

Libyan Civil War

Background:

A crisis occurred from 22 February 2011 to 20 October 2011 between Libya and a coalition of international actors (mostly NATO members) that were opposed to the brutal repression by Muammar Gaddafi's regime of anti-government protesters and rebel supporters during an emerging civil war. The anti-Gaddafi coalition states that experienced a crisis included the United States, United Kingdom, France, Canada, Italy, and Qatar. A dozen other NATO and non-NATO regional actors were also involved in the enforcement of a no-fly zone over Libya.

PRE-CRISIS:

In mid-January 2011, inspired in part by the civil uprising that occurred earlier in Tunisia, small protests began to emerge in Libya, focusing on issues such as corruption, local concerns, and a desire for greater political freedoms. These eventually gave way to mass demonstrations against the Gaddafi regime in Tripoli and Benghazi beginning in early February. By mid-February, protests spread to the rest of the country and civilians began demanding that Gaddafi step down. The Gaddafi regime responded with a violent repression campaign against demonstrators. Repression escalated significantly beginning on 16 February, and reports of mass killings occurred on 17 and 19 February. This attracted significant attention and condemnation from the international community. On 16 February, Human Rights Watch called for intervention in Libya, particularly from the members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). On 18 February, the US condemned the violence and voiced support for democratic reforms and economic openness in Libya and other states that were part of the Arab Spring. On 19 February, the UK called for an immediate end to the use of force against civilians. On 21 February, Canada also condemned the violence. That same day, the United Nations Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, met with Gaddafi, and the UN Deputy Permanent Representative for Libya, Ibrahim Dabbashi, called on the UN to impose a no-fly zone over Tripoli.

Summary:

On 22 February 2011, the escalating protests and repression in Libya reached a tipping point. Libya responded to mass protests against the regime that day with military force, including the use of helicopter gunships, artillery fire, and snipers. On the same day, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi delivered a potent speech in which he threatened to show no mercy to protestors, urged his loyalists to attack protesters and their supporters, and vowed to never resign or leave Libya.

The culmination of escalating repression and Gaddafi's speech triggered foreign policy crises for the United States, United Kingdom, France, Canada, Italy, and Qatar. The major responses from these states were multi-faceted, beginning with condemnations on 22-23 February, escalating quickly to more substantial political and/or economic pressure, and culminating in mid-March with the most important general response: UN authorization and implementation of a no-fly zone in order to protect Libyan civilians. On 23 February, French President Nicolas Sarkozy called for the European Union to impose sanctions against Libya and suggested that the assets of the Gaddafi family should be frozen. On 25 February, the US closed its embassy in Tripoli and imposed unilateral economic sanctions on Libya, including the freezing of billions in Libyan government assets. That same day, Canada began Operation MOBILE, a non-combatant mission in which armed forces were sent to facilitate the evacuation of Canadian citizens and other

foreign nationals from Libya. On 26 February, the UNSC voted to adopt Resolution 1970, which imposed sanctions on Libya and referred the situation to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The sanctions included an arms embargo and a travel ban and asset freeze on members of the Gaddafi regime. On 28 February, Italy suspended its friendship treaty with Libya, a treaty that also included a nonaggression clause. On 3 March, the US threatened to impose military sanctions on Libya, including a no-fly zone, and Obama issued the first public statement in which he demanded that Gaddafi step down and leave Libya.

Early condemnations and calls for action also came from the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) on 22 February and the African Union (AU) one day later. The Arab League's involvement was most important: on 12 March, it called on the UN to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. This helped to spur and legitimize an effort from the wider international community to do the same. The AU called for a transition to a post-Gaddafi Libya, but advocated for a negotiated process.

On 17 March, the UNSC voted to adopt Resolution 1973, which imposed a no-fly zone over Libyan airspace in order to protect civilians. The resolution was proposed by the UK, France, and Lebanon. Voting to adopt this resolution constituted the most important part of the major responses to the crisis trigger from the UK, US, and France.

The passing of the UNSC resolution triggered a crisis for Libya. The Libyan foreign minister, Moussa Koussa, declared a ceasefire later that day, framing it as a response to the UN resolution. However, Libyan artillery shelling on Misrata and Ajdabiya continued, and government soldiers continued approaching Benghazi.

On 19 March, Libya issued its major response in the form of a public statement from Gaddafi in which he harshly condemned the UNSC resolution and vowed to arm the Libyan people and fight to the end to protect them from "colonial, crusader" aggression. That same day, Libyan government troops and tanks entered Benghazi, and artillery and mortars were fired into the city.

Enforcement of the no-fly zone also began on 19 March. This constituted the most important part of Canada's and Italy's major responses to the crisis trigger. Airstrike operations led by the UK, the US, France, and Canada were launched against Gaddafi's forces in Benghazi, Tripoli, and Misrata that day. Qatari fighter jets joined the enforcement effort the following day, which constituted the most important part of its major response to the crisis trigger. These operations were eventually merged into a single NATO operation named Operation Unified Protector. The establishment of the no-fly zone provided vital assistance to the Libyan opposition groups.

As the Libyan state was dealt heavy blows from both the domestic opposition and the foreign interveners, the international community began recognizing the National Transition Council (NTC) as the official representative of the Libyan people. In June, Gaddafi offered to hold elections and promised to step aside if he lost, but this offer was rejected by the NTC. On 20 August, the NTC began a major offensive in the form of the Battle of Tripoli and ultimately took control of the Libyan capital. Qatari special forces supported Libyan rebels in their attack on Gaddafi's Bab al-Aziziya during this battle. Forces of Operation Unified Protector continued to fly thousands of sorties in support of the Libyan opposition.

The Libyan opposition completed their goal of removing Gaddafi from power in the Battle of Sirte on 20 October, and Gaddafi was killed in the aftermath of the battle. This effectively ended the civil war, constituted a change in the Libyan regime, and terminated the crisis for all actors. Operation Unified Protector officially came to a close on 31 October 2011, which was also the day that Abdel Rahim al-Keeb assumed the office of interim Prime Minister of Libya after being appointed to the position by the NTC.

At the outset of the crisis, humanitarian concerns were paramount for the NATO members that perceived a crisis. The situation in Libya constituted a threat to non-material, moral values, specifically human rights, and invoked the Responsibility to Protect norm. Italy also had economic concerns, as it received 25% of its oil and 10% of its natural gas from Libya, and the two countries were heavily mutually invested in each other. France also perceived a threat to influence, adopting a strong anti-regime stance in order to help recover its reputation after taking failed pro-regime stances in several prior Arab Spring uprisings (e.g., Tunisia, Egypt). A number of the European crisis actors also had concerns about the possible influx of refugees. Qatar was primarily motivated by the opportunity to expand its regional influence.

Operation Unified Protector had both air and naval components. Qatar only contributed to the air component, while all other members of the coalition that were also crisis actors contributed to both components. During the operation, the US flew the largest number of sorties (2000), followed by the UK and France (1300 and 1200, respectively), and then Italy and Canada (600 and 358, respectively). The US also provided covert support for NATO and the Libyan rebels. Qatar's combat deployment was the first by an Arab or Muslim-majority country and thus of critical regional and diplomatic significance. It was also the only country to commit ground troops to the effort, sending hundreds of special forces to train and fight alongside the Libyan opposition. Qatar also provided weapons to the opposition. Additional NATO and non-NATO countries that were involved in the enforcement of the no-fly zone, albeit to a lesser degree than the crisis actors, included Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Jordan, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates.

Russia and China were minimally involved in the crisis. Russia abstained from the UNSC vote on Resolution 1973, but both the Russian representative to the UN and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin heavily criticized it. Russia and China also signed a joint declaration emphasizing the need for a political, not military, solution to the crisis.

In the aftermath of this crisis, Libya struggled with establishing an effective government. Elections for the General National Congress (GNC) were held in July 2012, and the NTC transferred power to it one month later. In March 2014, the General National Congress voted to replace itself with a new legislature named the Council of Deputies. Elections were held three months later with low turnout. The Council of Deputies took up residence in Tobruk and is the internationally recognized government of Libya. Former GNC and Islamist parties fared poorly in the elections and set up a rival government in Tripoli. Militias that fought against the Gaddafi regime vied for power in post-Gaddafi Libya, with violence beginning in 2011. By 2013, Libya became a failed state and was in a near-anarchic situation. Violence escalated in 2014, eventually

leading to the emergence of a second Libyan civil war. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) also established a presence in Libya in 2014 and contributed further to this violence.

References:

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