



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 22, 2011

Situation in Libya Deteriorates as Gadhafi's Son Warns of Civil War

As unrest in the Middle East bled over into Libya, anti-government protesters were reportedly close to controlling Benghazi, the nation's second largest city, with the security forces under dictator Moammar Gadhafi fighting for control of Tripoli's city center. Speaking for his father, Gadhafi's son, Seif al-Islam, warned that the unrest in the country was on the verge of exploding into civil war.

Six days into the nation's unrest, the younger Gadhafi rambled confusedly in a 40-minute speech, assuring the nation that his father "is leading the battle in Tripoli, and we are with him. The armed forces are with him. Tens of thousands are heading here to be with him. We will fight until the last man, the last woman, the last bullet."

On February 20 snipers were seen on rooftops firing down on mourners leaving a funeral in Benghazi, while elsewhere government supporters in speeding vehicles shot indiscriminately into crowds of people. As reported by the [Christian Broadcasting Network](#), one horrified doctor in Benghazi cried out that government gunmen were "firing at civilians here! They are going crazy here."

But despite an increasingly violent government response, defiant protesters continued to take to the streets, with cries that "the people demand the removal of the regime."

CBN reported that thousands had been wounded or injured, and one hospital worker estimated a death toll of at least 200. "Actually I can't see the specific number," the worker said, "but unfortunately, there are plenty of them, maybe more than 200." He added that "all the hospitals are full of dead bodies — even the fridges are full. Some people are working as volunteers in the hospital and more of them [are] trying to help."

As U.S. officials expressed their concern over deteriorating conditions in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and elsewhere, Susan Rice, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, emphasized that her country condemned all violence against Libya's protesters. "Our view is that in Libya, as throughout the region, peaceful protests need to be respected," Rice told NBC's Meet the Press.

According to the [New York Times](#), witnesses reported that an army of protesters at Tripoli's Green Square had clashed with heavily armed riot police:

Young men armed themselves with chains around their knuckles, steel pipes, and machetes. The police had retreated from some neighborhoods, and protesters were seen armed with police batons, helmets, and rifles commandeered from riot squads.



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The *Times* claimed that the “escalating violence in Libya — a cycle of funerals, confrontations, and more coffins — has made the revolt there the bloodiest in the wave of uprisings sweeping the region.”

The violence unfolded as opponents of Gadhafi had planned a February 17 protest against the dictator in what they called a “day of rage” inspired by events in Tunisia and Egypt. After government forces arrested a prominent attorney who had represented families of some of the 1,200 prisoners killed in a notorious 1996 government massacre at the Abu Slim prison in Benghazi, the protest turned to a riot, and when the attorney, Fathi Terbil, was released on February 20, he quickly set up a live online video broadcast to encourage protests.

“We are expecting people to die today, more people than before,” Terbil was quoted by the *Times* as declaring. “If anything happens to us today, we are not going to leave this place. I’m not afraid to die, I’m afraid to lose the battle, that’s why I want the media to see what’s going on.”

As an increasing flow of protesters converged on a square near the Benghazi courthouse with shouts that “the people want to bring down the regime,” government forces responded by shooting from cover, with scores of bodies seen in the streets. By afternoon protesters had reportedly taken control of an army barracks at the headquarters of the security forces, with one protester quoted by the *Times* as saying that “despite the pain and victims, we are happy because the blood of our sons was not spilled in vain. Mark my words: Gadhafi is coming down.”

While under Gadhafi’s rule tribal bonds in Libya had remained strong, even among the military personnel, the *Times* noted that leaders of the powerful al-Warfalla and al-Zuwayya tribes had come out against Gadhafi. “We tell him to leave the country,” the paper quoted a spokesman for the al-Warfalla as saying.

On February 22, as Gadhafi appeared momentarily on government-controlled television in an attempt to counter rumors that he was losing control or had already fled, the [Washington Post](#) was reporting that even some of his own troops and military leaders had forsaken the dictator in outrage over his violent response to the protests. “The vicious crackdown against demonstrators appears to be fast eroding whatever support remains for Gaddafi, 68, who assumed power in a 1969 military coup,” reported the *Post*.

On February 21 two Libyan air force pilots chose to fly their fighter jets to Malta and defect rather than carry out bombing attacks on protesters in Benghazi.

The *Post* reported that the country’s tribal and religious leaders were condemning Gadhafi “for the attacks against civilians; some urged all Muslims to rise against him. Influential Muslim cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi told al-Jazeera that he urged any Libyan soldier who has the opportunity to kill Gadhafi — and issued a religious decree to that effect. ‘I am issuing a fatwa now to kill Gadhafi,’ the cleric said. ‘To any army soldier, to any man who can pull the trigger and kill this man to do so.’”

And in an interview on al-Jazeera, Libya’s deputy ambassador to the United Nations, Ibrahim Dabbashi, urged other nations to help Libya oust Gadhafi. “Either he has to get out or the Libyan people will kick him out,” he declared. “It is the end of the game.”

Photo of Moammar Gadhafi: AP Images



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