# *Libya 2011: Beyond the Humanitarian Rhetoric*

# *France, Italy and the Competition for the Central Mediterranean*

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## *Contents*

1. Introduction....2
2. Theoretical Framework....2
2.1 Offensive Realism and Survival Strategies....2
2.2 A Condition of Applicability....3
2.3 Hypotheses and Observable Implications....4
3. Method and Sources....4
4. Two States, One Stake....4
5. France: The Liberator Narrative and the Interests Behind It....5
5.1 The Narrative....5
5.2 The Behaviour: Three Checks....5
5.3 Two Levels of Interest....6
5.4 The Cost for Italy and the Limits of French Power....7
6. Italy: The Bandwagoning State....7
6.1 Before 2011: Appeasement....7
6.2 2011: From Reservation to Alignment....7
6.3 After 2011: Delegating Security....9
6.4 The Price Today....9
7. Alternative Explanations and Limits....10
8. Conclusion....11
Bibliography....12

## *1. Introduction*

Libya is the country where Italian and French interests have historically clashed in the most evident way.

Italy governed it from 1911 to 1943,[1] imports its natural resources and is geographically projected toward it in the central Mediterranean; on the other side France has never had deep links in the country, but in 2011 led the military coalition who helped to subvert Muammar Gaddafi; 15 years later, both EU and NATO members, still pursue different policies in Libya, with the country divided in rival authorities which rely more and more on other powers like Turkey and Russia.

This paper questions why the intervention in Libya has revealed a so deep gap between the declared objectives and the states' behaviour, and why the state with the highest stakes in Libya has followed instead of leading, advancing two hypotheses:

1. H1: France, despite its liberal and humanitarian rhetoric has acted in an egoistic way, following its domestic and geopolitical interests;
2. H2: Italy, which according to the logic of offensive realism should have defended its position in the region, has behaved as a bandwagoner, passively following the coalition against the Gaddafi's regime, paying the price of the coup until nowadays

The analysis uses John Mearsheimer's offensive realism as a lens and not as a moral judicial index: to say that a nation hides an interest means comparing what states declare with their actual behaviour in the anarchical system, without putting into discussion the sincerity of the single individuals. Section 2 presents the theoretical framework and the observable implications of the two hypotheses; section 3 describes the method and its limits; section 4 shows Italian and French stakes in Libya; sections 5 and 6 tease the limits of the two hypotheses; section 7 discusses the alternative explanations and the section 8 concludes the paper.

## *2. Theoretical Framework*

### *2.1 Offensive Realism and Survival Strategies*

The Offensive Realism doctrine is based on five bedrock assumptions:[2]

1. The international system is anarchic, just like the state of nature described in the Leviathan, since the system comprises independent states that have no superior authority above them;
2. Great powers inherently possess some offensive military capability, which gives them the wherewithal to hurt and possibly destroy each other, similarly to the equality in human capabilities described in the Leviathan;
3. States can never be certain about other states' intentions; specifically, no state can be sure that another state will not use its offensive military capability to attack the first state, concept already described as mistrust by Thomas Hobbes;

[1] Del Boca, A. (1986–1988). Gli italiani in Libia [The Italians in Libya] (2 vols.). Rome–Bari: Laterza.
[2] Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). The tragedy of great power politics. New York: W. W. Norton.

4. Survival is the primary goal of great powers; specifically, states seek to maintain their national integrity and the autonomy of their domestic political order; survival dominates other motives because if a state is conquered it would be in an unlikely position to pursue its other goals;
5. Great powers are rational actors like the human beings described in the Leviathan; this means that they are aware of their external environment, and they think strategically about how to survive in it.

None of these assumptions alone dictates that great powers should behave aggressively toward each other, however, when the five assumptions are married together, they create powerful incentives for great powers to think and act offensively with regard of each other; in particular, three general patterns of behaviour result:

- Fear: since there is no central authority enforcing rules and order in the anarchical international system, states regard each other with suspicion, not only seeing each other as competitors but as potentially deadly enemies;
- Self-help: since no higher authority can guarantee protection, states must rely on themselves to ensure survival; this dynamic encourages the tragic security dilemma;
- Power maximization: unlike defensive realists, Mearsheimer argues that states naturally seek as much power as possible, ideally to become regional hegemons to increase their chances of survival.

Since the stopping power of water makes global hegemony impossible to achieve, the most a great power can obtain is regional hegemony.[3]

To increase their power or to contain the rivals, states choose among different tactics: when they are facing a menacing rival they can use the balancing or the buck-passing, the alternative is bandwagoning, which means to take the side of the strongest power instead of resisting it; according to Mearsheimer it is the weakest states' tactic, since the strongest power can anyway take what it wants through the use force.[4] Walt revealed that usually states tend to balance menaces instead of joining them,[5] while Schweller sustained that bandwagoning can also be motivated by profit, when a state expects to enjoy from the loot of a stronger revanchist power.[6] In this article the bandwagoning term is used in the wide meaning common to this kind of works: when a state decides to join the side of a stronger power, or a menace, instead of trying to contain it and negotiate to defend its own national interest.

### *2.2 A Condition of Applicability*

To be precise, offensive realism is a great powers' theory and Mearsheimer considers Italy as a great power only until WWII,[7] while neither France nor Italy are cited as great powers in the contemporary academic debate. Therefore, I use the theory only at a regional level, where the central Mediterranean functions as a sub-system: France, as nuclear power and a member of the UN Security Council, is the

[3] Mearsheimer (2001).
[4] Mearsheimer (2001).
[5] Walt, S. M. (1987). The origins of alliances. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
[6] Schweller, R. L. (1994). Bandwagoning for profit: Bringing the revisionist state back in. International Security, 19(1), 72–107.
[7] Mearsheimer (2001).

strongest among the two; while Italy, the weakest state, has the highest stakes in Libya; so the theory is used to explain interests and behaviours rather than to represent Italy as a great power.

### *2.3 Hypotheses and Observable Implications*

Table 1 shows what the single theories assert and what could confute them; for both the states the antagonist explanation is the one declared: for France the humanitarian narrative, for Italy the one that argues that prudence and legality served the Italian interests.

**Table 1. Hypotheses and observable implications.**

| Hypothesis | Observable implications if the hypothesis is correct | Confutational evidence |
|---|---|---|
| H1 (France) | Initiatives aiming at anticipating the other leaders rather than consulting them; objectives which switch from protection of the civilians to regime-change; pursuit of economic and political advantages; advantages obtained at the expenses of Italy | Preemptive consultations with NATO and EU allies; actions proportionate with the threats for the civilians; limited objectives; serious commitment in the afterward stabilization of the country. |
| H2 (Italy) | Concessions to a stronger actor; follow of the coalition despite the declared reserves; reactive decisions; security delegations to others after the departure; loss of influence with respect to the rivals. | Use of the Italian influence (2008 Benghazi Treaty) to form the coalition; active strategy after 2011 to preserve the regional position. |

## *3. Method and Sources*

The article is a qualitative case study on Libya from 2008 to 2026, based upon process-tracing: it reconstructs the sequence of the governments' decisions and compares them with the Table 1 implications. The sources are documents from the Security Council, the treaties, Parliamentary acts and reports, academic papers and press articles.

Two limits must be declared:

1. Causes are deduced from behaviours and partial evidence: since the reconstruction of the French interests are mainly based upon the notes of a counsellor of the American State Department which talks about meetings with functionaries of the French intelligence, we cannot independently verify it, so the evidence must be coherent with H1, not demonstrate it;
2. Most recent events have been spread only by the press and thinktanks.

## *4. Two States, One Stake*

Italy has a more deep and ancient bound with Libya: after the colonial period, ENI's energetic campaign have been active since 1959 and the Greenstream pipeline connects Sicily with the Libyan coast since 2004, with Libya also being the biggest point of departure for irregular migration directed to Italy; this boundaries were formalized with the Benghazi Treaty in 2008, which provided a compensation for the colonial period and over 5 billion dollars in investments spread over a period of twenty to twenty-five years from Italy in exchange of energy contracts and cooperation on migration

from Libya; the Treaty also prohibited Italy in taking part of military operations against Libya and to allow to use its territory to launch them.[8]

France did not have any colonial revendication over Libya, but had a long-dated rivalry with the Gaddafi regime in Chad, Niger and Mali, which belonged in its "francophone" African sphere of influence, and an unsatisfied Mediterranean ambition: the Union for the Mediterranean, launched by Sarkozy in 2008, failed in giving Paris the desired leadership; also in the energy market France was a rival of Italy, and in 2018 TotalEnergies acquired 16.33% of the Waha concessions, once dominated by ENI.

## *5. France: The Liberator Narrative and the Interests Behind It*

### *5.1 The Narrative*

French narrative presented the intervention as a humanitarian European action to save Benghazi from a massacre, led by France who was standing as the defender of the Arab Springs' values: on the 4th of March, the philosopher Bernard-Henri Lévy met in Benghazi the leader of the National Transitional Council (NTC) and called upon Sarkozy, who received him in Paris and recognized him as the legitimate representative of the Libyan people;[9] the 17th of March the Security Council approved the Resolution 1973 with 10 approval votes and 5 abstentions (Germany included);[10] the 19th of March, day of the Paris summit,[11] French air forces struck the first attacks.

### *5.2 The Behaviour: Three Checks*

1. The first verification regards the consultation: France recognized the NTC on the 10th of March, a day before an EU extraordinary summit, a decision described by the Finnish Minister Alexander Stubb as "isolated"; sources near Catherine Ashton described the decision as hasty while the Italian PM Berlusconi declared that it would have been better to attend for a unitary EU position.[12] The raids of the 19th of March happened while the other leaders were in Paris, while NATO, whose leadership of the operations would have been soon asked by Italy, was not present. Germany abstained upon the Security Council and EU did not have, as a unitary political institution, a military role in the operation, therefore the verification does not confirm the declared European solidarity of the operation, which was rather originated by a France and British initiative.
2. The second check regards the aim and the proportionality of the operation: the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee concluded that the dimension of the threat to the civilians had been presented with an unjustified certainty, citing a witness which viewed the fear of a massacre as "enormously exaggerated";[13] Kuperman asserts that the goal of the NATO

[8] Ronzitti, N. (2009). The Treaty on Friendship, Partnership and Cooperation between Italy and Libya: New prospects for cooperation in the Mediterranean? Bulletin of Italian Politics, 1(1), 125–133.
[9] Marquand, R. (2011, March 28). How a philosopher swayed France's response on Libya. The Christian Science Monitor. https://csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2011/0328/How-a-philosopher-swayed-France-s-response-on-Libya
[10] United Nations Security Council. (2011, March 17). Resolution 1973 (S/RES/1973).
[11] Paris Summit for the Support to the Libyan People. (2011, March 19). Communiqué. https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/libya/libya-110319-state01.htm
[12] Agence Europe. (2011, March 10). EU27 split over Libya's NTC. https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/10333/2/eu27-split-over-libyas-ntc

campaign switched from the civilian protection to the regime-change.[14] The 15th of September Sarkozy and Cameron visited Tripoli and Benghazi with a "victory parade", citing Al-Jazeera,[15] but the country was not put under security measures, indeed France had to intervene in Sahel in 2013 due to the diffusion of weapons and militias. A humanitarian operation should provide a long-term effort to stabilize the country, which did not happen after the "victory parade".

3. The third check regards the pursuit of interests: the Committee cited a note that Sidney Blumenthal sent to Hillary Clinton on the 2nd of April 2011,[16] talking about a meeting with some officials of the French intelligence, listing 5 aims for the operation: a wider share of Libyan oil production, a greater French influence in North Africa, an improvement of the internal political situation of Sarkozy, the opportunity for the French army to reassert a major-role in the global landscape and the preoccupation of the French statesmen that Gaddafi was aiming at substituting France as the major power in the "Françafrique". Not a single goal of the five listed can be categorized as humanitarian and each of them is coherent with the observed behaviour.

*5.3 Two Levels of Interest*

Offensive Realism regards the interest of the state, but the French case study shows that there are two levels to study:

1. The Republic's interest was geopolitical: to prevent Libya to become a serious challenger in the "French" Africa, following the realist principle of fear; to obtain a major share of the Libyan oil weakening Italian position, following the principle of power maximization; to give back to France the role of regional power in the Mediterranean, following the principles of self-help and power maximization;
2. Sarkozy's interest was personal: the source of the commission talks about his desire to improve his political position in France, in sight of the Presidential elections of 2012. A judicial process also add another element to this level, since in September 2025 a Paris' tribunal condemned Sarkozy for a criminal conspiracy in connection with a scheme, between 2005 and 2007, to finance his campaign with Libyan funds in exchange of diplomatic favours;[17] Sarkozy appealed the sentence and the final decision is expected for November the 30th.[18] The case does not prove that the operation was caused by it, but it tarnishes the image of emancipator of the Libyan people.

[13] House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. (2016, September 14). Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options (HC 119, Third Report of Session 2016–17). https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmfaff/119/11905.htm
[14] Kuperman, A. J. (2013). A model humanitarian intervention? Reassessing NATO's Libya campaign. International Security, 38(1), 105–136.
[15] The World. (2011, September 15). Sarkozy, Cameron victory lap visit Libya. https://theworld.org/stories/2011/09/15/sarkozy-cameron-victory-lap-visit-libya
[16] House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2016).
[17] WHDH. (2025, September 25). Paris court sentences Nicolas Sarkozy to 5 years in prison for criminal conspiracy. https://whdh.com/news/paris-court-sentences-nicolas-sarkozy-to-5-years-in-prison-for-criminal-conspiracy/
[18] Al-Monitor. (2026, April 7). France's Sarkozy says innocent at trial over Libya funding [AFP report]. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2026/04/frances-sarkozy-says-innocent-trial-over-libya-funding 24matins. (2026). Nicolas Sarkozy désormais fixé sur la date du verdict dans l'affaire du financement libyen. https://www.24matins.fr/nicolas-sarkozy-desormais-fixe-sur-la-date-du-verdict-dans-laffaire-du-financement-libyen-1408187

### *5.4 The Cost for Italy and the Limits of French Power*

The French initiative represented for Italy a signficant loss, because it mined the privileged position the 2008 Treaty gave to Rome; however, the competition between the two European states did not end in 2011:

- In 2017 Macron hosted Serraj and Haftar in La Celle-Saint-Cloud, showing that Italy wasn't anymore the principal European actor in Libya;[19]
- In 2019 Haftar attacked Tripoli, Italy and Great Britain condemned the French hesitation in the condemnation of the offensive and the Italian Minister Salvini accused France to exploit the created chaos to help Total against ENI;[20]

However, the French aggression did not produce dominance: the collapse of the Libyan state caused the spread of weapons and armed groups in the Sahel region, forcing France to launch Serval Operation in 2013, then also in Barkhane, resulting in the French withdrawal from Mali (2022), Burkina Faso, Niger (2023) and Chad (2025). Offensive Realism says that maximizing power is rational, not that it always ends with a success.

## *6. Italy: The Bandwagoning State*

### *6.1 Before 2011: Appeasement*

The Italian policy toward Gaddafi is what Schweller defines bandwagoning for profit: instead of containing a regime that could be completely trusted, Rome bought its cooperation. Through the 2008 Treaty Italy obtained energetic contracts and the control of irregular migration in exchange of a non-aggression clause and a compensation for the colonial period.[21] Since 2009 Italy started to bring the migrants intercepted in the sea back to Libya, resulting in the 2012 condemnation of the European Court of Human Rights.[22] When the revolt erupted, Berlusconi, being asked if he had a call with Gaddafi, answered that the situation was not clear yet and that he "would have not disturbed anyone".[23]

### *6.2 2011: From Reservation to Alignment*

The Italian behaviour in the crisis is shown in the Table 2, beside the French one: Berlusconi participated at the Paris summit of the 19th of March, then in July he declared to have been against the intervention but to have been force by the Parliament's vote,[24] remembering that in Paris he sided with Angela Merkel regarding the no-fly zone.

[19] Libya Security Monitor. (2017, July 25). July 18–25: French initiative in Libya political settlement breeds Italian discontent. https://libyasecuritymonitor.com/july-18-25-french-initiative-in-libya-political-settlement-breeds-italian-discontent/
[20] Middle East Eye. (2019, April 9). Analysis: French-Italian scramble over Libya fuels Haftar's offensive. https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/analysis-french-italian-scramble-over-libya-fuels-haftars-offensive
[21] Ronzitti (2009).
[22] Hirsi Jamaa and Others v. Italy [GC], no. 27765/09, European Court of Human Rights (2012, February 23).
[23] NPR. (2011, February 22). Italy embarrassed by ties to Libya's Gadhafi. https://www.npr.org/2011/02/22/133966115/italy-embarrassed-by-ties-to-libyas-gadhafi
[24] Atlantic Council. (2011, July 7). Berlusconi declares he was against NATO intervention in Libya. NATOSource. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/berlusconi-declares-he-was-against-nato-intervention-in-libya/

The declaration evidences a stance which was not translated in a direct foreign policy: the Italian PM preferred the German stance, but the State followed the French one.

**Table 2. The French and Italian timelines in 2011.**[25]

| Date (2011) | France | Italy |
|---|---|---|
| 20–28 February | — | Questioned if he talked with Gaddafi, Berlusconi answers that he "will not disturb anyone"; the 2008 Treaty is suspended after the start of hostilities. |
| 4–10 March | Lévy meets the NTC in Benghazi; Sarkozy receives and recognize him the 10th of March, the day before the EU summit. | Berlusconi declares is better to wait for the entire EU position before recognizing the NTC. |
| 17–19 March | Pushes for the Resolution 1973; before the attacks of the 19th of March. | Berlusconi participates to the Paris summit; the 24th of March the Italian Parliament votes to act in conformity with the UN resolutions and to participate to the NATO operation. |
| 21–31 March | Leads the first coalition, with Great Britain and USA. | Frattini menaces to retake the military bases if NATO does not take the lead of the operations; NATO takes the lead on the 31st of March. |
| 25 April – 4 May | Continues with the air campaign. | Italian air forces join the attacks after an Obama call; on the 4th of May the Chamber approves a motion for an operation "without military troops on the Libyan soil" with a deadline. |
| June | Continues with the air campaign but under NATO command. | Proposes a humanitarian pause of the operations (9 June); signs a memorandum with the NTC on human trafficking (17 June). |
| 15 September – 15 December | Sarkozy and Cameron visit Benghazi and Tripoli, the first leaders to do it after the regime change. | Revives the 2008 Treaty with the new national authorities on the 15th of December. |

4 characteristics emerge:

1. Each Italian decision followed an external initiative: Rome suspended the Treaty only after the erupt of the revolts, joined the NATO operation only after the organization had already decided and joined the attacks after an American request;
2. The efforts to shape the coalition were limited and didn't work out: the request for a NATO leadership succeeded, but the Italian air forces still joined the attacks, many missions departed from Italian bases and there was no true sign that Italy wanted to deny the access to them, the proposal for a humanitarian cessation of the offensives didn't have any effect;
3. The limitation to an air operation can be interpreted as an internal concession rather than an influence instrument;
4. Italy returned to the precedent logic in December 2011, reviving the Treaty with the new Libyan authorities;

[25] NPR (2011); T.M.C. Asser Instituut (2011); Marquand (2011); Agence Europe (2011); Chivvis (2014); Atlantic Council (2011, March); Atlantic Council. (2011, April 25). Italian jets joining NATO air strikes in Libya. NATOSource. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource/italian-jets-joining-nato-air-strikes-in-libya/; The White House. (2011, April 25). Readout of the President's call with Prime Minister Berlusconi of Italy. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2011/04/25/readout-presidents-call-prime-minister-berlusconi-italy; The World (2011).

*6.3 After 2011: Delegating Security*

The framework continued after the intervention: after the collapse of the Libyan state in 2014, Italy closed its Embassy in Tripoli in February 2015 and re-opened it in January 2017;[26] on the 2nd of February 2017 signed a memorandum with the Tripoli government which sustained the Libyan coast-guard and frontier polices financing reception facilities, tacitly renewing every 3 years with the last time in 2025;[27] in this way Italy has externalized the control of its own frontier to armed groups outside of its control; Libya remained the main point of departure, with about the 88% of the arrivals through sea in the first 8 months of 2025, with the Central Mediterranean route registering about 63,200 arrivals the same year.[28]

Now comes the Italian response to the proactive French Libyan foreign policy: after the Macron request for elections before December 2018, Italy organized the Palermo Conference on 12-13 November, which did not end in a success, since Haftar participated only at the second day and the Turkish delegation left the meeting.[29] In 2025-2026 the two European countries continued to follow parallel bilateral channels: Macron received Haftar in Paris in February 2025, Rome hosted him in June of the same year, then the Italian Intelligence Director visited him in Benghazi the 7th of July 2026, after that the 30th of June the Diplomatic Meloni Counsellor participated at the Washington talks about the political re-unification of Libya with American mediation;[30] according to Al-Ghwell this competition mined the credibility of a unitarian European Foreign Policy.[31]

*6.4 The Price Today*

The price that Italy is still paying today is composed by 4 components:

1. Security: The frontier is handled by groups out of Rome's control;
2. Migration: The number of departures is still linked to Libyan political stability;
3. Diplomacy: The competition between Paris and Rome advantaged other actors, specifically Turkey and Russia; Turkey overturned Haftar's offensive with its intervention in 2019, has a permanent military presence in the country and, on the 20th of October 2026, obtained the approval of the 2019 maritime agreement with Tripoli also from the eastern Parliament;[32] Russia, through the actions of the Wagner Group and the Afrika Corps, has established its

[26] ANSA. (2017, January 10). Italy reopens embassy due to Libya role. https://www.ansa.it/amp/english/news/politics/2017/01/10/italy-reopens-embassy-due-to-libya-role_89d3d565-2b93-4cdb-8b4e-466fcd192a67.html

[27] Il Sole 24 Ore. (2025). The understanding [Renewed Libya memorandum: how migrant rules work]. https://en.ilsole24ore.com/art/renewed-libya-memorandum-how-migrant-rules-work-minniti-wrote-AH974MCD

[28] Eunews. (2025, December 12). Migrant arrivals from the central Mediterranean dropped by 1 percent so far in 2025. https://www.eunews.it/en/2025/12/12/migrant-arrivals-from-the-central-mediterranean-dropped-by-1-percent-so-far-in-2025/

[29] De Maio, G. (2018, November 19). The Palermo conference on Libya: A diplomatic test for Italy's new government. Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-palermo-conference-on-libya-a-diplomatic-test-for-italys-new-government/

[30] Libya Security Monitor. (2026a, July 7). Italian intelligence chief visits Saddam Haftar. https://libyasecuritymonitor.com/italian-intelligence-chief-visits-saddam-haftar/ Libya Security Monitor. (2026b). Italy joins Libya talks in Washington. https://libyasecuritymonitor.com/?p=9468

[31] Al-Ghwell, H. (2026). The EU's technocratic trap in Libya: How Brussels is ceding the Mediterranean. Stimson Center. https://www.stimson.org/2026/the-eus-technocratic-trap-in-libya-how-brussels-is-ceding-the-mediterranean/

[32] Middle East Eye. (2026, October 20). Turkey secures a strategic win over Greece as eastern Libya backs maritime deal. https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/turkey-secures-strategic-win-over-greece-eastern-libya-maritime-deal

presence in the east of the country, and is planning to extend the air force base of Maaten al-Sarra and to build a naval base in Tobruk.[33]

4. Economy: this fourth component is not lost yet and is the main counterargument to H2; in 2021 ENI, with about 400,000 oil barrels a day,[34] is still the major foreign energetic company in Libya, and in January 2023 has signed an agreement of natural gas estimated in about 8 billion dollars during PM Meloni visit to Tripoli.[35] Italy tries to defend a commercial position without controlling its political condition, since an agreement signed with just one of the two rival factions is valid only as that faction is in power;

## *7. Alternative Explanations and Limits*

- The humanitarian explanation: Liberal scholars will interpret the intervention as an application of the responsibility to protect the civilians, and the sincerity of the individuals that sustained this view, Lévy included, is out of discussion; however, the explanation does not pass the Section 5 check, since it does not explain the unilateral recognition of NTC, the French isolation in the EU, nor the slide to the pursuit of a regime-change or the lack of commitment after the war; the humanitarian argument explains why the intervention was possible, not because it took this shape;
- Domestic politics and personalities: Sarkozy's electoral calculations and the Berlusconi's relationship with Gaddafi matter; they don't go against the realist interpretation because they explain the channels through which the structural interest became decisions;
- The Italian external constraints: the strongest objection to H2 is that Italy did not have any other option to choose, since the Art. 11 of its Constitution says that Italy repudiates war as an offensive instrument, the country depends upon US, NATO and EU and in 2011 had to decide between the 2008 Treaty of Friendship and an alliance that could not be abandoned; in 2015 Napolitano described the decision as a responsibility shared with a wide parliamentary sustain,[36] showing that bandwagoning was a decision of the political system as a whole rather than a Berlusconi personal one; according to offensive realism, these constraints explain the behaviour without justifying it; the difference between bandwagoning and negotiation is that the second tries to use a bargaining leverage, in this case the Treaty with Libya and the military bases, to obtain something in exchange, and there is no proof that Rome tried to do it beside the request for the NATO leadership of the operations.
- Limits of the theory: Is improbable that Italy could have stopped the intervention by its own and is impossible to know if a more assertive Rome may have avoided the collapse of the Libyan

[33] Africa Defense Forum. (2025, January 21). After Syria retreat, Russia turns to Libya. https://adf-magazine.com/2025/01/after-syria-retreat-russia-turns-to-libya/ The New Arab. (2025, January 28). Russia plans to assert Africa-Europe power via Libya airbase expansions. https://www.newarab.com/news/russia-assert-africa-europe-power-libya-airbase-expansion

[34] Rigzone. (2021, November 23). Total, Eni ready to invest billions in Libya. https://www.rigzone.com/news/wire/total_eni_ready_to_invest_billions_in_libya-23-nov-2021-167103-article/

[35] Al Jazeera. (2023, January 28). Italy's Eni signs $8bn gas deal with Libya amid energy crunch. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/28/italys-meloni-in-libya-to-conclude-8bn-gas-deal

[36] ANSA. (2015, February 18). Napolitano says 2011 Libya mission had broad support. https://www.ansa.it/english/news/2015/02/18/napolitano-says-2011-libya-mission-had-broad-support-update2_69f4cf6a-305b-4ccc-943f-cd0a3832e296.html

state; this paper's affirmation is less ambitious, it argues that if the state with the higher stake does not try to shape the events will always let the initiative to a rival.

## *8. Conclusion*

Evidences are coherent with the two hypotheses:

- France, describing its action as an act of humanitarian liberation, acted as offensive realism predicts, anticipating the partners and pursuing the geopolitical interest of the Republic damaging the Italian position;
- Italy, which had the highest stake, flattered Gaddafi until the revolt erupted, followed the coalition after an initial hesitation and in the end delegated the security of its borders to other actors; today is still paying the price of this bandwagoning with a loss in security, diplomatic and economic influence and an increase in irregular migrations.

Some final observations have to be made: France's aggressivity did not produce positive effects since Libya is still divided, France lost its position in western Africa and other powers like Turkey and Russia filled the regional void of power; Italian behaviour did not have irrational causes but external constraints and ENI remains the main foreign company in Libya.

Therefore, the conclusion is that EU, which should be a space of shared sovereignty, in Libya acted as the state of nature described by Hobbes: two of its main members competed following two separate channels, since there is no superior Leviathan above them capable to impose a common foreign policy.

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