

# Odyssey Dawn Squeezes Qadhafi

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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## Brief Analysis

Operation Odyssey Dawn is having telling effects on the military situation in Libya. Air operations by NATO and the coalition of countries opposing the Libyan government are degrading regime capabilities substantially and bolstering the rebels' ability to conduct both defensive and offensive operations. For the Qadhafi regime's part, its capacity to engage in offensive operations is declining markedly, and even its ability to conduct a coherent defense of its heartland is diminishing.

The rebels still need improved offensive capabilities and must demonstrate that they can conduct a sustained offensive over the distances involved to reach Tripoli. Critical to rebel success will be continued strike operations by NATO/coalition forces against regime units and military infrastructure, along with diplomatic actions and information operations designed to weaken the resolve of the regime and its military forces. Additional military assistance to the rebels will also be needed to enhance their offensive capabilities. Given the pressure now being exerted, the regime's ability to hold power is likely to crack in a matter of weeks.

## Stripping Away the Regime's Advantages

In a concerted and increasingly effective air campaign, NATO/coalition forces are breaking the regime's military capabilities through the following measures:

*No-fly zone enforcement.* No serious offensive air actions have been undertaken by the Libyan air force since the no-fly zone came into effect on March 19. Coalition air operations to enforce the no-fly zone have included attacks on Libyan fighters and helicopters on the ground and the destruction of airfield facilities, as well as combat air patrols over northern Libya.

*Firepower reduction.* Coalition air operations have inflicted major losses on Libyan combat and combat-support vehicles, likely along with some of their trained crews. Images from the fighting in the east show destroyed and abandoned T-72 tanks, BMP infantry fighting vehicles, 155-millimeter artillery pieces, and BM-21 multiple rocket launchers, all of these being the key combat systems on which the regime has relied for offensive operations.

Coalition forces are also reducing regime firepower in western Libya, having struck the 32nd Brigade -- a key government security force -- tank forces in the Zintan area, and regime artillery and tanks operating in or near Misratah. The government offensive around Zintan has waned, and while the regime is still fighting desperately to

take Misratah, it now does so at much less of an advantage in firepower.

*Attacks on command and control.* The government's ability to exercise command and control of its forces has been degraded by attacks on command and control (C2) facilities.

*Attacks on the logistics system.* Coalition airstrikes have targeted the regime's ability to support its forces in both east and west. Destroyed regime assets have included storage and maintenance facilities, transportation and supply units, and logistics vehicles, including cargo trucks and tank transporters.

*Deep air interdiction operations.* Coalition aircraft have been attacking regime air facilities deep in Libya, including the air base at Sebha, some four hundred miles from Tripoli. These operations are aimed at denying the government the ability to use these bases to support offensive air operations as well as to bring in personnel reinforcements from south to the north.

## Net Effects of Odyssey Dawn

**A**mong the accumulating effects of Operation Odyssey Dawn are substantially reduced regime capabilities to deploy and use its ground forces. Coalition operations are denying loyalist forces the ability to move and maneuver, especially on the strategic and operational fronts -- an outcome seen first at Benghazi and later at Ajdabiya. Even tactical movement has become a struggle given the regime's lack of defense against air attack. Only near Tripoli can the regime initiate offensive action, and that too is being circumscribed by coalition attacks. In the east, the leadership failed to sustain its forces over a long and vulnerable supply line, and the loyalists in the west are likely encountering increasing difficulties in sustaining offensive operations.

The air operations are also having important psychological effects. The rebels are currently riding both NATO/coalition successes, as well as their own, to repel loyalist forces from eastern Libya. To a degree they have overcome the fear of tanks that possessed them during the regime's advance. Now, in a complete reversal from the scene on March 18, it is regime forces who are showing signs of being demoralized, particularly in the east. There are images of a retreating, if not defeated, army: destroyed vehicles and abandoned equipment, ammunition, and uniforms.

Most important thus far, Odyssey Dawn has restored the opportunity for the rebels to take the offensive in the east. On March 26, the rebels took Ajdabiya and rapidly advanced as far as Bin Jawad, their previous high-water mark. They are reportedly approaching Sirte, some 150 road miles from Misratah, and 270 from Tripoli. All this means that the government faces the prospect of defending a broad area against a rebel advance with limited mobility, declining firepower, and reduced command and control.

## Coalition Operations and Assistance to the Rebels Still Required

**D**espite its rapid backslide, the regime has not yet lost and needs a good shove to go over the brink. To achieve this end, NATO/coalition forces must continue to engage loyalist ground forces -- in the Sirte area and further west. A sustained rebel advance will not be possible without airstrikes against regime ground forces and logistics centers. Such operations must include both urban areas in the west in order both to defend civilian centers such as Misratah and Zintan and to prevent the regime from digging in and holding its current territories. Allied air forces are certainly capable of enacting such a mission (e.g., British Royal Air Force Tornados have struck tanks in Misratah, and other precision strike capabilities exist), but it would entail increased risk of collateral damage.

As noted, opportunities to split the regime's leadership should be exploited through diplomatic contacts and information operations. In particular, regime military forces should be offered the chance to quit fighting or face destruction. Even if these types of actions do not succeed completely, they will erode the regime's confidence in itself

and its forces.

In addition, rebel offensive capabilities require enhancements, including weapons appropriate for defeating armor; advisors to help use existing forces and weapons more effectively; and intelligence support to plan operations, allocate forces, target regime combat units, and avoid ambush.

## Remaining Military Issues

Important issues remain to be resolved with respect to the course of the conflict:

- For the rebels, issues include the ability to maintain lengthening supply lines and to overcome possible desperate regime forces resistance. Success in neither area is certain, even given current coalition operations.
- For the regime, questions center on finding a way to reduce the vulnerability of its heavy forces to air attack and establish a coherent defense of its heartland around Tripoli.
- For NATO/coalition forces, issues surround the ability to fight a close battle in Misratah and Zintan against regime elements without causing unacceptable civilian casualties; the ability to continue operations if the regime shifts to a "hedgehog strategy," acting only defensively and fighting from within populated areas; the ability to provide the rebels with the appropriate military assistance; and what to do if rebels carry the offensive into civilian areas held by regime forces, such as Sirte or, eventually, Tripoli.

## Conclusions

The opposition's military situation is much improved but still calls for leadership and determination by the coalition, and not interminable discussion and examination of options. The consequences of diplomatic and military shambling can be severe: civilian casualties resulting from loyalist attacks on cities and regime retribution in cities it has conquered, as has been reported in Tripoli, Zawiyah, Zaoura, Marsa al-Burayqah, and Ajdabiya, and as was planned for Benghazi; the possibility of a political solution that leaves Qadhafi in power; and the danger of a stalemate if loyalist resistance stiffens and the rebel offensive proves difficult to sustain. Now is not the time to snatch stalemate from the jaws of victory. Fortune can continue riding with the rebels, if the coalition has the will to use its own forces and capabilities decisively.

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