

THE UPRISING IN LIBYA

Introduction

Focus

This *CBC News in Review* story focuses on the popular uprising in Libya against the 40-year reign of leader Moammar Gadhafi. The uprising has sparked a violent civil war and a military response from other countries, including Canada.

The winds of revolution that swept across North Africa and the Middle East in the early months of 2011 suddenly reached Libya in mid February. Unarmed protesters, emboldened by the success of similar uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, took to the streets demanding the end of the leadership of Colonel Moammar Gadhafi and his replacement by a democratic government. It quickly became apparent that Gadhafi would not yield to the demands of the protestors, as he ordered his secret police and elite military units to quash the uprising.

For their part, the rebels—who were now armed with weapons captured from Gadhafi’s troops—were able to consolidate their position in the eastern city of Benghazi and spread their armed rebellion westward toward Tripoli, Libya’s capital city and the seat of Gadhafi’s power. Many were killed as Gadhafi’s men brutally slaughtered the rebels. Many of Gadhafi’s troops were killed, too.

The uprising also spawned a huge humanitarian crisis as hundreds of thousands of people—mainly foreign workers in Libyan oil fields—fled the violence and overwhelmed the borders of neighbouring Tunisia. International relief agencies struggled to cope.

The world watched in admiration as the brave but poorly armed and ill-trained rebel forces stood their ground against Gadhafi’s vastly superior military machine. In the initial phases of the uprising, the rebels pushed Gadhafi’s units from a number of important centres in both the eastern and western parts

of the country. Meanwhile, Gadhafi’s denunciations of the rebels became increasingly shrill and almost incoherent, alleging among other things that they were supporters of the terrorist organization Al Qaeda and that they were intoxicated with alcohol and drugs. Despite the high morale of the rebel forces, they soon found themselves outgunned and losing ground. By mid-March Gadhafi’s forces were poised to strike at the gates of the opposition stronghold of Benghazi, where he had vowed he would show “no mercy” to its inhabitants.

It was at this crucial point in the Libyan crisis that the international community finally decided to act. Right from the beginning of the rebellion, world leaders had called upon Gadhafi to stop using force against his people and leave office immediately. When these demands went unheeded, and with a bloodbath looming in Benghazi, the United Nations on March 17 passed a resolution authorizing a no-fly zone to be imposed on Libya. This would prevent Gadhafi from using his superior air power against the rebels and unarmed civilians. The U.S., France, Britain, and other countries—including Canada—were soon launching air strikes against various military positions inside Libya while the rebels took advantage of this new development to push back against Gadhafi’s army in towns where they had earlier been forced to withdraw. But with the UN resolution expressly ruling out the deployment of foreign ground troops, the rebels appeared to be facing a long uphill struggle in their quest to defeat Gadhafi.

To Consider

1. Why do you think Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi has refused to leave office despite a major uprising against his regime? Should he have to?
2. Do you think Western countries, including Canada, have a duty to become involved in the Libyan crisis, or is it none of our business? Explain.
3. Do you think that the anti-Gadhafi rebels will eventually achieve their goal? Why or why not?

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Video Review

Pre-viewing Questions

With a partner or in a small group, discuss and respond to the following questions.

1. How much do you know about Libya and the fighting that was occurring in early 2011?

2. Why do you think the uprising in Libya has become an international crisis involving a number of countries, including Canada?

3. Do you think that the Canadian government is right to be participating in the international coalition involved in the fighting in Libya? Why or why not?

Viewing Questions

As you watch the video, respond to the questions in the spaces provided.

1. What are Libya's two most important natural resources?

2. When did Gadhafi come to power in Libya?

3. What actions did Gadhafi take in the 1970s and 80s to anger Western countries such as the United States?

4. What happened in Libya in February 2011? How did Gadhafi respond to this?

5. What warning did Gadhafi's son give to the rebels fighting against the regime?

6. How have Libya's oil exports been impacted by the fighting?

7. What action did the United Nations authorize regarding Libya on March 17, 2011? Why did it take this step?

8. What was the impact of the first air strikes against Gadhafi's forces?

9. What accusations has Gadhafi made against the countries participating in the military actions against his regime?

10. What military assets has Canada contributed to the fighting in Libya? What has been their role in the operation so far?

11. What questions have been raised in Parliament regarding Canada's participation in military operations in Libya?

12. What questions about the scope and ultimate goal of the military operations in Libya have been raised in the U.S. and other countries?

13. What options may be available to Gadhafi as he faces such strong international efforts to assist the Libyan pro-democracy rebels in driving him from power?

Post-viewing Questions

1. Now that you have watched the video, revisit your responses to the Pre-viewing Questions. How has watching the video helped you to respond to the questions in greater depth?

2. Why do you think Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi is so determined to hang on to power?

3. Do you think the United Nations was right to authorize a no-fly zone over Libya to help protect civilians from attacks by Gadhafi's troops? Why or why not?

4. Do you think that Canada should be participating in the military operations in Libya? Why or why not?

5. What do you think the future holds for Libya?

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The Battle for Libya

Vocabulary

Moammar Gadhafi has been called a megalomaniac. This is someone who is totally convinced he or she is in possession of the unconditional love and loyalty of those around him or her.

Did you know . . .

Gadhafi made a number of odd television appearances claiming that the rebels were Islamic fundamentalists being paid by Al Qaeda's Osama bin Laden, and that they would threaten Europe with terrorism and set off a flood of illegal immigrants from Africa.

Focus for Reading

As you read this section, focus on the developments that transformed an internal uprising against the Libyan regime of Moammar Gadhafi into a full-scale international crisis. Highlight some of the events that you think were crucial in this process.

Background to a Revolution

The uprising against the entrenched 41-year-old leadership of Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi, which broke out in the eastern city of Benghazi on February 17, 2011, caught that North African country and much of the world by surprise. Although similar protests demanding democratic reform had successfully toppled autocratic leaders in neighbouring Tunisia and Egypt, few observers inside or outside Libya believed that Gadhafi's regime faced a similar threat. This was because, unlike those other rulers, Gadhafi was known to be a tyrant, and delusional about the support of his people. Moreover, his internal state security forces, in operation since shortly after he seized power in 1969, had imposed a virtual reign of terror inside Libya, cracking down harshly on any opposition and reducing most of its citizens to a passive state of submission to Gadhafi's rule.

Ordinary Libyans were denied access to reliable information about the dramatic events taking place on their borders. This was because the state television network was controlled by Ghadafi, and because other Arabic-language news outlets were heavily censored. In addition, few foreign journalists were permitted to file reports from inside Libya. Social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter were also severely restricted. And unlike their fellow activists in Tunisia and Egypt, Libyans did not have the same degree of Internet and e-mail access.

Nonetheless, the successful pro-democracy revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt were unquestionably an inspiration for the protesters who defied Gadhafi's security forces during the early days of the uprising. Despite a virtual international news blackout, amateur videos taken from personal cell phones of protesters being shot by Gadhafi loyalists soon made their way onto television screens around the world, provoking a reaction of horror and solidarity with the rebels. Within days, Benghazi was liberated, and the opposition, buoyed by its initial success, began to press westward in the direction of Tripoli, where it was hoped Gadhafi would be driven from power.

From Uprising to International Crisis

Gadhafi and his government were initially caught off-guard by the scope and seriousness of the revolt, leading some to predict that it would all be over in a matter of days. But Gadhafi was able to regroup and began to fire back against any rebels who approached Tripoli and other areas still under his control. He staged numerous television appearances where he ranted against the rebels. He claimed they were misguided young people high on drugs and being used as dupes by outside powers determined to gain access to Libya's oil wealth. These speeches were broadcast live on Libyan state television and included scenes of pro-Gadhafi crowds waving banners and chanting slogans in praise of him.

Did you know . . .

The Arab world grew increasingly hostile to the U.S. after that country invaded Iraq in 2003.

Vocabulary

The code name for the coalition's military operations in Libya was Operation Odyssey. An odyssey is a long, eventful journey.

By early March, the rebel forces' initial advances were stalled, as their ill-trained and out-gunned fighters proved to be no match for Gadhafi's professional army and paramilitary units. Coastal towns lying between Benghazi and Tripoli—which are home to Libya's economically vital oil production—were retaken after heavy aerial bombardments and relentless shelling of rebel positions. Calls from U.S. President Barack Obama and other Western leaders for Gadhafi to halt his attacks on his own people and leave office proved futile, while the increasingly desperate rebels appealed to the international community to assist them.

For their part, the United States and European nations were reluctant to act, fearing that any Western military intervention in Libya would be viewed unfavourably in the Arab world. But when Gadhafi publicly boasted on March 16, 2011, that his advancing troops on Benghazi would go “house to house” showing “no mercy” to those who had supported the rebellion, world leaders finally determined that the time to act had come.

The United Nations Takes Action

On March 17, the UN Security Council met in emergency session and passed a “no-fly” resolution to take effect immediately over the skies of Libya. This meant that France, Great Britain, the United States, Canada, and some Arab states such as Qatar would be authorized to use their air power to disable Libya's anti-aircraft and communications systems and bomb Gadhafi's military installations and troop positions on the ground.

The purpose of this action was to defend Libyan civilians and prevent a looming humanitarian catastrophe. The UN said that the measure would not signify direct foreign military

intervention on behalf of the rebels in a developing civil war in Libya, nor was it meant to result in Gadhafi's overthrow. No foreign troops were to be dispatched to Libya. Nonetheless, by most accounts the UN's decision was clearly aimed to assist the rebels and defeat Gadhafi.

Backlash

The coalition of nations that assumed responsibility for enforcing the UN's “no-fly” resolution over Libya was a broad one, including Western powers and some Arab and African states. It had the backing not only of the UN and the European Union, but also of the African Union and the Arab League. All seemed united in their determination to prevent a humanitarian disaster from unfolding inside Libya. But within days of the onset of air strikes against Gadhafi's forces, some strains in the alliance began to emerge.

There were alarms raised in Arab capitals that the bombardment of military targets in Tripoli and other places might result in unintended civilian deaths. In addition, some congressional and military leaders in the United States were questioning the basis on which Obama's decision to use military force against Gadhafi had been formulated. Was it wise, for example, for the U.S. to assume the leading role in an attack against an Arabic-speaking Muslim country after its unpleasant experience in Iraq? What was the ultimate goal of the campaign, and how would military and political leaders know when it had been achieved? What was the exit strategy for coalition forces operating against Libya, and how could a long, drawn-out military involvement be avoided?

Within a week of the imposition of the no-fly zone, the military situation on the ground had shifted dramatically in favour of the rebels. Secure of their position in Benghazi, opposition forces

were beginning to make real progress westward toward Tripoli. It was believed that operatives from the U.S.'s CIA and Britain's Special Forces were at work training the rebels in the use of sophisticated weaponry and military tactics. But by late March the situation on the ground remained fluid, with Gadhafi's forces proving that they were still willing and able to put up stiff resistance, stalling the rebels' advance.

At the beginning of April it was

unclear how long Gadhafi could remain in power, defying the military might of the most powerful countries in the world and an increasingly confident and well-armed opposition. But many had made the mistake of underestimating the ruthlessness and cunning of this leader and the staying power of his regime. For this reason, few were willing to predict a transition to a new, post-Gadhafi era of democracy, stability, and peace in Libya anytime in the near future.

Follow-up

1. With a partner or in a small group, compare your responses to the Focus for Reading at the beginning of this section. What do you think were the key events and developments that transformed the uprising in Libya into an international crisis?

2. a) With a partner or in a small group, prepare a scenario of events that you think will follow from the current situation in Libya. Do you think the actions of the Libyan opposition and the international coalition will finally result in the overthrow of Gadhafi? Why or why not?

b) If he is driven from power, what might the future of Libya look like? If he remains, what might Libya look like?

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Spotlight on Gadhafi

Focus for Reading

As you read this section, consider the following question: Assuming that the armed rebellion against Gadhafi, aided by NATO air power, is ultimately successful in toppling his regime, what do you think his legacy will be for Libya and the world as a whole?

From the Desert to Power

Ever since Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi seized power in a bloodless coup on September 1, 1969, at the young of age of 27, he has fascinated and rattled the world with his bizarre, unpredictable, and sometimes violent actions. Gadhafi was born into a poor family of nomadic Bedouin camel herders. As a teenager, he was inspired by Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser's resistance to Britain, France, and Israel during the Suez Crisis of 1956 and became a strong advocate of pan-Arab nationalism. After rising to the rank of captain in the Libyan air force and attending a military training school in Greece, he returned to Libya and assumed a leading role in the plot to overthrow the monarchy. After the coup, he quickly installed himself as "Brother Leader" and "Guide of the Revolution," but never assumed any official government position. However, he did bestow on himself a military promotion to the rank of colonel.

Under Gadhafi, Libya's vast oil reserves were nationalized and the profits used to benefit Libya's people. In the early years of Gadhafi's revolution, the government spent large sums on improving the health care, education, and living standards of average Libyans. As a self-styled socialist revolutionary, Gadhafi also quickly allied Libya with other countries that opposed U.S. and Western foreign policies in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America.

But Gadhafi did not stop at verbal denunciations of what he called "American imperialism." His regime

secretly channeled funds and weapons to a number of violent revolutionary organizations worldwide, including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the Irish Republican Army (IRA), Peru's Shining Path guerrillas, and even terrorist groups such as Germany's Red Army Faction. He also permitted some of them to use Libya as a base of operations and for training camps.

Although he claimed to place all decision-making power in the hands of the people, it was clear that the real power lay firmly with Gadhafi himself, his family, and a few favoured cronies. No opposition parties were allowed to organize, press freedom was non-existent, and even the slightest criticism of Gadhafi or his regime could land one in a torture chamber, jail, or cemetery.

International Terrorist

In 1985, after a series of terrorist attacks on Westerners were linked to Gadhafi, U.S. President Ronald Reagan publicly labelled Gadhafi a "mad dog." Reagan then authorized an air strike against Tripoli and Benghazi, in which 101 people, including Gadhafi's adopted daughter, lost their lives. Gadhafi himself, the ostensible target of the U.S. bombs, survived the attack and vowed he would take revenge.

Three years later, he made good on this threat, with perhaps his most evil deed: the bombing of Pan-American Airlines flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, on December 21, 1988. All 259 passengers on board were killed, along with 11 people on the ground. Despite its denials, Libya

was held responsible, and in 1992 the UN imposed trade sanctions against the country, demanding that Gadhafi turn over two Libyan secret agents who allegedly planned the bombing.

Western Ally

The events of September 11, 2001, and the subsequent U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 caused Gadhafi great alarm and led to a radical policy shift. Realizing that his regime was considered part of U.S. President George W. Bush's "axis of evil" and a potential target, Gadhafi took measures to improve his relations with the United States, Britain, and other Western countries. He handed over the suspects in the Lockerbie bombing to an international court of justice and agreed to pay USD\$2.7-billion in compensation to the families of the victims. In return, the UN lifted its sanctions against Libya.

Gadhafi went even further by announcing that Libya was destroying its weapons of mass destruction and offered to assist the U.S. and other Western countries in the "war on terrorism." His rapid about-face soon attracted the favourable attention of Western leaders such as Britain's Prime Minister Tony Blair, who paid a state visit to Libya in 2004, the first of any British leader since 1943. Soon after, the U.S. also decided to resume trade and diplomatic relations with Libya, with Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice meeting Gadhafi in 2008 and stating that "a new page" had been turned in her nation's relationship with him.

The "Desert Fox" Fights to Survive

Gadhafi's new opening to the West was a master stroke for his regime and its

Follow-up

What nickname do you think best applies to Gadhafi: "mad dog" or "Desert Fox"? Or do you think some elements of both are appropriate? Explain your choice.

standing in the international community and earned him the grudging respect of many observers. His wiliness and ability to change his policies in a chameleon-like fashion earned him the nickname "Desert Fox." Both Gadhafi and the West had much to gain from their new friendship. The Libyan leader was now free of any worries that he might be the target of armed efforts to promote regime change, such as had befallen his fellow dictator Iraq's Saddam Hussein, in 2003. The Libyan economy revived as a result of increased trade and oil exports to the West. For their part, Washington and London were able to champion Gadhafi's radical change of heart as proof that their carrot-and-stick policy in dealing with rogue states was successful, while their intelligence agencies eagerly devoured the lists of alleged international terrorists handed over to them by Gadhafi's security henchman and foreign minister, Moussa Koussa. However, they failed to notice that most of the names on the list were those of anti-Gadhafi activists operating inside Libya or abroad, not Al Qaeda operatives.

The unexpected uprising against Gadhafi that broke out in February 2011 and quickly spread throughout Libya was a dramatic demonstration of the unpopularity of his regime. But his determination to hold on to power by violently suppressing the revolt, and his wild claims that he was the victim of an international conspiracy and continued to enjoy the support of most Libyans were also clear indications that while the "Desert Fox" might have a tenuous grasp of reality, he was determined to go down fighting no matter how many of his people he took with him.

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Libya: A Profile

Did you know . . .

Libya controls approximately four per cent of the world's total petroleum supplies.

Did you know . . .

During the early decades of the 19th century, pirates operated out of Tripoli. U.S. President Thomas Jefferson sent the U.S. Navy to the area to eliminate the pirates.

Focus for Reading

In your notebook create an organizer like the one below. As you read the following information on Libya, record key points in your organizer. You should be able to enter at least two or three points in each section of your chart. You will be using this information in the activities that follow the text material.

Key Facts

- Libya is located in North Africa. It is a large country in land area, but sparsely populated.
- It possesses significant reserves of high-quality oil.

Early History

-

Contemporary History and Current Situation

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Key Facts

Libya is a vast but sparsely populated country in North Africa bordering the Mediterranean Sea on the north, Egypt on the west, Tunisia and Algeria on the east, and Chad and Niger on the south. Its total land area is 1.77 million km², making it the fourth-largest country in Africa. However, its population is only 6.5 million and is mainly concentrated along the northern coast. The two largest cities are Benghazi in the east, and Tripoli, the capital, in the west.

Most Libyans are a mixture of Arab and indigenous North African Berber and Tuareg peoples, sometimes known as the “Blue Men” of Africa because of the light blue robes they favour. Arabic is the official language, and most Libyans belong to the Sunni branch of the Islamic faith. Libya is the only African country besides Algeria and Nigeria that possesses large reserves of oil and natural gas. The oil is of very high quality, requiring little refining, and is mainly exported to European countries such as Italy.

Early History

Libya has a long history, beginning with the establishment of colonies by the Phoenicians, a sea-faring people who came from Lebanon in the 7th century BCE. Their settlements were called Tripolitania, and were concentrated in the western part of the country. During the 6th century BCE, Libya was conquered by Carthage, a powerful state based in what is now Tunisia, and by the fourth century BCE the Greeks were settling in the eastern areas, which they called Cyrenaica. Rome assumed control in 74 BCE under the great general Pompey, and Libya became a major supplier of agricultural products such as oil and grain to Rome and its empire.

The magnificent Roman ruins at Leptis Magna, located on the seacoast east of Tripoli, are a major archaeological site. Along with the country's beautiful beaches, such attractions could form the basis for a thriving tourist industry in Libya, but to date have not been successfully developed or promoted. In 643 CE, Libya was conquered and made

part of the rapidly expanding Islamic empire that began in Arabia following the death of the Prophet Mohammed. Roughly a millennium later, Libya fell under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, based in Istanbul.

Contemporary History

During the Second World War, Libya became a central theatre of conflict. Allied troops fought against Italian and German troops commanded by Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, who was nicknamed “The Desert Fox.” After their victory at Tobruk in eastern Libya, the Allies liberated the country, dividing it into two parts, under British and French control. In 1951, Libya finally gained its independence, and a few years later granted control of its newly discovered petroleum reserves to American and

British oil companies. In 1961, a pipeline linking the interior oil fields to the Mediterranean was opened, making exports to Europe possible.

As a result of its oil wealth and the economic reform policies introduced in the first years of Moammar Gadhafi’s regime in the 1970s, Libya became one of the most developed countries in Africa. Its life expectancy and infant mortality rates, along with GNP per capita and educational indexes compare favourably with a number of developed countries—and far exceed those of most of its African neighbours. But despite their relative prosperity, many Libyans resented the repression and lack of personal freedom they experienced under Gadhafi’s rule and were quick to join the uprising against him that broke out in Benghazi in February 2011.

Analysis

1. With a partner or in a small group, compare the information in your summary chart. Help each other to complete any missing information.
2. Based on the information on Libya’s history in this section, what do you think has been the impact of foreign invasion and occupation of this country over the centuries?
3. Why have some Libyans been unhappy during Gadhafi’s rule, given that they have a higher standard of living than other African citizens?

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Activity: Gauging the Impact of the Crisis

The Libyan uprising that began in February 2011 has become a major, multi-dimensional international crisis. The crisis will impact that country, other Arab states, and the rest of the world. The direct military involvement of a number of powers, including the United States, Britain, France, and Canada, has raised serious questions in diplomatic circles about the wisdom of this exercise. Most criticism is directed at the fact that outside countries have become involved in the internal conflict of another country.

The mass exodus of hundreds of thousands of foreign workers from the Libyan oil fields to the neighbouring countries of Tunisia and Egypt, themselves only just emerging from their own revolutionary upheavals, has created a major humanitarian crisis. The spike in world oil prices, coming at a time when many Western countries were only beginning to recover from the effects of the recession of 2008, threatened to have serious economic repercussions. And finally, with the military conflict between pro- and anti-Gadhafi forces within Libya approaching a virtual stalemate by early April 2011, it was not at all clear what the future held for both the dictator himself and the people who had suffered for so long under his regime.

Your Task

As the culminating activity for this *CBC News in Review* story, form groups to investigate and report on one aspect of the uprising in Libya, such as:

- the NATO military operation to enforce the UN's no-fly zone
- the refugee and humanitarian crisis
- the economic impact of the crisis in Libya
- the future of Libya with or without Gadhafi

With your group, research the aspect you have chosen and prepare and present a report on it to the class. In your report, be sure to provide background information on why this aspect of the crisis in Libya is significant, not only for that country itself, but also for the rest of the world.

After the reports have been presented, discuss as a class the various aspects of the crisis in Libya that you have investigated. Which of them do you think has the most significant and long-term consequence for Libya and the world, and why? As a concluding activity, write a short reflection paper on the aspect of the crisis in Libya that your group investigated, making predictions about how you think it is likely to be resolved, or not, in the months to come.

The following Web sites provide up-to-the-minute in-depth coverage of the developing crisis in Libya.

- Canadian Broadcasting Corporation: www.cbc.ca
- British Broadcasting Corporation: www.bbc.co.uk
- Cable News Network: www.cnn.com
- Al Jazeera: www.aljazeera.net
- YouTube: www.youtube.com