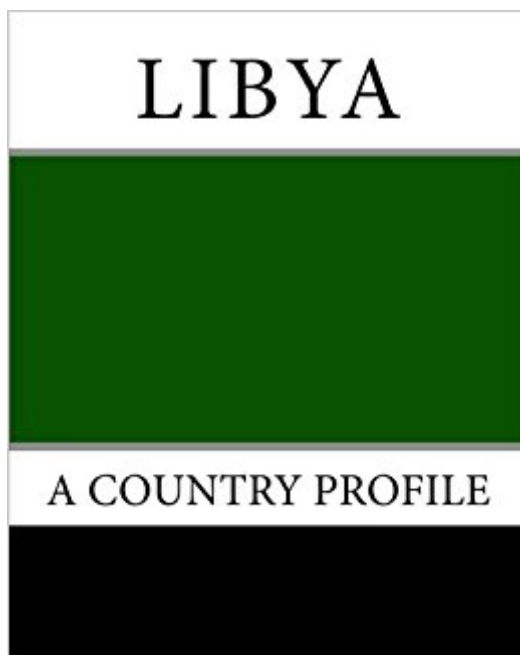


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Libya: A Country Profile



Synopsis

Libya is a country in the Maghreb region of North Africa. Bordered by the Mediterranean Sea to the north, Libya faces Egypt to the east, Sudan to the south east, Chad and Niger to the south, and Algeria and Tunisia to the west. With an area of almost 1,800,000 square kilometres (700,000 sq mi), Libya is the fourth largest country in Africa by area, and the 17th largest in the world.

The capital, Tripoli, is home to 1.7 million of Libya's 6.4 million people. The three traditional parts of the country are Tripolitania, Fezzan, and Cyrenaica. Libya has the highest HDI in Africa and the fourth highest GDP (PPP) per capita in Africa as of 2009, behind Seychelles, Equatorial Guinea and Gabon. These are largely due to its large petroleum reserves and low population. Libya is one of the world's 10 richest oil-producing countries. Having gained independence as the Kingdom of Libya in 1951, Libya has been ruled from 1969 to the present by Muammar al-Gaddafi, who rose to power in a military coup. In mid February 2011 mass protests and demonstrations broke out across Libya against Gaddafi's government. By 26 February, the Libyan opposition was reported to be in control of several coastal towns and cities, with the Gaddafi government retaining control of parts of Tripoli, the southern desert town of Sabha, and Gaddafi's coastal home city of Surt. After popular movements overturned the rulers of Tunisia and Egypt, its immediate neighbours to the west and east, Libya experienced a full-scale revolt beginning in February 2011. By 20 February, the unrest had spread to Tripoli. In the early hours of 21 February 2011, Saif al-Islam Muammar Al-Gaddafi, oldest son of Muammar al-Gaddafi, spoke on Libyan television of his fears that the country would fragment and be replaced by "15 Islamic fundamentalist emirates" if the uprising engulfed the entire state. He warned that the country's economic wealth and recent prosperity was at risk, admitted that "mistakes had been made" in quelling recent protests and announced that a constitutional convention would begin on 23 February. Shortly after this speech, the Libyan Ambassador to India announced on BBC Radio 5 live that he had resigned in protest at the "massacre" of protesters. Gaddafi appeared on Libyan state TV to deny rumors, stating "I want to show that I'm in Tripoli and not in Venezuela. Do not believe the channels belonging to stray dogs". Two Libyan Air Force colonels flew their F-1 Mirage jets to Malta and defected after refusing orders to bomb protesters. As of late February 2011, much of Libya has tipped out of Gaddafi's control, falling under the aegis of a disparate and informal coalition of protesters. Eastern Libya, centered around the second city and vital port of Benghazi, is said to be firmly in control of the opposition. The rebels are organizing themselves into a functioning government. However, in several public appearances, Gaddafi has threatened to destroy the protest movement, and Al Jazeera and other agencies have reported his government is arming pro-Gaddafi militiamen to kill protesters and defectors against the regime in

Tripoli. Organs of the United Nations, including United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the United Nations Human Rights Council, have condemned the crackdown as violating international law, with the latter body expelling Libya outright in an unprecedented action urged by Libya's own delegation to the UN. The United States imposed economic sanctions against Libya. On 26 February 2011, a rival government was established under the stewardship of Mustafa Mohamed Abud Al Jeleil, Gaddafi's former justice minister, to administrate the areas of Libya under rebel control. This marked the first serious effort to organize the broad-based opposition to the Gaddafi regime. While the government is presently based in Benghazi, it claims Tripoli as its capital.

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