



Libya's Revolution

What began in Tunisia is no longer containable, as revolution sweeps through the Middle East, challenging whatever government lies in its path — including that of Colonel Moammar Gadhafi, or the “mad dog,” as President Ronald Reagan once called him.

Protests in Libya erupted on February 15 following the arrest of Fathi Terbii, a human rights attorney who represented the “relatives of more than 1,000 prisoners allegedly massacred by security forces in Tripoli’s Abu Salim jail in 1996,” the [BBC reported](#).



According to witnesses, more than 2,000 people demonstrated overnight in the city of Benghazi, where Terbii was arrested. One witness told the BBC:

A couple of people in the crowd started chanting anti-government slogans and the crowd took that on.

But then there were clashes with pro-government supporters and then after a bit the pro-government supporters dispersed and then the security services arrived and they dispersed the crowds with hot-water cannons.

The clashes between anti- and pro-government forces in Benghazi and Zentan, south of Tripoli, caused as many as 40 injuries and ignited a flame of revolt that Qaddafi’s regime has been violently attempting to suppress.

In addition to demonstrations in Benghazi and Zentan, protesters on Wednesday, February 23, claimed victory in the capture of Misurata from government forces.

Protesters have also claimed much of eastern Libya under their control.

[Al Jazeera reported](#), “140km from the Egyptian border, there was no presence of security forces.”

According to various reports, protesters have claimed to have seized control of cities and other settlements spanning from Libya’s border with Egypt to the city of Ajdabiya, 500 miles east of Tripoli.

“Down with the enemies, down with them everywhere; down with the puppets everywhere, the puppets are falling, the autumn leaves are falling,” Gadhafi chanted, adding, “The puppets of the USA, the puppets of Zionism are falling.”

On Sunday, February 20, the Indian newspaper [The Hindu reported](#) that through the usage of “mostly live ammunition,” Libyan “security forces have already killed 84 people demonstrating for greater freedoms in eastern Libya, with the city of Benghazi as the epicentre.”

The reported continued, “Thirty-five protesters were gunned down in Benghazi alone, making Friday the bloodiest day since pro-democracy demonstrations began...”



Written by [Christian Gomez](#) on February 24, 2011

Despite Gadhafi's violent attempts to quell the protesters, they have proven themselves a resilient force to be reckoned with. On Monday, February 21, [protesters took to the streets of Benghazi in celebration](#) as they declared victory in their conquest of the city — Libya's second largest.

As protesters were emboldened by their historic takeover of Benghazi, new and larger protests erupted throughout the capital in Tripoli, which as expected has enraged Gadhafi, eliciting further bloody crackdowns on the people.

According to reports from human rights activists, medical personnel and escaped refugees, over 200 people have been killed so far by Libyan authorities.

While visiting Egypt, which shares a border with Libya, British Prime Minister David Cameron called the Gadhafi regime's violent response to the protests "appalling."

The White House, which has very little leverage over Libya, has been working with allies in the region to try to pressure Gadhafi to cease his repressive crackdowns.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton condemned the violence in Libya, emphasizing that the United States is "working urgently with our friends" in order to apply pressure on Gadhafi. "Now is the time to stop this unacceptable bloodshed," she declared on Monday.

Though the Obama administration has received calls to intervene, it has remained reluctant for the most part, instead it has centering its attention on the evacuation of U.S. citizens and non-emergency personnel in the country. "Our embassy is focused on, at this point, security and the evacuation of Americans. There's a lot of information out there. We're not really in a position to corroborate on it," an official from the State Department said.

Britain is moving rapidly to evacuate its nationals and citizens from Libya as well. British Foreign Secretary William Hague announced that the Royal Navy would be sending the frigate HMS *Cumberland* to support in the evacuation of Britons from the strife-torn country.

"We are calling on the Libyan authorities to stop the violence against their own people," German Chancellor Angela Merkel told reporters at a press conference.

Lynn Pascoe, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs at the U.N., stressed: "The situation is deteriorating and can get much worse," adding, "We are deeply concerned."

According to a statement from the U.N., Secretary General Ban Ki-moon spoke to Gadhafi and "expressed deep concern at the escalating scale of violence and emphasized that it must stop immediately."

In addition to external pressure, Gadhafi is losing support from within his own government.

Ibrahim O. Dabbashi, Libya's deputy ambassador and second in command at the Libyan mission at the United Nations, broke with Gadhafi and [told Bloomberg news](#) that he would call upon the U.N. to establish a "no-fly zone" around his country as means of preventing "mercenaries and arms from going to the government," Bloomberg reported.

"We are sure that what is going on now in Libya is crimes against humanity and crimes of war," Ambassador Dabbashi told reporters in a press conference at the Libyan mission located in Manhattan.

In addition to Gadhafi's loss of support from his own U.N. mission, his military has not been the most reliable for him, either.



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On Monday, February 21, two high-ranking colonels, piloting two Soviet-built F1 Mirage-class fighter jets, flew from a Libyan air force base near Tripoli to Malta, where they have been granted asylum. “The jets arrived shortly after two Libyan civilian helicopters landed at the airport, carrying seven people who said they were French. The aircraft remain at Malta’s airport while the pilots and helicopter passengers are being questioned by airport immigration officials,” [The Blaze and the AP reported](#).

Ali al-Essawi, Libya’s ambassador to India, who resigned as a result of the violent repressive measures taken by Gadhafi’s regime, told Reuters that the regime was now relying on mercenaries to suppress the people and called upon the Libyan military to defect:

They are from Africa, and speak French and other languages. They [army troops switching to back the protests] are Libyans and they cannot see foreigners killing Libyans so they moved beside the people.

Major-General Suleiman Mahmoud, the commander of the armed forces in Tobruk, [told Al Jazeera](#) that Libyan troops have defected over to the protesters. “We are on the side of the people,” the general said. “I resign from serving the current dictatorship regime. But I will never resign from serving our people until their voices reach the whole world, until their goals are achieved,” Libyan Ambassador Ali Suleiman Aujali said in an interview with ABC television’s “Good Morning America.”

Despite the many setbacks and what seems to be the end of his rule, Gadhafi vowed to remain in power, declaring he would die a martyr. “I will fight to the last drop of my blood. The Libyan people are with me. Capture the rats,” Gadhafi stated in an address on his country’s national television.

An unidentified source told *Time* magazine journalist Robert Baer that Gadhafi has threatened to blow up his country’s oil facilities in order to raise oil prices in the West.

“However,” the [Israel National News reported](#), “the same source two weeks ago told Baer, a former Middle East CIA officer, that the Middle East revolutionary movement would never spread to Libya, where Gadhafi is hanging on to power and ordering massacres of protesters while being condemned by the United Nations.”

The Israel National News also made mention of the increasing price of crude oil as a result of the protests in Libya and elsewhere in the Middle East, warning of a possible new global recession:

Oil prices have skyrocketed this week, passing the \$95 per barrel mark on world markets. Financial analysts are predicting prices of \$140-\$200 a barrel if world events do not stabilize. Soaring oil prices could be a knockout punch to the struggling economic recovery in the United States and elsewhere and could spawn a new recession.

Gadhafi’s son, Seif al-Islam, [has even gone so far as to threaten civil war](#) if the protests do not cease. “I have the money and arms to fight for a long time,” he warned.

The situation has become so volatile that neighboring countries have begun to take action.

“Egypt’s military rulers will reinforce their border with Libya with border guards and open the Salloum passage to enable the sick and injured to enter Egypt,” reported Reuters on Tuesday, February 22.

Gadhafi is right about one thing: Libya is not Egypt and Tunisia — at least in the sense that unlike the leaders of those countries, Qaddafi is not one to give up so easily. Historically, he is a man of his word — and if he claims he will stay and fight at the risk of civil war, then such is likely to be the case; however, the protestors and defectors will not make his quest for unity an easy task.



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Still, whether Gadhafi wants to accept it or not, his days are numbered — as a new dawn for Libya is about to begin.

Photo: People watch papers falling from a window as a police station burns, in Tobruk, Libya on Feb. 21, 2011: AP Images



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