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Libya

ليبيا, officially Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya [state of the masses], republic (2005 est. pop. 5,766,000), 679,358 sq mi (1,759,540 sq km), N Africa. It borders on Algeria in the west, on Tunisia in the northwest, on the Mediterranean Sea in the north, on Egypt in the east, on Sudan in the southeast, and on Chad and Niger in the south. Tripoli is the capital of Libya and its largest city. Other cities include Ajdabiyah, Al Bayda, Al Marj, Benghazi, Darnah, Misratah, and Tobruk.

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Land and People

Libya falls into three main geographical regions—Tripolitania in the west, Fazzan in the southwest, and Cyrenaica in the east. Tripolitania in turn can be divided into three zones. In the north is a low-lying coastal plain called the Jifarah, which, although mainly arid, has several irrigated areas. It also includes the city of Tripoli. South of the Jifarah is a mountainous zone (highest altitude: c.2,500 ft/760 m) known as the Jabal; it is mostly arid and barren but has scattered areas of cultivation. South of the Jabal is an upland plateau, largely desert, but crossed by a string of oases in the south. South of Tripolitania is the Fazzan region, which is largely made up of sandy desert but has a number of scattered oases.

Cyrenaica is Libya's largest region. In the N along the Mediterranean is a narrow upland plateau (highest altitude: c.2,000 ft/610 m) called the Jabal al Akhdar, which includes the cities of Benghazi and Darnah. In the west the Jabal al Akhdar drops abruptly to the shore of the Gulf of Sidra, which deeply indents Libya's Mediterranean coastline, and in the east it falls gradually toward the Egyptian border, where there is another upland region. South of the Jabal al Akhdar is a vast region of sandy desert, which in the east includes part of the Libyan Desert. Cyrenaica is fringed in the southwest by the Tibesti Massif (located mostly in Chad), which includes Libya's loftiest point, Bikku Bitti, or Bette Peak (c.7,500 ft/2,290 m).

Berbers once constituted the chief ethnic group in Libya but have been largely assimilated into Arab culture, with those of Arab-Berber descent making up over 95% of the population. There are scattered traditional Berber communities, and in Fazzan many persons are of mixed Berber and black African descent. There are also smaller groups of Greeks, Maltese, Italians, Egyptians, South Asians, and others. Labor shortages in the agriculture and petroleum industries have attracted many foreign workers, mostly from Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey. Some 5% of the people live as pastoral nomads, mostly in Cyrenaica. Arabic is the official language; Italian and English are also widely understood. The great majority of the population is Sunni Muslim.

[Land and People](#) | [Economy](#) | [Government](#) | [History](#)

Economy

Libya was a very poor agricultural country with bleak economic prospects until 1958, when petroleum was discovered 200–300 mi (320–480 km) S and SE of the Gulf of Sidra; crude petroleum was exported on an increasingly significant scale between 1961 and 1981. Oil income increased markedly in 1972–73, when the government nationalized (with compensation) 51% ownership in subsidiaries of foreign petroleum firms operating in the country. The remaining subsidiaries were completely nationalized. At the same time, the price of petroleum rose dramatically, further increasing Libya's receipts. Since then, the economy has been almost inextricably linked to world oil prices.

Much of the income from petroleum was used to improve the cities, to modernize transportation, and to build up the military. The resulting migration of Libyans to urban areas created a growth in unemployment, spurring the government to invest in agricultural development in order to make farming more attractive. Although petroleum production has dropped since the 1970s, oil exports continue to generate about 95% of export earnings and 25% of the country's GDP. Libya is also a major exporter of natural gas and has several large gas liquefaction plants. In addition, gypsum, salt, and limestone are produced in significant quantities. Libya has increased industrial

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production in recent years. The principal manufactures are refined petroleum, liquefied natural gas, petrochemicals, iron and steel, aluminum, textiles, handicrafts, and construction materials. Food processing is also important.

Farming is severely limited by the small amount of fertile soil and the lack of rainfall, and Libya must import about 75% of its food. The chief agricultural products are wheat, barley, olives, dates, citrus fruit, vegetables, peanuts, and soybeans. Large numbers of cattle, sheep, and goats are raised. Most of the arable land is located in Tripolitania. To increase the amount of cultivatable land, a massive water development project, called The Great Manmade River, was begun in 1984. It is designed to carry water from underground aquifers in the Sahara through a 2,400 mi (3,862 km) pipeline system to irrigate 313 sq mi (811 sq km) in the coastal region. The project is expected to take 25 years to complete at a cost of \$25 billion. By 1997, the system was connected to the cities of Tripoli, Surt, and Benghazi and also provided thousands of acres of farmland with irrigation water; the final phase of the project was still under construction in 2006.

Libya's annual earnings from exports are usually much higher than the cost of its imports, and in the 1990s it had the highest per capita GDP in Africa. Crude petroleum and natural gas are by far the leading exports; the main imports are machinery, transportation equipment, foodstuffs, and manufactured consumer goods. The principal trading partners are Italy, Germany, Turkey, France, and Spain.

[Land and People](#) | [Economy](#) | [Government](#) | [History](#)

Government

Libya professes to have a government in which the people rule directly. The highest official organ is the General People's Congress, consisting of some 2,700 representatives from local peoples' committees. In practice, Libya is a military regime, with power vested in the revolutionary leader, Muammar al-Qaddafi, who holds no official title but is the de facto chief of state. The head of government is the secretary of the general people's committee. Administratively, the country is divided into 25 municipalities.

[Land and People](#) | [Economy](#) | [Government](#) | [History](#)

History

Through the Nineteenth Century

Throughout most of its history the territory that constitutes modern Libya has been held by foreign powers. Tripolitania and Cyrenaica had divergent histories for most of the period up to their conquest by the Ottoman Empire in the mid-16th cent. Fazzan was captured by the Ottomans only in 1842. The Ottomans gained control of most of N Africa in the 16th cent., dividing it into three regencies—Algeria, Tunisia, and Tripoli (which also included Cyrenaica). The Janissaries, professional soldiers of slave origins, became a military caste, wielding considerable influence over the Ottoman governor. From the early 1600s the Janissaries chose a leader, called the dey, who at times had as much power as the Ottoman governor sent from Constantinople. Numerous pirates who preyed on the shipping of Christian nations in the Mediterranean were based at Tripoli's ports.

In 1711 Ahmad Karamanli, a Janissary, became dey, killed the Ottoman governor, and prevailed upon the Ottomans to name him governor. The post of governor remained hereditary in the Karamanli family until 1835. In the 18th cent. and during the Napoleonic Wars, the dey took in great revenues from the pirates and also extended the central government's control to much of the interior.

During 1801–5 the United States and Tripoli fought a war precipitated by disagreements over the amount of tribute to be paid to the dey in order to gain immunity from raids by pirates (see Tripolitan War). After 1815, England, France, and the kingdom of the Two Sicilies undertook a successful campaign against the pirates, which undermined the finances of the dey and thus facilitated the reestablishment of direct Ottoman rule in Tripoli in 1835. During the rest of the 19th cent., the Ottomans contributed little toward the political stability or the economic development of Tripoli. Beginning in the 1840s the Sanusi brotherhood gained many adherents, primarily in Cyrenaica but also in S Tripolitania and Fazzan.

Italian Rule, Independence, and the Discovery of Oil

During the Turko-Italian War of 1911–12, Italy conquered N Tripoli, but by the Treaty of Ouchy, which ended the war, Turkey granted Tripoli and N Libya autonomy. The Libyans continued to fight the Italians, but by 1914 Italy had occupied much of the country. However, Italy was forced to undertake a long series of wars of pacification against the Sanusi and their allies.

Under Italo Balbo, who was governor-general during the 1930s, the country's infrastructure was developed as roads, civic buildings, schools, and hospitals were constructed. In 1934, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were formally united to form the colony of Libya; Fazzan was administered as part of Tripolitania. About 40,000 colonists were sent from Italy to the plateau regions of Libya at the end of the 1930s. Libya was made an integral part of Italy in 1939, and the Muslim population was granted a limited form of citizenship.

Libya became one of the main battlegrounds of North Africa after Italy entered World War II in June, 1940 (for military details, see North Africa, campaigns in). After the Allied victory over the Axis in N Africa (1943), Libya was placed under an Anglo-French military government. The Big Four (Great Britain, France, the United States, and the USSR) failed to reach agreement on the future of Libya as stipulated in the 1947 peace treaty with Italy. The United Nations was given (1949) jurisdiction and decided that Libya should become independent, which it did on Dec. 24, 1951, as the United Kingdom of Libya. It was ruled by King Idris I, head of the Sanusi brotherhood. Libya joined the Arab League, and in 1955 it was admitted into the United Nations.

The 1950s in Libya were characterized by great poverty; minimal economic development was made possible only by the payments and loans received from various Western nations. In 1958, petroleum was discovered in the country, and by the early 1960s Libya was taking in growing revenues from the exploitation of that resource. A 1953 Anglo-Libyan treaty that had allowed Britain to establish military bases in Libya in return for economic subsidies was terminated by Libya in 1964; most British troops were withdrawn in early 1966.

The Qaddafi Regime

In Sept., 1969, a group of army officers led by 27-year-old Col. Muammar al-Qaddafi ousted King Idris in a coup. The 1951 constitution was abrogated, and government was placed in the hands of a 12-member Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) headed by Qaddafi, who became prime minister. In mid-1972, Qaddafi turned the post of prime minister over to Abdul Salam Jallud, but he remained the RCC's president, the country's most important political and military office.

The regime pursued a policy of Arab nationalism and strict adherence to Islamic law; though Qaddafi espoused socialist principles, he was strongly anti-Communist. He was particularly concerned with reducing Western influences; as part of that effort, the British were forced (1970) to evacuate their remaining bases in Libya, and the United States was required to abandon Wheelus Field, a U.S. air force base located near Tripoli. Libya's foreign policy was generally reoriented away from N Africa and toward the heart of the Middle East. Close ties were established with Egypt, and in 1971 Libya joined with Egypt and Syria to form a loose alliance called the Federation of Arab Republics. A cultural revolution launched in 1973 sought to make life in the country more closely approximate Qaddafi's socialist and Muslim principles.

An implacable foe of Israel, Libya contributed some men and matériel (especially aircraft) to the Arab side in the Arab-Israeli war of Oct., 1973. After the war, Libya was a strong advocate of reducing sales of petroleum to nations that had supported Israel and was also a leading force in increasing the price of crude petroleum. Qaddafi was severely critical of Egypt for negotiating a cease-fire with Israel, and relations between the two countries declined steadily after 1973 when Qaddafi failed to push through a merger with Egypt.

By the mid-1970s, Qaddafi had survived numerous coup attempts, and in 1980 he began ordering the assassination of Libyan dissidents who were living in exile in Europe. In 1981, two Libyan fighter planes attacked U.S. forces on maneuvers in the Gulf of Sidra (which Libya claims as national waters) and were shot down. Libya's relations with the United States became even more hostile when it began to support international terrorist organizations. The United States placed a ban on Libyan oil imports in 1982. In 1986, in an apparent attempt to kill Qaddafi, U.S. President Ronald Reagan ordered air strikes against Tripoli and Benghazi in retaliation for the Libyan-sponsored terrorist attack in West Berlin that had killed two American servicemen. Libya's attempts in the mid-1980s to form a union with Algeria and Tunisia, while not successful, resulted (1989) in the Arab Maghreb Union (see Maghreb).

In 1988, a bomb blew up on a Pan Am commercial airplane over Lockerbie, Scotland, killing 270 people. International warrants were issued for the arrest and extradition to Great Britain of two Libyan suspects in the case, but the government refused to surrender them. Libya was also implicated in the similar 1989 bombing of a French UTA DC-10 over Niger in which 170 people died. In 1989, it was discovered that a West German company was selling Libya equipment for the construction of a chemical weapons plant at Rabta. These actions, as well as the widespread belief in the United States and Europe that Qaddafi's regime was responsible for terrorist activities, led to American and UN sanctions against Libya in 1992. In 1994, Libya pulled its troops out of the Aozou Strip, a mineral-rich region of N Chad, after the World Court rejected its claim to that territory. In 1995 there were clashes between Libyan security forces and members of Islamic groups in E Libya. The United States charged (1996) that Libya was constructing a chemical weapons plant southeast of Tripoli and said Libya would be prevented from putting it into operation.

Beginning in the late 1990s Libya embarked on a series of moves designed to end its estrangement from Western nations. In Apr., 1999, Libya handed over the suspects in the Lockerbie crash to the United Nations; they were to be tried in the Netherlands under Scottish law. The UN sanctions were suspended, but those imposed by the United States remained in place. In Dec., 1999, Qaddafi pledged not to aid or protect terrorists. Libya agreed in 2003 to a \$2.7 billion settlement with the families of the victims, and that and a revised settlement for viction of the UTA bombing led the UN Security Council to lift the sanctions imposed more than a decade earlier. In December, after negotiations with the United States and Great Britain, the government renounced the production and use of chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons and agreed to submit to unannounced international inspections. Subsequently (Mar., 2004), Libya acknowledged that it had produced and had stockpiles of chemical weapons. As a result of these events, the United States lifted most sanctions and resumed diplomatic relations with Libya, although it continued to list Libya as a state sponsor of terrorism until mid-2006.

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