



## Libya: War On The Mind May Reduce Casualties

If Colonel Gaddafi and his sons are not captured soon the present stand-offs at Sirte and Bani Walid may be repeated elsewhere in Libya. To avoid unnecessary violence anti-Gaddafi forces have adopted a siege and negotiate approach, a strategy that will bear more fruit if measures are taken which target the mind of Gaddafi's supporters.

Put simply, the duration, scope and intensity of loyalist resistance could be reduced by undermining their will to fight. By acting in the cognitive and emotional domains revolutionary forces may facilitate victory on the physical battlefield with fewer casualties on all sides.

The new Libyan regime has supportive radio and television stations, and ample access to social media. These electronic means offer ways to exert influence over the minds of Gaddafi's supporters and should be used to reinforce the changed circumstances across the country. However, anecdotes from Tripoli suggest that pro-Gaddafi forces have been fed only the (increasingly fantastic) messages provided by Gaddafi, his sons, and his official spokesman. Without access to opposition media or independent sources of news and information Gaddafi's supporters continue fighting largely ignorant of the wider reality.

In an age where computers and digital technology dominate communications it is important to not neglect the significance of the humble paper leaflet, especially when access to electronic media sources is tightly controlled. Gaddafi might be able to prevent his supporters from accessing TVs, radios, computers and mobile telephones but he cannot stop them being showered with leaflets. Simple flyers dropped from the sky would burst the bubble of restricted information around Gaddafi's supporters.

A critical benefit of using paper leaflets is that they would provide a visible testament to the strength of the rebellion, even if they were unread. Where green pennants and posters of Gaddafi represent his control over the population, scattering thousands of leaflets sporting the new Libyan tricolour would tangibly challenge that authority. They would represent a physical token of the revolution, a palpable link to the surrounding opposition and a collectable emblem by which wavering loyalists could cautiously disclose their doubts.

In either paper or electronic form, the messages for Gaddafi's supporters must have the authenticity and authority of the new Libyan regime. Some die-hard loyalists will never abandon the dictator or his family, but others would switch allegiance when it is safe or in their interests to do so. They need to be reassured, persuaded, and convinced that regime change is not to be feared, but embraced as very much to their long-term advantage. Influencing those who give Gaddafi genuine and sincere support will be difficult but themes which undermine his credibility, integrity, and entitlement to loyalty are worth pursuing.

The new Libyan government is not be able to fully exploit this psychological potential without Nato's co-operation or consent. Nato's formal determination to avoid taking sides in Libya is no longer sustainable. Realistically, it is free to conduct partisan activity on behalf of the new Libyan government, especially if it prevents further bloodshed. It should be prepared to drop leaflets on behalf of the new Libyan regime in areas where pro-Gaddafi supporters have hunkered down, or allow Libyan aircraft to do so.

If Gaddafi's supporters still fight because they remain genuinely loyal to him, they are ignorant of reality, or they are afraid of a future without him, their motivation can be undermined through psychological operations, where even paper leaflets may help end the bloodshed of this Libyan war of liberation.