

PAMUN XVI RESEARCH REPORT— Countering the aftermath of the Arab Spring in Libya

Introduction of Topic

“Liberty, Justice, Democracy” – the words of the Libyan motto. However, after the Arab Spring, chaos has descended over the country, with armed groups out of control and critical human rights abuse.

The Arab Spring was an anti-government revolution which took place from 17th December 2010 – mid 2012. It began with a wave of protests, riots and civil wars occurring in Tunisia with the Jasmine Revolution. The causes of this revolution were the alarming rate of government corruption causing distressing levels of inflation and below inadequate living conditions. Further issues were vast differences in income, social inequality, multiple human right violations and kleptocracy. The primary cause of the Arab Spring was authoritarianism in countries such as Syria, Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and of course, Tunisia. This dictatorial behaviour led to large political riots, civil disobedience, internet activism, insurgency and other forms of protest. Citizens filled streets demanding democracy, free and fair elections along with economic freedom and the abolishment of corruption.

During the Arab Spring, the Libyan Civil War broke out for 8 months in February 2011 after rulers were overturned in Egypt and Tunisia. It began with peaceful protests and soon escalated into an armed conflict between the government forces of Colonel Gaddafi and the rebels against his government.

Background Information

The Libyan Crisis refers to continuing civil war taking place as a result of the Arab Spring in Libya. The Crisis can be thought of as being in three parts: the first civil war which began and ended 2011, the inter-civil war atrocities which occurred due to the aftermath of the first war and the second civil war, which started early 2014 and is still presently ongoing. The primary reason which fuelled the conflict was the oppressive rule of Muammar Gaddafi. Gaddafi and his government ruled for 40 years in Libya, brutally treating civilians by disrespecting their human rights, curbing freedom of speech, criminalising peaceful expressions of belief and engaging in torture and execution. As a consequence, Libyans began to demand their basic human, universal rights and sought to end the leadership of a ruthlessly unscrupulous government.

[The first Libyan civil war](#)

Inspired by the revolts in neighbouring countries, protests began in Benghazi, Libya to overthrow the government of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. Libya's first civil war began on 15th February 2011 and ended 8 months later in October. The protests led to a rebellion which spread throughout the entire country and soon escalated into violent clashes between anti-Gaddafi forces (the National Transitional Group) and the government (the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya). The conflict intensified so rapidly, that in February itself, the United Nation's Security Council passed a resolution to freeze Gaddafi assets and restrict his travel. Later, Security Council referred the crisis to the International Criminal Court and established a no-fly zone over the country and begin a series of air strikes in order to protect civilian life. The government aimed to call for ceasefires but the damage they had done to the Libyan population was so great that the rebels rejected this and the fighting continued.

Clashes continued for many months, and spread to cities all over the country including Tripoli, where African mercenaries began to shoot protestors in the streets. As a consequence, thousands of civilians began to flee the country and seek refugee in Egypt, Tunisia and Turkey, while others were trapped within the Libyan border. The United Nation's High Commissioner for Refugees deemed the situation to be critical, as several Libyans were living in unimaginably poor situations, travelling between Tunisia and Egypt. In addition, Libya was already in a situation with a dangerously low level of aid, food and medicine, and as the civil war began, the numbers grew to over a million Libyans requiring immediate humanitarian aid. Though organisations such as Amnesty International and International Red Cross aimed to gather aid, the situation was one of complete chaos and inefficiency.

The exact number of the casualties have not been released, but most estimates have stated around 6,000 deaths from February to October.

In last July, after the National Transitional Group was announced the legitimate government of Libya and his fortress is raided in Tripoli, Colonel Gaddafi went into hiding. The NTG gains momentum and soon is recognised as the main governmental party in Libya by over 60 nations, including the African Union itself. And in end October, Colonel Gaddafi is found hiding in the drainage pipe, is captured and soon killed.

[Between the first and second civil war](#)

After the death of Colonel Gaddafi and the end of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, several followers of Gaddafi were enraged and began to take up arms to continue to war with the NTG. From 1st November 2011 – 16th May 2014, it is known as the inter-civil war period or the factional war period in Libya where over 1300 deaths have been estimated. Various militia initiated violence upon the country in the form of guerrillas, mercenaries and Islamists. The revolts began small, but soon large scale fighting commenced between Zawiya and Tripoli and spread to Bani Walid (another city in Libya).

[The second Libyan civil war](#)

As a consequence of the above, the second Libyan civil war erupted on 16th May 2014 and is currently ongoing. The conflict is between four prominent groups: the Council of Deputies (the government), the General National Congress (the rival Islamist government), the Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries (a Islamic jihadist group) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant.

In 2012, by quite a majority, the General National Congress (GNC) were voted to govern Libya. However, once in office, the group were suspected of assisting Islamic terror group in the acquisition of arms, allowing radical groups in to kidnap and organise assassinations, enforcing the Sharia law upon Libyans and refusing to hold free and fair elections when its mandate had expired. In addition, the GNC imposed unjustified and restrictive laws upon women, enforcing gender segregation. Their imposition of Sharia law further enforced this as the law prohibits women from exercising basic rights such as the right to testify against a rapist (unless a man confirms the woman's testimony). Furthermore, several allegations were made that the GNC were allied with terrorist groups which further enflamed the conflict. In early 2015, the Council of Deputies initiated a coup d'état to remove the GNC. However, the the Islamic military men began to fight forces from the Council of Deputies. Soon after, the National Army formed a defence line outside Tripoli in order to protect the GNC.

The consequences of the civil war have been crippling to Libya. Over 4000 civilians have died fighting an ongoing crisis, and tens of thousands Libyans have fled the country and crossed borders.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

[Neighbouring countries – Algeria, Malta, Egypt and Tunisia](#)

Algeria and Libya have been strong neighbours, though their relations were quite strained since the first Libyan civil war. In 2011, the National Transitional Council accused Algeria of being affiliated with pro-Gaddafi forces and allowing the movement of arms between the country's border. Relations worsened as the Algerian government pledged their unconditional support for the Gaddafi government. In addition, thousands of refugees have entered Algeria borders from Libya, straining the country further.

The volatility in Libya has been spreading to its neighbours, such as Egypt.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
26 th February 2011	Resolution by the UNSC to refer the situation in Libya to the International Criminal Court
17 th March 2011	Resolution by the UNSC to establish an arms embargo in Libya

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Resolution by the UNSC to refer the situation in Libya to the International Criminal Court (S/RES/1970)
- Resolution by the UNSC to establish an arm's embargo in Libya and impose a no-fly zone over the country (S/RES/1973)
- Resolution by the UNSC to lift the no-fly zone and ban the use of force for civilian protection (S/RES/2016)
- Resolution by the UNSC to counter the effects of terrorism in Libya (S/RES/2214)
- Resolution by the UNSC calling for the destruction of all category two weapons chemical weapons outside the country (S/RES/2298)

Main Issues

[Government](#)

This war is undoubtedly multifaceted, with different political groups aiming to gain control over the country for various reasons. There are two major sides to the conflict: the Council of Deputies (the government) and General National Congress (the rebel group). As the conflict continues to evolve, both sides have international backing and support. In 2015, the two sides decided to form Government of National Accord in principle.

[Tripoli and Benghazi](#)

In 2011, the Battle of Tripoli took place between Gaddafi loyalists and the National Transitional Council. The NTC acted with the ultimate goal of overthrowing the Gaddafi government by taking over the capital. Ultimately, the city was captured and Gaddafi was shortly executed. Soon after, the second civil war escalated in Libya, and the capital was unstable.

In 2012, the Benghazi attacks took place against two government facilities of the United States in Libya. The group responsible came into action because of the death of Colonel Gaddafi in the first Libyan civil war. Ansar al-Sharia is recognised as a terrorist group by the United Nations, as it aimed to enforce the Sharia Law upon the country. The Islamist militant group is responsible for the death of four deaths: one of the US ambassador to Libya at the time, a foreign service officer and two CIA contractors. Benghazi had always been a place of great instability and chaos, but the 2021 events further enhanced this.

[Human rights abuse](#)

The human rights abuse in Libya during both the first and second civil war have been an atrocity and has led to brutally blatant oppression. Freedom of expression has been curbed, women's rights have been ignored, civilians have been forced to take refugee and flee the country and international support has been low. It became common practice for groups to oppress journalists by threatening assignation and attacks in order to ensure that certain news was published and others was forgotten. In 2015, six journalists were assassinated from reporting new agencies including Libya Al-Ahrar, Burniq and Barqa, while several were either abducted, kidnapped or assaulted. Authorities aimed to take care of the chaotic situation but did not succeed after failed investigations.

Furthermore, extreme restrictions were imposed upon women during the period of both civil wars. Examples of such constraints included women being detained for attempting to leave the country without a male guardian, women being harassed for not wearing a hijab at their university and female news reporters being denied access into courts. In addition, sexual violence and mass rape has been a gruesome result of the violence within the country. Since 2011, Gaddafi loyalists have been charged with committing mass rape during the civil war, and this remains to be an ongoing issue.

Lastly, due to the devastating conditions of the country, many civilians have aimed to cross the border and flee to neighbouring countries, but Libyan guards have detained those trying to do so. Guards have allegedly said to have beaten, electrically shocked, whipped and tortured those detained.

Failed peace attempts

Peace efforts and ceasefires have been attempted by different groups during the period of the Libyan civil war but evidently, have not been successful. In January 2015, the United Nations conducted a series of peace talks in Geneva, in order to negotiate and aim to bring some level of stability into the country. The Libyan army and the militia in Tripoli agreed upon a partial ceasefire. In the past, five peace talks have been made and all of them have failed. However, a recurring reason for this one side of the negotiation does not show up. Due to this fractured relationship and understanding, multiple peace talks have failed and there seems to be a slim chance for that to change in the near future.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

As mentioned above, several peace efforts have been by both the United Nations, however, in a fractured country, this has proved to be challenging. In 2011, the United Nations Security Council established Resolution 1973 to deal with the situation in Libya. The resolution was proposed by France, the United Kingdom and Lebanon, and 10 members (Colombia, South Africa, Nigeria, Gabon, Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, France, the United Kingdom and the United States), while the rest abstained. The resolution aimed to establish a no-fly zone over the country and was a legal basis for there to be military intervention in the appropriate circumstances. It is also demanded an immediate

ceasefire. 5 countries such as Brazil and India abstained since they disagreed with the idea of using force to establish immediate peace.

Possible Solutions

The situation in Libya requires a great deal of international support and communication between member states and the following should be taken into account:

1. Many countries such as Egypt have stressed the importance of understanding that the problem is not a political issue, but rather, one that needs to be contained on a military level.
2. Aiding those who are suffering human rights violations due to the copious levels of violence.
3. Finding sources of funding and international backing for civilians.

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