



Geography

Libya, officially known as the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Republic covers 1,759,450km² of territory stretching from the Mediterranean Sea south toward the Sahara Desert. Libya derives its name from a Berber tribe called Libou which in Greek became Libya. Libya is bordered on the west by Tunisia and Algeria, on the south by Niger and Chad and to the east by Sudan and Egypt. The Libyan Desert, one of the world's largest, spreads across the east and south. Less than 6% of Libya is arable land.

Population

Libya's population is nearly 6 million. The vast majority of people live along the coast and 60% of these live in cities of at least 5,000 inhabitants. Tripoli, the capital, is the largest city with more than 1/4 of the country's population (1.7 million). Benghazi with its 485,000 inhabitants is the second largest city.

The official language is Arabic however certain nomadic communities as well as the Tuareg speak Berber dialects. A number of Libyans also speak Italian, English and French.

The Libyan economy is based almost completely on petroleum while agriculture and livestock are still important in a number of rural communities. Libya is home to a large number of expatriates (approximately 22%) from Europe and other Arab nations who come to work in the petroleum industry.

In Libya Islam is strictly applied and guarded by its head of state, Muammar Qaddafi. 99% of Libyans are Sunni Muslims.

History

Since 1000BC Libya has had a long history with Sub-Saharan Africans. The Garamantes, ancestors of modern day Tuaregs, occupied the principal oases that were situated along the routes that led to the Niger River and they controlled the traffic of slaves and gold between Sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean. In the 7th Century BC the Greeks settled in Cyrenaica and founded the city of Cyrene that became a center for the arts and sciences. In the 6th Century BC Tripolitania became an eastern province of Carthage. Some time later, Libya was integrated into the Roman Empire and became a prosperous and flourishing region. At the fall of the Roman Empire Libya fell under the control of the Byzantine Empire of Constantinople until 439AD when the Vandals conquered Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. A century later the Byzantine Empire retook the region.

In 642, following the Arab conquest, Libyans espoused the Muslim religion. The Berber peoples resisted the political control of the Arab dynasties of Damascus and Bagdad. In the middle of the 11th Century the nomadic tribes, Beni Salim and Beni Hilal, settled in the region imposing their power on the Berbers and under their influence the Arab language and culture began to dominate the country.

In 1510 Libya was invaded by the Spanish and later in 1551 by the Ottoman Turks. At the end of the war with the Ottoman Empire, Italy took control of the country and decided to make it a colony. The Italian colonists settled along the coast and in the most favorable agricultural regions.

From 1911 to 1932 the Libyans resisted the Italian domination, notably under the direction of the legendary religious leader Omar Mukhtar who would be later hanged. In 1939 Libya finally became a colony of Italy. During WWII the country witnessed clashes between Germano-Italian and Allied forces on its soil. Following the defeat of the Axis powers Libya was administered by a Franco-British military government. In 1951 Libya became the first independent nation created by the UN after the war. It became a member of the Arab League in 1953 and the UN in 1955. In 1963 the country became one of the founding members of the Organization of African Unity.

On September 1, 1969 a small group of young officers overthrew the government and abolished the monarchy. The leader of this group was one 27 year old Colonel Muammar Qaddafi. He was named Head of State, Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces and President of the Revolutionary Command Council. March 2, 1977 the Libyan Arab Republic became the

Socialist People's Libyan Republic. The political orientation of Libya's government is based upon Jamahiriya which can be defined as Islamic Socialism. The fundamentals of this orientation are exposed in the "Green Book" written by Qadafi.

The country has invested heavily in arms and weapons thereby becoming one of the primary military powers in North Africa. At the start of 1983 Libya pledged its support to 'revolutionary forces' in Arab countries. The People's General Congress called Libyans to take up arms. In the face of multiple terrorist attacks, the US bombed Tripoli and Benghazi destroying the residence of Qadafi. In 1992 after the attack on Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, the UN imposed an aerial and military embargo on Libya.

However, since 2001, presumably in order to perpetuate his regime, Colonel Gaddafi began to redeem himself vis-à-vis the Western powers. Libya has acknowledged responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing and signed a Memorandum of compensation for victims' families. In addition, it has declared its intention to combat international terrorism and radical Muslims and stands now as a bulwark against illegal immigration from black Africa bound for Europe. Finally, it dismantled its nuclear program in 2003 and stated its intention to comply with international treaties on the subject. Received with great fanfare in France in late 2007, Colonel Gaddafi sealed a reconciliation with the United States during the summer of 2008, receiving the U.S. Secretary of State, a first since 1955! In September 2009 Colonel Gaddafi celebrated the 40th anniversary of the coup that brought him to the head of Libya.

Parallel to the revolution called "jasmine" in neighboring Tunisia, in 2011 Libya has seen the beginning of major problems related to the social crisis and centering around various real estate projects. The uprising turned into a real civil war from February 15. Overwhelmed by the insurgents in the country's second city Benghazi, Col Gaddafi violently suppressed the riots with the help of the army and of mercenaries (possibly 30,000?) from Black Africa, Algeria, or Central Europe, but also Libyan tribes which remained loyal. Colonel Gaddafi nevertheless lost control of part of the country including Benghazi which has become the laboratory of the new Libya.

The terrible violence of the last week of February caused a humanitarian crisis with the exodus of foreign workers living in Libya. Many went westward, towards Tunisia.

In March, after the regime conducted a violent counter-offensive to regain control of major oil major, the UN adopted a resolution (March 17th), demanding the complete cessation of attacks against civilians, imposing a no fly area over Libya and air strikes to force Gaddafi's supporters to stop the repression. Two days later (March 19), a coalition of NATO led by the United States, France and Britain began bombing military targets Libya. For one hundred more days, NATO launched air about 5,000 air strikes, but the West of Libya and the capital Tripoli remained in the

