

Origins of the Crisis



In 1969, Muammar Gadhafi and a group of army officers staged a coup d'état against King Idris I. The new regime promptly abolished the monarchy and declared Libya a republic. Gadhafi soon emerged as the leader of the new republic, which has come to be known as the Jamahiriya, or “the state of the masses.” Under the Jamahiriya, the creation of political parties is forbidden, as the expression of any political ideology that deviates from the current regime’s is deemed treasonous. As a result, Gadhafi has been able to stay in power for over 40 years and has established himself as one of the longest serving leaders in history. However, Gadhafi’s rule has been directly challenged by a popular uprising that began earlier this year.

The uprising began in January when Libyans in various cities such as Benghazi, Bani Walid, and Darnah protested out of frustration towards long delays in the building of government housing for poor families. Many Libyans also complained of a lack of basic services and widespread political corruption that has plagued the nation for years. In February, protests intensified after the arrest of human rights activist Fethi Tarbel. Protestors originally demanded that Tarbel be released, a request that was actually granted by the Libyan government just a few days later. Nevertheless, protests soon converted into anti-government demonstrations as Libyans drew inspiration from successful popular regional movements in Tunisia and Egypt, demanding a regime change and insisting on Gadhafi’s departure.

After police and security forces attempted to violently suppress these protests throughout the nation, opposition leaders called for a “Day of Rage” on February 17 and asked all Libyans opposed to Gadhafi to join in protest. Protests on this day were also met with violence as Gadhafi’s security forces and mercenaries opened fire on crowds in Benghazi, Darnah, Al Bayda, and Az Zintan. The violence used against protestors sparked outrage amongst Libyan citizens and led to the formation of rebel groups, effectively turning the conflict into a full-fledged civil war.

Internal Actors

The Libyan National Council: The National Council is the opposition's newly established government. Officially formed on March 5, the council has vowed to liberate Libya from Muammar Gadhafi. The opposition militia is composed of teachers, students, merchants, and other volunteers, as well as soldiers from the Libyan Army who have defected.

The Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya: The Gadhafi led government is clinging on to power, deploying loyalist armed forces in hopes of bringing an end to the rebellion.

External Actors

The UN: Unsurprisingly, the United Nations has condemned the violence in Libya and has demanded an immediate ceasefire. The UN Security Council has stressed that its primary objective is to protect Libyan civilians and have thus approved airstrikes against Libyan military targets. The UN Security Council also voted to impose a no-fly zone in March, meaning that all flights over the country's airspace have been banned. In addition, the UN has authorized the freezing of Ghaddafi's and other Libyan authorities' assets. An arms embargo has also been mandated by the UN and is currently being enforced by NATO.

NATO: Since joining the conflict, NATO has pledged to enforce the UN mandate to protect Libyan civilians. Despite contest from Turkey and Germany, NATO officially took command of military operations in Libya on March 31. Member nations of NATO such as the United States, Great Britain, and France have launched airstrikes on pro-Gadhafi forces and air defenses, thereby effectively enforcing a no-fly zone. NATO has recently announced that it has sufficient resources to carry out its mission in Libya, which seems to suggest that the coalition will not cease operations until Gadhafi is ousted.

The Arab League: The Arab League endorsed the UN authorized no-fly zone, but later condemned the bombing campaign against pro-Gadhafi forces. The Arab League has also recently spoken out against France's decision to airdrop arms to rebel fighters. However, the Arab League could play an important mediating role should the two sides seek a ceasefire agreement.

Current Situation



Following the capture of a few key cities, the rebels have remained locked in a stalemate with pro-Gadhafi forces for quite some time now. However, the opposition remains optimistic and determined to win the war. In fact, Libyan rebel diplomat Ibrahim Dabbashi asserted earlier this week that he believes Gadhafi will be gone by the middle of this month. The rebels seem to be encouraged by recent airdrops from the West, including a shipment of supplies and arms from France. This airdrop has caused controversy, however, as it violates the UN mandated arms embargo. While airdrops such as these undoubtedly aid the opposition's efforts, many fear that supplying the rebels with arms could promote terrorism and regional conflict following the civil war.

Despite international intervention and numerous defections, Gadhafi remains defiant, vowing to fight to the death. The embattled leader is running out of options and may indeed have no other choice but to stay and fight, as it appears unlikely that any other nation will grant him political asylum at this point. The UN and NATO want Gadhafi out of the picture and a quick resolution to the conflict so as to avoid further casualties and stop the flow of refugees exiting Libya (over 70,000 refugees have already left the country).

More Information

- <http://www.rtu.com.ec/internacionales/22118-gadafi-esta-dispuesto-a-dejar-el-poder>
- http://www.swissinfo.ch/fre/nouvelles_agence/international/Libye:_la_rebellion_prepare_une_offensive_avec_des_armes_francaises.html?cid=30601358
- <http://www.jpost.com/International/Article.aspx?id=227855>

