

• Middle East

Mar 24, 2012

• Arab Spring bleeds deeper into Africa

By Derek Henry Flood

- "He is a black man! From Africa!" was how an exuberant Libyan rebel fighter described to Asia Times Online a purported Chadian national captured from pro-Gaddafi forces after the rebel victory in the immediate aftermath of the first battle of Brega on March 2, 2011.

Brega, a key oil terminal town west of Benghazi, was significant for not only being the first clear military victory for the rebels against regime forces who had begun to creep eastward toward the rebel stronghold of Benghazi, but also for more quietly being

the place where rebel forces began to disseminate statements to journalists about the importance of sub-Saharan Africans in the war that at times bordered on hysteria.

- Though the Libyan conflict in 2011 was lumped in with the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain and elsewhere in the Arab world as yet another front in the mushrooming "Arab Spring", it became immediately clear that Libya, due to both its geographic reality and its political history, was as much an African as well as an Arab conflict.
- The hype over the place of sub-Saharan Africans in the Libyan war seemed more propaganda than fact at many points because of the rebel claims were most often impossible to independently verify. Certainly there were plenty of black Africans in the Libyan theater, but many of them were migrant workers encouraged to look for work in Libya either by Muammar Gaddafi's polices proclaiming "brotherhood" with Libya's southern neighbors or simply drawn to Libya's relatively immense energy-derived wealth coupled with Gaddafi's renewed economic ties with an opportunistic West.
- Western companies and governments along with their autocratic counterparts in Russia and China were suddenly eager to do business with a post-sanctions Gaddafi. His image had been skillfully rehabilitated after the disastrous invasion of Iraq had made the "Mad Dog of the Middle East" appear, through the prism of a woefully distorted neoconservative worldview then dominating international affairs, as if he were a secular liberal

Then there were those who simply hoped to transit Libya en route to Italian shores and the seemingly bountiful European Union across the Mediterranean. Given the long range of Gaddafi's artillery men and snipers, journalists were mostly unable to get a close enough look at the regime troops to ascertain their ethnic makeup, relying solely on rebel conjecture along with some flat-out lies about the proportion of enemy forces made up of African "mercenaries".

- In the midst of all this chaos, innocent Africans were tortured, imprisoned and even killed after being easily marked with the mercenary label. They were targets of rebel rage, xenophobia and ignorance of the "other". They were also victims of an oversimplification of the ethnic dimension to the Libyan conflict.
- Asia Times Online observed a number of competent officers and logisticians of sub-Saharan background propelling forward the anti-Gaddafi forces of the The National Transitional Council of Libya (NTC) on the front lines in the battles for Brega, Ras Lanuf and the Jebel Nafusa region. The NTC ran a schizophrenic propaganda campaign emphasizing their fight as a colorblind one that did observably entail Libyans of all hues while constantly denouncing, in terms that seemed to stray into racism at certain points, their enemies' exploitation of African soldiers.
- In the globalized conflicts raging in the early 21st century, few wars exist in a vacuum. Weapons, material and men move easily across porous borders, poorly thought out regime-change scenarios are imposed from outside, and assorted strong men fall throughout the developing world. Virtually all state and non-state actors alike trade barbs about their opponents utilizing so-called foreign fighters in order to bolster their own claims of victimhood while delegitimizing the enemy's supposed nationalist or indigenous war-fighting goals.

Colonel Gaddafi did have foreign nationals fighting alongside his troops to be sure, but their role in the war is far from clearly understood. Gaddafi integrated himself into conflicts across the length and breadth of the African continent to make himself the indispensable interlocutor until he was pulled from a sewage portal on the outskirts of Sirte and summarily executed by jubilant NTC fighters on October 20, 2011.

- Gaddafi deftly positioned himself as the solution to many of Africa's persistently unstable regions whilst often stoking these very same disputes with arms and boilerplate rhetoric about perennial Third World revolution. Now five months after Gaddafi's deadly demise, Libya's North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Gulf Cooperation Council-backed revolution threatens to destroy or at least bifurcate the wobbly Republic of Mali, whose president was overthrown in a military coup in the capital of Bamako on Thursday morning.

As the Gaddafi ship was definitively sinking, Malian and Nigerien ethnic-Tuareg fighters returned to their respective bastions in the Sahara armed to the teeth with looted Libyan arms. The Malian state, which until earlier this week was led by President Amadou Toumani Toure, is now facing an almost insurmountable security challenge in the country's vast under-governed north due south of the Algerian border as an insurgent group calling itself the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (Mouvement National pour la Liberation de l'Azawad-MNLA).

- Shown in footage careening across Mali's Saharan north in vehicles identical to Libyan army issue Toyota Hi-Lux technical trucks brandishing Soviet bloc small arms, the MNLA seeks to secede from the Malian republic and form an independent nation called Azawad. The MNLA has overrun towns and army garrisons along the borders with Niger, Algeria and Mauritania, causing thousands of refugees and, in the case of Algeria, Malian soldiers themselves-to flee Mali's borders.

The current crisis began on January 17 with an MNLA attack on the eastern town of Menaka. It was however borne of Libya's internationally backed war on the cheap and has the potential to create further destabilization in the wider Sahara and Sahel regions beyond the current chaos in Mali. In simplest terms, the Arab Spring has now bled into Africa. And the mercurial, egomaniacal Gaddafi is no longer available to mediate such deadly disputes.

- In response to President Toure's impotency during his last days in office, a group of military officers led by an army captain named Amadou Sango and calling themselves the National Committee for the Restoration of Democracy and

State (Comite national pour le redressement de la démocratie et la restauration de la démocratie et la restauration de l'état - or CNRDRE).

The CNRDRE has announced that it has immediately suspended the Malian constitution and claims to have detained several government ministers in Bamako in one of its initial actions. None of this bodes well for Mali and Libya's neighbor Niger, which suffered its own coup in 2010 and dealt with a Tuareg rebellion in its north from 2007-2009. With Gaddafi now gone, these enfeebled states will have to look to supranational bodies like the African Union and the Economic Community Of West African States (ECOWAS) to attempt to sort out their differences.

- In Niger, authorities arrested a notorious Tuareg rebel leader, Aghali Alambo, who led an armed revolt against the central government in Niamey from 2007-2009. Alambo was one of the key leaders of the Nigerien's Movement for Justice (Mouvement des Nigériens pour la justice-MNJ) with which he agitated against the French-led uranium-mining consortium Areva.

The Tuareg, Tubu and other traditionally nomadic and pastoralist minority groups in Niger's rugged north claim to see virtually no benefit to their communities even as the price of uranium has climbed upward in international markets.

- After Gaddafi intervened in Niger's Tuareg troubles, Alambo was exiled to Tripoli, conveniently enough, where he was reported to have quickly become a close confidant of the doomed Gaddafi. Nigerien police stated that Alambo was believed to have orchestrated the smuggling of a substantial amount of Libyan explosives in Niger before his arrest.

Gaddafi, while crushing the aspirations of Libya's Amazight (commonly referred to as Berber) minority at home, supported the national liberation struggles of various minorities abroad. In turn, Niger's Tuareg still maintain a degree of loyalty to the late Libyan dictator, evidenced by the dilemma over son Saadi Gaddafi and three high-ranking military figures who were spirited into Niger following the fall of Tripoli late last August. Officially, Niamey states that it will not extradite Saadi to an NTC-ruled Libya due in large part to the gruesome, humiliating fate of his bedraggled father.

- Niger, one of the world's poorest nations in absolute terms and unable to feed its own citizenry, has suddenly become a champion of human rights for wealthy, disgraced Libyan regime figures. But beneath the surface Niger has real, paramount security concerns.

It cannot afford to rupture the tacit, Gaddafi-brokered peace with the Tuareg and other disgruntled groups in place since 2009. Niger does not want to further provoke the oft rebellious Tuareg by mishandling the Saadi case.

Nigerien officials are also rightfully irate about the treatment of Nigeriens by the NTC's rebel forces and the flight of Nigerien migrants back to Niger as well as those accused of fealty to Gaddafi stuck in limbo in the NTC's ad hoc justice system.

- The independent states in West Africa that the Tuareg inhabit have been plagued by just how to manage the Tuareg question since their inception. Muammar Gaddafi was adroit at manipulating Tuareg historical grievances to his own advantage while simultaneously portraying himself as peacemaker to black African leaders troubled by recurring Tuareg insurrections.

Now President Toure of Mali, who still claims to cling to power amidst a reported coterie of loyalist soldiers and was only to have theoretically remained in power until presidential elections scheduled to begin at the end of April - and Niger's former opposition leader-cum-President Mahamadou Issoufou, who has been in power less than a year - must contend with insurgent leaders on their own.

- Complicating all of these matters is the specter of al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). AQIM is described as everything from al-Qaeda's North African franchise, an elaborate cover for a massive transnational kidnapping-for-ransom and drug smuggling operation to a front for Algeria's Department of Intelligence and Security (Departement du Renseignement et de la Securite-DRS), as posited by more conspiratorially minded academics and journalists.

In the Malian conflict, both belligerents are hurling mostly baseless accusations at each other with regard to the role of AQIM in the region. The MNLA has stated that part of the reason it is fighting for an independent state of Azawad is to rid the region of AQIM. Meanwhile, Bamako has put forth that the MNLA is in league with AQIM to impose a violent brand of Islamism in northern Mali.

- The MNLA's agenda should not be confused with that of a more religious-minded, smaller outfit called Ancar Dine that has proclaimed it is fighting for the implementation of sharia law in Mali's troubled northern regions. Ancar Dine is led by a nonagenarian Salafist and lifelong Tuareg rebel called Iyad ag Ghali, who stated that his men fight now not for the liberation of the imagined state of Azawad but for the establishment of an Islamic republic.

The MNLA countered talk of Islamic law by issuing an official communique by its Paris-based spokesman, Mossa ag Attaher, that the rebel's goal is solely for the secession of Azawad from Mali and intimated that no other ideological agendas will be entertained nor folded into their avowedly secular rebellion. However unpalatable Ancar Dine's plans for Mali may be, the group is not to be confused with the Algeria-centric, Ayman al-Zawahiri affiliated AQIM.

- Until Wednesday, it may have been possible to paint the situation in Mali as relegated to that country's isolated, rough northern reaches with limited refugee spillover into adjacent nation-states. Disaffected Malian soldiers who have suffered the brunt of the northern violence staged a mutiny at the Kati barracks just 20 kilometers outside the capital of Bamako.

Tensions at the barrack spiraled out of control after a visit by Defense Minister Sadio Gassama meant to address troop worries about a lack of appropriate weapons to counter the MNLA's sturdier Libyan armaments among other dire concerns. After embittered soldiers pelted the defense minister's car with stones as he sped away in retreat, a mutiny gathered steam as soldiers stormed the state radio and television facilities in downtown Bamako. Conflicting reports vacillated on just whether or not Wednesday's drama was a fit of mutinous rage or an attempted palace coup.

- President Toure's official Twitter feed emphatically stated the soldiers were not engineering a coup, while Reuters quoted an unnamed Defense Ministry official as stating that the events were in fact a potential coup d'etat. By Thursday morning, the CNRDRE announced on state television that it had taken power. President Toure has supposedly been deposed - although at the time of this writing Toure was claiming otherwise.

If it is true that the CNRDRE has gained control of the Malian capital, it means nothing for parts of the north, east and northwest that remain under MNLA rebel control. What is certain is that the Arab Spring has claimed its first African leader. Rather than a classic, autocratic "Big Man" of Africa, however, Toure was a democratically elected leader who was on the cusp of stepping down in what should have been a peaceful transition of power.

- Toure's nickname in Mali is the "soldier of democracy", in reference to the coup he led in 1991 to help transform

Mali from a military dictatorship to a reasonably representative government. Quite unlike the previous Nigerien leader, president Mamadou Tandja, who was ousted on February 2010 for amending the constitution in that country to extend his stay in power, Malian President Toure appeared to be making good on his word allowing the preparation for elections meant to begin April 29.

Mali faces escalating problems - among them the heavily armed rebels stemming from Libya and soldiers suffering from low morale after a series of strategic defeats like that of the capture of the remote northern town of Tessalit's army base and airport.

- Now the capture of Gaddafi's infamous intelligence chief, Abdullah Senussi, in Mauritania, arriving on a flight from Casablanca, Morocco, reportedly on a forged Malian passport, illustrates that the effects of regime change in Libya will be felt across Africa for some time to come.

Following Wednesday and Thursday's climatic affairs in Bamako, it is now clear that the consequences of the Western-backed Libyan campaign have now unequivocally traveled from North Africa to what is distinctly West Africa.

- ***Derek Henry Flood** is a freelance journalist specializing in the Middle East and South and Central Asia and has covered many of the world's conflicts since 9/11 as a frontline reporter. He blogs at the-war-diaries.com. Follow Derek on Twitter @DerekHenryFlood*

(Copyright 2012 Asia Times Online (Holdings) Ltd. All rights reserved. Please contact us about sales, syndication and republishing.)

[Mali Coup Shows Tensions Over Tuareg Fighters Back From Libya | Special English | Learning English](http://www.voanews.com/learningenglish/home/Mali-Coup-Shows-Tensions-Over-Tuareg-Fighters-Back-From-Libya-144027296.html)

<http://www.voanews.com/learningenglish/home/Mali-Coup-Shows-Tensions-Over-Tuareg-Fighters-Back-From-Libya-144027296.html>

- 23 March 2012

Mali Coup Shows Tensions Over Tuareg Fighters Back From Libya

- This week, soldiers in Mali seized power. They said they acted because the president has failed to end a rebellion by ethnic Tuareg rebels in northern Mali. That conflict started again in January after Tuareg fighters returned from Libya. They had been allied with Moammar Gadhafi.

Leaders of the overthrow suspended the constitution and arrested government ministers. In Bamako, the capital, the price of fuel doubled and bread was reported in short supply.

Mali was set to hold presidential elections in late April. President Amadou Toumani Toure, a former army officer, was not seeking another term. The democratically elected president has served two terms, the legal limit. Years ago, he himself led an overthrow.

The United Nations Security Council condemned the ouster of President Toure. The U.N.'s political chief, Lynn Pascoe, said the return of the Tuaregs from the Libyan army has fueled the rebellion.

- LYNN PASCOE: "A sizeable number had gone to Libya because there they could earn more money working in the military and other areas. They were welcomed by the Gadhafi regime. We think that somewhere in the range of fifteen hundred to two thousand of them returned. Some of them were actually quite high-ranking people in the Libyan Army. And they also came with weapons."
- The Tuareg rebellion has been happening on and off in Mali for many years. But Mr. Pascoe says the new weapons have changed the situation.

LYNN PASCOE: "They have clearly added much more firepower and drive to this operation, which made it very difficult for the Malian Army to deal with."

In Washington, State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland expressed the support of the Obama administration for President Toure. She said Mali has been a leading democracy in West Africa and its democracy must be respected.

- VICTORIA NULAND: "The United States condemns the military seizure of power in Mali. We echo the statements of the African Union, of ECOWAS and of other international partners in denouncing these actions. We've called for calm. We've called for restoration of the civilian government under constitutional rule without delay, so that the elections can proceed as scheduled."

The United States has been providing Mali with as much as one hundred forty million dollars a year in security, economic and financial assistance. That is in addition to humanitarian aid.

Ms. Nuland says the change of power in Libya has affected security in the Sahel area, with rebels again fighting for an independent Islamic state.

- VICTORIA NULAND: "It's certainly true that there has been increasing concern inside Mali about Tuareg activity over the last number of months, and particularly since the Tuaregs have had less to fight about in Libya and have moved on to Mali."

Tuareg rebels have taken control of several towns in the north. The United Nations says the fighting has forced at least one hundred thirty thousand people from their homes.

- The military uprising started on Wednesday. The next day, the soldiers announced a National Committee for the Recovery of Democracy and the Restoration of the State. They promised elections but set no date.

In Bamako, people from Tuareg and Arab ethnic groups say the soldiers must work to avoid renewed discrimination against those groups. Many Malians thought the government was poorly handling the Tuareg rebellion. Still, people had praise for government efforts to spread the message not to treat Tuareg civilians or other light-skinned groups unfairly.

[Neighbours want Libya to stay united, says Tunisia | Oman Observer](#)

• Neighbours want Libya to stay united, says Tunisia

Mon, 12 March 2012

- TRIPOLI — Tunisia and Egypt want a united Libya and reject calls for federalism for their neighbour, the Tunisian foreign minister was quoted as saying yesterday.
"Tunisia and Egypt share the goal of preserving national unity, security and stability in Libya," the official Lana new agency quoted Rafik Abdessalem as saying.
At a meeting in the eastern Libyan city of Benghazi last Tuesday attended by thousands, tribal and political leaders unilaterally declared the region of Cyrenaica autonomous, raising fears the country might split up.
Thousands of people demonstrated across Libya on Friday against the proposed secession of the oil-rich region, a move that was sharply condemned by the interim government in Tripoli.
- "The unilateral announcement of Berqa (or Cyrenaica) made by some groups was rejected both by the Libyan elite and the Libyan people in general," Abdessalem said after a meeting with his Egyptian counterpart in Cairo.
"One of the lessons drawn from our experience of the Tunisian revolution and the subsequent Egyptian revolution is that Arab politics are closely interwoven and that we influence each other," he said.
"The security and stability of Libya concerns us all as Arabs and as neighbouring countries," the foreign minister said.
Libyan interim Prime Minister Abdel Rahim al Kib yesterday said that increased regional co-operation was required to tackle the escalation of cross-border criminal activities.
"The border regions have witnessed a noticeable escalation of drugs and weapons contraband," Kib said in Tripoli at the opening of a two-day ministerial regional conference on border security.
He said illegal immigration was on the rise and that smugglers were taking advantage of lax border controls to traffic an array of products, including expired foodstuff, medicine and liquor into Libya.
- "Terrorist groups will always find in border regions an auspicious environment to conduct incursions and destabilise security," Kib said, urging the region to intensify efforts to stop these actors.
"We have to boost regional co-operation in order to eradicate these development and activities," Kib said.
The two-day conference brings together ministers and representatives from Algeria, Chad, Egypt, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Sudan and Tunisia, with the aim of enhancing co-operation.
Diplomats and delegates from the African Union, the Arab League, the European Union and the UN are also attending the conference.
Kib also accused former government members of trying to harm Libyan ties with its neighbours.
"Remnants of the collapsed regime who fled to neighbouring countries are spending Libyan money, which they stole, to harm the people of Libya and the country's relations with its neighbours," he said.
Algerian Interior Minister Dahou Ould Kablia said there were "clear indicators" that Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb had exploited tensions in Tunisia and Libya to acquire and proliferate weapons.
"The deterioration of security in the region and the extensive proliferation of weapons required intensified efforts to secure our borders," he said. — AFP

[Libya Seeks Regional Co-operation to Stop Cross-border Criminal Activities](http://tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=8009)

<http://tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=8009>

- Libya Seeks Regional Co-operation to Stop Cross-border Criminal Activities
12/03/2012
- Addressing the opening session of the two-day ministerial regional conference on border security Sunday, Libyan interim prime minister Abdurrahim El-Keab said that increased regional cooperation was required to tackle the escalation of cross-border criminal activities.

He said: "The border regions have witnessed a noticeable escalation of drugs and weapons contraband."

He added that illegal immigration was on the rise and that smugglers were taking advantage of lax border controls to traffic an array of products into Libya, including expired foodstuff, medicine, and liquor.

While urging the region to intensify efforts to stop these actors, Mr El-Keab said, "Terrorist groups will always find in border regions an auspicious environment to conduct incursions and destabilise security. We have to boost regional co-operation in order to eradicate these development and activities."

- The Libyan premier went on to accuse former regime members of trying to harm Libyan ties with its neighbours, saying: "Remnants of the collapsed regime who fled to neighbouring countries are spending Libyan money, which they stole, to harm the people of Libya and the country's relations with its neighbours."

In his intervention, Algerian interior minister Dahou Ould Kablia said there were "clear indicators" that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb had exploited tensions in Tunisia and Libya to acquire and proliferate weapons.

"The deterioration of security in the region and the extensive proliferation of weapons required intensified efforts to secure our borders," he said, adding that in January, Algerian intelligence services had stopped a Libya-bound convoy loaded with ammunition and since the start of the year foiled three other similar operations.

- **Algeria to Help Libya Create Army, Police**

Earlier in the week, following talks with his Libyan counterpart Ashur bin Khayyal, Algerian foreign minister Mourad Medelci said his country will help Libya to create an army and a police force.

Medelci also discussed the security situation on the two country's long border, promising to help Libya as much as they could. He said Libya has the means to leave this transition period behind it.

He also assured Libya's leadership that the members of the family of late leader Muammar Gaddafi - his wife Safiya, his daughter Ayesha and two of his sons, Mohammed and Hannibal - who sought refuge in Algeria and were received for "humanitarian reasons" will not be able "to touch a single hair of the Libyan people".

[Weapons smuggling into Egypt from Libya increases - Boston.com](#)

• Weapons smuggling into Egypt from Libya increases

March 05, 2012|Associated Press

- The number of weapons smuggled into Egypt across the Libyan border is on the increase, with thousands of weapons flooding into the country, security officials said on Monday.

They said residents of southern Egypt, where extended families often accumulate large arsenals to protect property and settle feuds, are the main buyers.

The officials said 576 weapons including modern sniper rifles were seized by police in the last three months in the Egyptian oasis of Siwa near the Libyan border. The number of weapons that reached buyers undetected is believed to be five times the number seized.

- Weapons smuggling out of Libya surged after its 2011 civil war, which freed up large numbers of arms for export.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

The smuggling of weapons across the Libyan border fuels Egypt's persistent security woes.

The nation's much-hated police are yet to fully retake the nation's streets after they retreated in not-yet-explained circumstances early in last year's uprising that toppled longtime leader Hosni Mubarak.

- Thousands of inmates, including hardcore criminals, remain at large a year after a series of jailbreaks that took place when police first melted away 13 months ago.

The availability of weapons, coupled with the thin presence of police on the streets, has emboldened criminals to commit crimes that had been rare in Egypt, like armed robberies, hijacking armored vehicles carrying cash for banks, setting up fake checkpoints to rob passengers on highways and kidnapping children for ransom.

- Rights activists and some politicians accuse the army generals who took over from Mubarak for the continued precarious security, arguing that the military had the resources and manpower to restore security. They cite the near total absence of violent incidents during recent parliamentary elections for which army troops provided security. Voting in Egypt has in the past routinely been marred by violence.

The generals say security has dramatically improved since the lawless days and weeks following Mubarak's ouster.

Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim, who is in charge of the police, said on Monday that security forces are combating crime committed by fugitive inmates, hardcore criminals taking advantage of the precarious security situation and first-time offenders pushed into crime by the nation's economic crisis.

The minister's comments were carried by the official Middle East News Agency.

[Officials say the number of weapons smuggled from Libya to Egypt has increased - The Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/officials-say-the-number-of-weapons-smuggled-from-libya-to-egypt-has-increased/2012/03/05/gIQAqBnJsR_story.html)

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/officials-say-the-number-of-weapons-smuggled-from-libya-to-egypt-has-increased/2012/03/05/gIQAqBnJsR_story.html

- Officials say the number of weapons smuggled from Libya to Egypt has increased
- By Associated Press, Updated: Monday, March 5
- CAIRO — Egyptian security officials say thousands of weapons are being smuggled into the country across the Libyan border.

They say residents of southern Egypt, where extended families often accumulate large arsenals to protect property and settle feuds, are the main buyers.

- The officials said Monday that 576 weapons including modern sniper rifles were seized by police in the last three months in the Egyptian oasis of Siwa near the Libyan border.

They said the number of weapons that reached buyers undetected is believed to be five times the number seized.

Weapons smuggling out of Libya surged after its 2011 civil war, which freed up large numbers of arms for export.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

Copyright 2012 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

[McCain urges Libyan militias to join national army, raises issue of rights abuses - The Washington Post](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/mccain-urges-libyan-militias-to-join-national-army-raises-issue-of-rights-abuses/2012/02/22/gIQAqAr2TUTR_story.html)

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle-east/mccain-urges-libyan-militias-to-join-national-army-raises-issue-of-rights-abuses/2012/02/22/gIQAqAr2TUTR_story.html

• McCain urges Libyan militias to join national army, raises issue of rights abuses



(Amr Nabil/Associated Press) - U.S. Senator John McCain, R-Ariz, the top Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, talks at the American Chamber of Commerce in Cairo, Egypt, Monday, Feb. 20, 2012. MacCain is scheduled to meet with Egypt's military leader, who took over after Mubarak was ousted last year.

- By Associated Press, Updated: Wednesday, February 22
- TRIPOLI, Libya — Sen. John McCain urged Libya's militias on Wednesday to integrate themselves into the country's new national army and called for the reported abuse of prisoners held by the ex-rebels to stop.

McCain, a strong advocate of U.S. intervention to stop deposed leader Moammar Gadhafi's crackdown on the country's 2011 uprising, spoke to reporters after meetings with former rebel commanders and the chairman of the ruling National Transitional Council, Mustafa Abdul-Jalil, in Tripoli.

- The senator said he raised the issue of alleged abuses inside makeshift prisons run by militias.

"We made clear to them that human rights organizations are reporting serious abuses and the world is watching. We know it is difficult but these abuses need to stop so Libya can be respected everywhere in the world," he said.

- He also said he advocated the collection of weapons by the authorities, saying that if they "fall into the wrong hands, it would pose a very serious threat."
- The U.N. and other agencies have expressed concerns about the proliferation of weapons from the upheaval, fearful that it may feed instability throughout the region.

Hundreds of armed militias that fought against Gadhafi's forces are the real power on the ground in Libya, wielding control over cities, neighborhoods and borders.

- The country has been plagued by revenge attacks by those who suffered at the hands of Gadhafi's forces during the brutal civil war. Human rights groups have documented reports of widespread torture and killings of detainees.

The NTC in contrast has been unable to rein in fighters, rebuild decimated institutions or stop widespread corruption.

- Underscoring the turmoil, scores of civilians have been killed in tribal warfare in southern Libya since Feb. 11.

McCain however noted "enormous progress and change that has taken place over the past months."

He offered U.S. assistance in the country's upcoming elections.

- The upcoming elections in June will prove to the world that the people of Libya are struggling for universal human values of democracy and freedom," he said.

Libya is set to have elections in June to elect a 200-member assembly that will appoint a prime minister and select a panel to write the constitution.

The senator also offered American help providing expertise in treating wounded fighters and setting up rehabilitation centers inside Libya.

- Libya lost thousands of its citizens-turned-fighters during the eight-month uprising against Gadhafi's forces. Thousands more were wounded and the government has set up a program to treat the injured fighters abroad.

[A victory, but at what price?](http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/victory+what+price/6178774/story.html)

<http://www.ottawacitizen.com/news/victory+what+price/6178774/story.html>

• A victory, but at what price?

After Moammar Gadhafi's death, NATO saw its victory as complete. But as David Pugliese writes in the last of a three-part series, Libya's new leaders are struggling to gain control and al-Qaeda has benefitted from the power vacuum

By David Pugliese, Ottawa Citizen February 20, 2012

- - Story
 - Photos (1)



Prime Minister Stephen Harper congratulates

Canadian Forces Lt.-Gen. Charles Bouchard after he was awarded the Meritorious Service Cross for serving in the NATO-led Libya mission during a ceremony on Parliament Hill last November.

Photograph by: Dave Chan, Reuters , Ottawa Citizen

- The death of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi on Oct. 20 was greeted with relief in the capital cities of NATO nations.

His demise meant the war was all but over. In Ottawa, officials in the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office went to work planning the largest military victory parade the country had seen in decades.

The Conservative government wanted a major event: a flypast of CF-18 fighter jets and other aircraft, a parade, a choir and a feting of hundreds military personnel in the Senate chambers.

The emphasis was on portraying all those who had taken part in the Libyan mission - from cooks to clerks to pilots and aircrew - as "heroes."

The PR campaign started with a press release issued Nov. 4 by the office of Defence Minister Peter MacKay, calling on Canadians to welcome their "military heroes" back from the war's staging base in Italy.

But even before Gadhafi's death, the government had carefully crafted strategic messages to be used by military officers and politicians in public and with the media when victory came in Libya. The main one was that Canada had taken a leading role in the NATO campaign and had "punched above its weight."

- MacKay was the first to use the phrase, which was soon parroted by generals and defence analysts.

Politicians in other nations also started using the term. Norway and Denmark punched above their weight in the war, U.S. officials said. British Prime Minister David Cameron declared Britain's military had also "punched above its weight."

NATO saw its victory as complete: 260 aircraft had flown more than 26,000 missions. Almost 6,000 targets, including tanks and other armoured vehicles, were destroyed. More than 200 cruise missiles were fired and 20,000 bombs dropped. Canadian CF-18s flew 946 sorties and dropped almost 700 bombs.

Libya's air force was almost entirely destroyed in the opening days of the war. More than 400 government buildings or command centres were attacked.

- With all the self-congratulation about victory in Libya, few in the Canadian government or military pointed out the obvious - that the thirdate army of an African state, outfitted with aging equipment, had somehow managed to withstand the full force of some of the largest militaries in the world and hang on for more than 200 days.
- As part of their PR campaign, government ministers also focused on Lt.-Gen. Charles Bouchard, whom they dubbed the "hero" of the Libyan war. The general would receive the Meritorious Service Cross, an honour military officers say usually takes quite a while to work its way through the bureaucracy before it's approved. In this case, the award was fast-tracked.

U.S. politicians were also full of praise for Bouchard's performance. "He was tough, he was able, he took no prisoners," U.S. Defence Secretary Leon Panetta said in lauding the general's efforts.

But not everyone was enamoured with a 'take no prisoners' approach to warfare.

- There were growing questions about the number of civilian deaths caused by NATO airstrikes and the lack of answers from the alliance. Antiwar groups claimed thousands might have been killed and that the alliance had committed war crimes.

A committee of British MPs tried to determine how many civilians NATO killed, but would acknowledge in a report there was no way of knowing. They accepted, however, that coalition forces did their best to avoid such casualties and commended them for that.

Libyan government officials said such casualties were unfortunate, but in the grander scheme of things, they were inevitable. They pointed out Gadhafi's forces killed thousands of people during the civil war.

Bouchard, who approved each and every airstrike, said NATO's process was extremely rigorous and geared to substantially reduce civilian deaths.

- One investigation by the New York Times newspaper found that NATO bombs killed as many as 70 civilians during the conflict, including 29 women and children. Survivors told the Times that one tactic used by NATO was to restrike targets minutes after the first attack, a practice that killed civilians rushing to aid the wounded.

NATO said it didn't have any figures about such fatalities, but critics countered that the alliance never tried to compile any.

One of the most controversial NATO attacks happened in August in the farming community of Majar. Five women and seven children were killed in the initial attack. Minutes later, NATO aircraft were back dropping bombs, killing four more. When neighbours rushed to help dig people from the rubble, another bomb hit, killing 18 more civilians.

- At the time, Gadhafi's government claimed 85 died, but that was dismissed as propaganda. Libya's new government now acknowledges around 34 civilians were killed.

But NATO still insists it had carefully planned out the airstrike and the dead were Libyan military personnel and mercenaries.

Back in Canada, there was disquiet as well, but for other reasons. Among some in uniform, the Conservative government's decision to honour the Libyan war didn't sit well.

A large number of Canadian military personnel had lost friends or acquaintances in the decade-long conflict in Afghanistan. Much blood and treasure had been spent, with 158 Canadians dead and almost 2,000 injured. More than 30,000 Canadian military personnel had served at some point in Afghanistan.

- But a similar ceremony to honour Canadian troops who fought in that country, complete with a parade on Parliament Hill and a flyover, had been scuttled.

It seemed to some military personnel the Afghan war was an embarrassment to the Conservative government.

Now, all the stops were being pulled out for a war where aircrew flew their missions before returning to a comfortable room and meal at night. No Canadian troops fought in the deserts of Libya. There were no casualties. Pilots at times faced gunfire, but most of Libya's air defences were destroyed in the opening days of the conflict. The war was, as some pilots suggested, a turkey shoot.

But Libya was different in other respects. Unlike Afghanistan, it was a military action that had a clear beginning and end and what the government considered a victory.

- The celebration that had been set for Nov. 24 on Parliament Hill would be televised nationally; some 300 military personnel were brought in from four bases across the country for the event.

The four-minute flight of CF-18s and other aircraft over Parliament Hill cost taxpayers an estimated \$850,000, although the Defence Department has not yet tallied the entire cost of the celebrations.

But the public appeared largely indifferent. The event attracted only a couple of dozen Libyan-Canadians who waved flags as cannons sounded a 21-gun salute.

"History shows us this: that freedom seldom flowers in undisturbed ground," Harper told the assembled military personnel at the time. "Our job in Libya has been done and done well."

That, however, was open to debate.

- While the Canadian government celebrated Gadhafi's overthrow, the countries in the region were feeling the effects.

The Libyan strongman had not only provided aid for many African nations, but employment for their citizens. His demise set into motion a mass exodus of workers back to their original countries.

That, in turn, created a domino effect as those nations struggled to deal with hundreds of thousands of traumatized and impoverished people, according to a recently released UN report for the Security Council.

Crime and drug and human smuggling have spiked in the region and the return of more than one million people to their homelands has worsened an "already challenging, humanitarian, development and security situation," the report noted.

- But Gadhafi's overthrow did breathe new life into one organization - al-Qaeda.

As Gadhafi's forces retreated from NATO's relentless air attacks they abandoned bases and ammunition depots holding thousands of weapons, including surface-to-air missiles. In the chaos that engulfed Libya, the sites were quickly pilfered, either by rebels or black marketers.

African nations were the first to sound the warning. In late March, just weeks into the conflict, Chad's president, Idriss Deby Itno, told journalists that al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, or AQIM as it is known, had obtained missiles and small arms from abandoned Libyan stockpiles. "This is very serious," he said. "AQIM is becoming a genuine army, the best equipped in the region."

- Canada was slow to recognize the problem. In April, Canadian Forces spokesman Brig.-Gen. Richard Blanchette said the military didn't have any information about missing armaments or missiles.

But a month later, Algerian intelligence was also warning that looted Libyan weapons were in the hands of AQIM.

"The region has turned into a powder keg," Mohamed Bazoum, Niger's foreign minister, would later tell delegates to an anti-terrorism conference. "Things have changed and degraded since the Libya crisis and the region is on a war path. With stolen weapons circulating, al-Qaeda's total impact is growing."

In November, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, one of AQIM's leaders, confirmed to the Mauritanian news agency that the terrorist group had acquired Libyan weapons. "We have been one of the main beneficiaries of the revolutions of the Arab world," he boasted.

- And in Libya, the war was over, but the fighting went on. The country's new leaders were dealing with their own problems as rebel groups, representing various factions, started to fight each other for control of the country. In Tripoli, rival groups fought gun battles over control of the city's sports complex and airport.

"I want to assure the Libyan people that everything is under control," a Libyan senior official, Mustafa Abdel Jalil, said after one four-day battle on the outskirts of the capital.

But the militias, estimated to number between 100 and 300 groups, aren't hearing the message.

- Tripoli residents have seen a different face of the rebellion than the one presented to the western media. Rebels have stopped people at gunpoint and stolen their vehicles. Other militia groups have taken over homes and buildings, evicting families and businesses. The militia from Zintan stole an elephant from Tripoli's zoo, taking the animal back to their city as a war trophy.

The militias refuse to disarm and clashes continue. It's estimated that around 125,000 Libyans have retained their weapons.

A recent report from the International Crisis Group pointed to one of the key problems: Libyans had rejected the National Transitional Council. The group that the Canadian government recognized as the legitimate representative of the Libyan people, long before Gadhafi's regime fell, actually had little real power.

Although the NTC was the face of the uprising for western politicians and the media, those from the western part of the country saw it as dominated by militia groups from the east. For their part, Islamists saw the transitional council as overly secular, too geared to western values and out of touch with ordinary Libyans, according to the report.

- There was also bad blood between a number of towns and cities and the NTC. Militias in Misrata complained they received little support from rebels in Benghazi and that the NTC had made them pay for weapons at the height of the civil war.

Equally troubling for countries that supported the rebels was the ongoing widespread detention of individuals and the use of torture in the new Libya.

An estimated 8,500 men, women and children are still being held in detention centres run by various militias. Navi Pillay, the United Nations high commissioner for human rights, reported that the detainees were being tortured and that both male and female prisoners were being raped.

In January, Médecins sans Frontières pulled its medical staff from detention facilities in Misrata after they determined more than 100 people had been tortured. The group's doctors were being asked to keep prisoners alive so they could be tortured again.

- Around the same time, Amnesty International reported that up to a dozen people had been tortured to death by Libya's new National Military Security agency.

In early February came the news that Libya's former ambassador to France, Omar Brebesh, had been killed shortly after being arrested by a militia group. According to the autopsy, he died after suffering "multiple bodily injuries and fractured ribs."

Such cases prompted Canada's Foreign Affairs Department to deliver a diplomatic note rebuking Libya for allowing such activities to take place.

But Libyan officials dismissed allegations of torture as unfounded. The head of Misrata's military council, Ibrahim Beitelmal, instead claimed that human rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Médecins sans Frontières were part of "Gadhafi's fifth column."

- Still, Canada's Lt.-Gen. Bouchard remains optimistic about Libya's future. He argues that the country is in a good position to bounce back and become prosperous again. "I believe once we get there, mixed with a government that is transparent and representative, we will find our way toward a Libyan democracy," he recently told a Canadian senate meeting.

Asked by senators about the torture and the concerns raised by Médecins sans Frontières and other agencies, Bouchard said the Libyans needed to understand that such things were not right.

"I would offer that this is an emerging democracy by people who may not know all the things that need to be done and who may not understand all the human rights issues," he added.

- Some are not so sure Libya is an emerging democracy. They point to the country's warm welcome in January of Sudan's President Omar Hassan al-Bashir.

Bashir, who is wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide and war crimes, was offering Tripoli the use of his military to help create a new Libyan army.

This was the same military Bashir used to ethnically cleanse Darfur. Ironically, the International Criminal Court had sought to try Gadhafi for similar war crimes.

- But Bashir felt at home in Tripoli. Asked by journalists if he was worried he might be arrested and handed over to the international court, he answered: "By God, No."

He said he felt absolutely safe in the new Libya.

© Copyright (c) The Ottawa Citizen

[Mali steps up battle against Tuareg revolt - FT.com](http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/056fc1e8-5ae4-11e1-a2b3-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1msz6RXLA)

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/056fc1e8-5ae4-11e1-a2b3-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1msz6RXLA>

- February 19, 2012 5:07 pm

Mali steps up battle against Tuareg revolt

By Xan Rice in Lagos

- Mali's army has launched an air-and-land offensive to try to crush a new Tuareg rebellion that was inspired by the return from Libya of fighters who had served under Muammer Gaddafi.

The uprising by the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad ([MNLA](#)) began in Mali's arid north in mid-January, with dozens of government soldiers and insurgents killed in a series of battles. Tens of thousands of civilians have been forced to flee their homes.

- The rebels, equipped with four-wheel-drive vehicles with machine-guns, as well as mortars and missiles that they hauled across the Sahel from Libya late last year, have taken control of several remote northern towns and forced the army into a series of strategic retreats.
- This has put the government under huge pressure to act in advance of presidential elections in April.

Dioncounda Traore, head of the national assembly, said on Thursday that after being in a "defensive position", the army had been instructed "to go after the attackers".

Amid fears that the rebellion could spread across borders, the 15-member regional Ecowas group called for "an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities by the rebels", at a meeting in Abuja, Nigeria, on Friday.

"[Ecowas] strongly condemned the MNLA rebellion in Mali and expressed its full support for the efforts being exerted by Mali to defend its territorial integrity," an Ecowas communiqué said.

- The Tuareg, a Berber people, are found in the deserts across the Sahara in north and west Africa. Their grievances in Mali stretch back almost a century, with the last rebellion ending in 2008. Previous demands included more autonomy and development, but the MNLA is for the first time seeking outright independence for three northern regions.

"This has been simmering for a long time," said Jeremy Keenan, a Tuareg expert at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London. "But this new rebellion would not have happened if all these guys had not come back from Libya."

Ashour Khayal, Libya's foreign minister, told the Financial Times this month that Libyans had little sympathy for governments to the south now attempting to contain the fallout from the previous regime's collapse.

"They were trying to find a solution for Gaddafi and were late in recognising what is happening here," he said. "The African countries are being destabilised by the people who were fighting against us. They cross back with their weapons."

- During the past few decades, Gaddafi recruited many Malian Tuareg to serve in his army. More were hired last year as mercenaries to help quash the Libyan uprising. When it became clear Gaddafi's regime was doomed, hundreds of Malian Tuareg went home, bringing with them a powerful arsenal of looted weapons.

Analysts believe the rebels are about 1,000-strong. The MNLA admits its ranks include returnees from Libya, including Mohammed Ag Najm, the senior military commander. But it says most of these men fought against Gaddafi during the revolution last year, not for him. Other fighters are veterans of Tuareg rebellions, army deserters, and volunteers of various ethnicities in northern Mali, the group says.

The Malian government accuses the MNLA of having links to al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, pointing to an attack on Aguelhoc, 450 miles north-east of Bamako, on January 18. Many soldiers were killed, and photographs of their bodies showed that their hands were bound, suggesting they were murdered. The rebels deny this.

- Amnesty International has called for an [independent inquiry into the Aguelhoc killings](#) and said northern Mali was experiencing its worst human rights violations for 20 years. At least 44,000 civilians have fled across the border to Niger, Mauritania and Burkina Faso, the [UN says](#), with 60,000 more displaced within Mali.

Mr Keenan said his "gut feel" was that fewer than 50 per cent of Tuareg backed the insurgency. There is no sign of Tuareg in Niger joining in, as has happened in previous rebellions, but if that were to happen "the situation could get out of control", Mr Keenan added.

Gilles Yabi, west Africa project director at the International Crisis Group, said that Mali's government now wanted to show it had the military capacity to resist the rebels, and to stop any attack on Kidal, Gao or Timbuktu, important cities in the north.

"If the government can secure these cities, we can expect to see some talks with the rebels, perhaps with the help of Algeria," Mr Yabi said.

Additional reporting by Borzou Daragahi

[Algeria seizes missiles smuggled from Libya | Firstpost](#)

<http://www.firstpost.com/fwire/algeria-seizes-missiles-smuggled-from-libya-217868.html>

• Algeria seizes missiles smuggled from Libya

— Feb 19, 2012

- **Algiers:** Algerian security forces have found a large cache of weapons, including shoulder-fired missiles, which they believe were smuggled in from neighbouring Libya, a security source briefed on the discovery told Reuters on Saturday.

The find follows warnings from governments in the region that instability in Libya after the end of Muammar Gaddafi's rule is allowing weapons taken from Gaddafi's [arsenal](#) to fall into the hands of al Qaeda's north African branch and other insurgent groups across the Sahara desert.

- The weapons cache was discovered in the desert about 60 km (40 miles) south of In Amenas, an energy-producing Algerian region near the border with Libya, said the source, who spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity.

The source said the cache was located following a tip-off from a smuggler who had been arrested. He said it contained a "large quantity" of arms including the shoulder-launched missiles – a weapon which, in some variations, could be used to bring down an aircraft.

- "This weapons seizure shows that the chaos in Libya is dangerous for the whole region," the source said.

There was no official confirmation of the discovery from the Algerian government and there was no way of independently verifying the source's account.

Western security experts tracking arms which have disappeared from Gaddafi's looted arms depots say the shoulder-fired missiles – also known as man-portable air defence systems, or MANPADS – are one of their biggest concerns because they could be used with relative ease by insurgent groups.

• INSURGENCY

Gaddafi's forces had about 20,000 of the missiles, according to a U.S. government task force which is trying to locate the missiles. The task force says most of the missiles are still inside Libya, in the hands of militias loosely allied to the interim leadership that took over after Gaddafi's rule was overthrown last year.

Security officials in North Africa say the worst-case scenario is that al Qaeda's north African wing, al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), could use one of the missiles to bring down a commercial airliner coming in to land or taking off at an airport somewhere in North Africa.

The group is waging a long-running insurgency against Algeria's government. It also carries out kidnappings, ambushes and bomb attacks on Western targets in the Sahel, a huge volatile band that straddles the borders of Algeria, Libya, Mali, Mauritania and Niger.

- Speaking in Geneva last week, a U.N. panel of experts on Libya said the lack of strong central government control in Libya was making it difficult to track down the missing MANPADS.

"People are concerned and they are right," said one panel member, on condition of anonymity. "There is certainly weapons traffic into the Sahel. It is a large desert area with limited (border) controls."

- Algeria has been one of the region's most vocal states in warning of the security impact of Gaddafi's fall. The revolt has left huge quantities of weapons unsecured and a fragile interim government that is struggling to impose its authority and control the country's borders.
- However, Libyan officials say they are working to secure the missing weapons and have accused Algeria of exaggerating the threat.

They say its neighbour was against the revolt in Libya and is now using the security issue to undermine the new leadership in Tripoli, allegations that Algerian officials deny.

Reuters