
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE LIBYAN REVOLUTION | PART 4- THE TIDE TURNS | BELL, BUTTS, & WITTER | NOVEMBER 2011

This report is the final installment of a four-part series on the revolution in Libya. *Part Four: The Tide Turns* details the final rebel offensives and the challenges the new government faces. The first section documents the conflict in the Nafusa Mountains, the characteristics of the rebel forces and the factors that led to their breakout. The second section explains the taking of Tripoli and the fighting at the last remaining strongholds. Lastly, the final section discusses the obstacles the rebels must overcome to stabilize the country and transition to a democracy successfully.

THE NAFUSA MOUNTAINS CAMPAIGN

- The Nafusa Mountains, an escarpment of low-lying mountains in western Tripolitania just south of the Jafara Plain, stretch approximately 150 miles west from the border with Tunisia to the city of Gharyan. The Nafusa Mountains are home to the Libya's Berber population as well as a minority of Arabs.
- The population centers in the Nafusa are scattered across the mountains, ranging from larger cities such as Gharyan, Zintan, Yafran, Nalut and Jadu to dozens of small villages. Most of the settlements are set atop the Nafusa's ridgeline, which provides a natural fortress-like security.
- Combat in the Nafusa Mountains began in February 2011 as a popular resistance against the regime's security and political institutions in each town.
 - Zintan was the first city in the Nafusa Mountains to join the uprising against Qaddafi on February 18, followed by residents of Nalut on February 19. By February 26, the rebels controlled the towns from Nalut in the west to Gharyan in the east.
- For three months, loyalist forces used tanks and artillery situated on the low-lying territory to strike the towns while simultaneously cutting off any resupply.
 - Loyalist soldiers retook the city of Gharyan on February 25.
 - In mid-March, Qaddafi's troops attacked Zintan and Yafran, which were suffering from food shortages and electricity outages, but retreated between March 22 and March 27.
 - Despite surviving the most intensive assault yet by the regime, rebel-held towns in the mountains remained besieged through mid-April and experienced dire shortages of food, medicine, electricity, and other supplies.
 - The rebels overcame the regime's isolation strategy by seizing the border town of Wazin on April 21, opening a supply line from Tunisia and strengthening the entire Nafusa Mountain campaign.
 - The siege of the mountain cities continued throughout May with few changes in the battle lines. Government forces launched repeated assaults on Zintan and Wazin while regularly shelling rebel strongholds throughout the mountains.
- The four-month-long stalemate in the Nafusa Mountains ended in June when the rebels won several battles.
- NATO airstrikes in addition to multiple covert shipments of weapons from France and Qatar empowered the rebels' June offensives.
- These military gains were short-lived, however, as combat in July slid into a stalemate and the operational capacity of the Nafusa rebels appeared limited.
- The rebel offensive in the Nafusa Mountains in late July and early August drove toward Tripoli and deposed the regime.

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THE ASSAULT ON TRIPOLI

- Rebel forces launched an offensive into Tripoli and surrounding towns in late August.
- The Tripoli offensive had been planned several weeks beforehand at a meeting in Paris between Sarkozy and the Misrata Military Council on July 20.
- The subsequent rebel assault on Tripoli featured three separate opposition groups acting in close cooperation: rebels based out of the Nafusa Mountains, Misrata, and from within Tripoli.
- The rebel seizure of Bir al-Ghanam on August 6 allowed the Nafusa fighters to move north and attack Zawiyah on August 13. On August 20, the rebels controlled all of Zawiyah.
- The battle for Tripoli began on the night of August 20 when residents battled for control of the eastern neighborhoods of Souk al-Jumaa, Aradu, and Tajoura.
 - Rebels from Misrata launched an amphibious assault and aided the attack on Tajoura.
 - On August 21, Nafusa rebels advanced from their position in Zawiyah to take control of a regime military base located in the town of Mayah and open a second front in Tripoli's western neighborhoods.
 - Fierce clashes on August 22 tempered excitement over rebel gains as loyalist forces staunchly defended Qaddafi's Bab al-Aziziya compound and the pro-regime neighborhoods surrounding it. Rebel fighters and Tripoli residents streamed into and looted the Bab al-Aziziya compound on August 23.
 - The rebels expanded their control of Tripoli on August 24 and 25 as fighting continued in the city's southwestern neighborhoods. The last of Tripoli's southern neighborhoods fell on August 28, and much of the city returned to normal by the end of August.

THE FINAL STRONGHOLDS

- Opposition fighters seized control of Brega after loyalists withdrew following Saif al-Islam's reported arrest on August 22.
- The rebels then pushed west; by August 24, they had taken control of the port town of Ras Lanuf and arrived in Bin Jawad.
- On September 21, rebel forces seized most of Sebha except for a few holdout districts.
- Rebel forces initially attempted to negotiate with tribal elders in Sirte to reach a peaceful surrender, but they were unsuccessful. On September 9, rebel forces began advancing from the east, west, and south.
- The initial assault on Bani Walid also began on September 9.
- In Sirte, the rebels surrounded remaining pro-Qaddafi fighters in the 'Number 2' and 'Dollar' neighborhoods on the western side of the city by October 10.
- On October 16, rebel forces made unconfirmed claims that they had captured significant portions of Bani Walid.
- On October 20, rebel forces captured Qaddafi after engaging his convoy as it fled the city. Qaddafi was alive despite his wounds, but died before reaching the hospital in Misrata. The final pockets of resistance in Sirte soon collapsed, and rebel troops conducted searches for loyalists. They found and killed Qaddafi's son Mutassim and army chief Abu Bakr Younis.

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- On October 23, the NTC declared liberation, marking the beginning of the transitional timeline to elections, which was intended to take approximately a year and a half.
- Two days later, on October 25, the NTC buried Qaddafi, Mutassim, and Younis at a secret location in the desert after a modest Islamic ceremony.
- On October 21, NATO announced a preliminary decision to end operations on October 31. Six days later, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to end its mandate permitting intervention on October 31.
- NATO's mission in Libya formally ended on October 31, 2011.

CONCLUSION

- In the short-term, Libya's future is highly uncertain. The NTC must find a way to exert control over and unify the country in the face of a recovering economy, an unstable security situation, and fragile political alliances.
- The NTC faces challenges to securing its legitimacy. Many independent groups received their funding and supplies not from the NTC but from wealthy individuals, non-government organizations, or foreign countries.
- Preliminary reconstruction efforts in rebel-held areas and recently liberated territory are important to the Council's legitimacy and ability to project power, but the NTC must work with the remains of a corrupt, disorganized, and inefficient government. In the long term, the NTC must gain the capability to meet Libya's needs consistently.
- Libya's natural resource-driven economy seemed like it would be able to fund NTC initiatives quickly. However, the complete reliance of the state and the economy on oil revenues will create immediate and long-term challenges and could be a point of vulnerability for the new government.
 - Security conditions and financial factors pose problems to both inactive and active oil fields. The new government must attract foreign workers back to the country, especially to service the oil industry. The oil industry is also facing a setback because of the attempted reintegration of loyalist managers.
 - Even if the transitional government brings oil output back to pre-conflict levels in a timely fashion, the money it generates could bring problems of its own. Regionalism and tribalism could complicate the distribution of oil income.
- Libya's frozen assets could emerge as a critical source of money.
- The transitional government faces considerable internal security challenges:
 - Remaining loyalists could launch an insurgency, though Qaddafi's death may make this less likely.
 - Weapons either distributed by the regime or looted from its stockpiles saturate the country and pose a problem to the new government. The NTC has promised to secure the arms depots and pursue disarmament, but so far they have not been successful.
 - The NTC must also clear Libya of remaining ordnance, including multiple minefields loyalist troops laid in different regions of the country during the months of fighting.
 - Countries have recognized some of the major security problems the interim government must confront and have offered to help.
 - The NTC must bring the independent militias under a formal military force to fill the security vacuum in the country.

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- The lack of control over rebel militias stands to challenge NTC authority by derailing reconciliation efforts.
 - There are also documented cases of opposition forces abusing human rights. While the NTC promised investigations into the claims of abuse, rebel leaders have not detailed their progress or any results from inquiries.
- Assuming the new government is able to address the economic and security challenges, it will still have to grapple with political issues to be successful.
- Libya has deep political cleavages down regional and tribal lines, and rumors abound about a possible Islamist-secular divide.
- The new government will also have to balance reappointing those who served under the regime with gaining public support for the new positions.
- Finally, the ripple effects of Libya's revolution pose security risks and threaten the stability of surrounding countries.
- Escaping regime members or loyalist fighters create diplomatic and security problems for other countries. The regime's vast weapons stockpiles are especially capable of disrupting security, and the international community recognizes this as a grave threat.
- Libya remains in a delicate situation that will require continued international engagement to heal its regional disputes, secure the country, form a functioning government, establish a security apparatus, and stem the spread of weaponry.