show they are not keen on intervening when necessary – or at least when the intervention bears fruit for national interests – but have also sent a signal to the Congolese, the Sudanese of Darfur and the Zimbabweans – to name a few – that any future reform of the UNSC will not

1 Patrick Donahue, "Germany backs more troops in Afghanistan after Libya rejection" (*Bloomberg*, 23 March 2011).

2 "India regrets air strikes over Libya" (*Times of India*, 21 March 2011).



attempt to resolve their situation. In the end, the reform these countries are asking of the UNSC appears to be nothing more than lip service to enhance their position in the international community.

Yet again, humanitarian wars are a very uncertain subject. The US invasion of Iraq in 2003 alienated the concept to an extent that any mention of it appears to be automatically rejected by other world powers. Even though all armed interventions have many other objectives to fulfill besides safeguarding civilians, regardless of these obscure interests, they still manage to spare human lives, which is better than accomplishing nothing at all. In the end, the question lies on how to improve these interventions in order to diminish the negative returns and future consequences, while improving the overall living conditions and political life of the country under conflict. By not taking part while also creating obstacles, not only do the G4 countries fail to contribute to any positive outcome but also raise doubts about the very weight and importance of their proposed reform, leaving no clear reason for the UNSC permanent members to seriously consider their bid. Hence, reforming the UNSC to include the G4 countries appears to be nothing more of a maneuver on their part to achieve more visibility in the international system.

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