

By Conn Hallinan

From [Dispatches From The Edge](#) | Original Article

According to the *New York Times* (5/16/11), Gen. Sir David Richards, “Britain’s top military commander,” is proposing that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) target Libyan “infrastructure,” including electrical power grids and fuel dumps, in government held areas.

Frustrated by the two-month old stalemate, Gen. Richards told the *Times* that “The vice is closing on [Muammar el-] Qaddafi, but we need to increase the pressure further through more intense military activity.” The British are playing a major role in the bombing campaign, and Gen. Richards was in Naples, the command center for the war in Libya, when he talked with the *Times*.

The *Times* went on to write, “The General suggested that NATO should be freed from restraints that precluded attacking infrastructure targets.”

Let us be clear what “infrastructure” means: “The fundamental facilities and systems serving a country, city or area, as transportation and communication systems, power plants and schools”(Random House Dictionary, Second Edition).

Now let’s see what the 1977 Protocol Addition to Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 say on the business of attacking “infrastructure.”

“In order to ensure respect for and protection of the civilian population and civilian objects, the Parties to the conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and

combatants and between civilian objects and military objectives and accordingly shall direct their operations only against military objectives.”

### Part IV, Section I, Article. 48

“It is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuff, agricultural areas for the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies and irrigation works...”

### Article 54

“It is prohibited for the Parties to the conflict to attack, by any means whatsoever, non-defended localities...”

### Article 59

In short, you can’t bomb power plants, electrical grids, water pumping plants, or transport systems that service the civilian population, even if the military also benefits from them. As Article 50 states: “The presence within the civilian population of individuals that do not come within the definition of civilians does not deprive the population of its civilian character.”

The pressure to step up the bombing and widen the delineation of targets reflects the fact that the war has turned into a stalemate. “We need to do more,” Gen. Richards told the *Times*, “If we do not up the ante now there is a risk that the conflict could result in Qaddafi clinging to power.”

That last statement appears to be a violation of United Nations Resolution 1973, which called for “protection of civilians,” a “no-fly zone,” “sanctions,” a “freeze of assets” and an “arms embargo.” Nowhere does 1973 mention regime change and getting rid of Qaddafi.

So are we being dragged into a war whose goals violate UN Resolution 1973, and whose means violate the Geneva Conventions for the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts? It is hard not to answer that question in anything but the affirmative.