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## Muammar el-Qaddafi (1942-2011)

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Updated: Oct. 25, 2011

Colonel Muammar el Qaddafi was an erratic, provocative dictator who ruled Libya for 42 years, crushing opponents at home while cultivating the wardrobe and looks befitting an aging rock star. He met a violent and vengeful death on Oct. 20, 2011, at the hands of the Libyan forces that drove him from power.

In death, as in life, his circumstances proved startling, with jerky video images showing him captured, bloody and disheveled, but alive. A separate clip showed his half-naked torso, with eyes staring vacantly and what appeared to be a gunshot wound to the head, as jubilant fighters fired into the air. In a third video, posted on YouTube, excited fighters hovered around his lifeless-looking body, posing for photographs and yanking his limp head up and down by the hair.

Throughout his rule, Colonel Qaddafi, who was 69 when he died, sanctioned spasms of grisly violence and frequent bedlam, even as he sought to leverage his nation's oil wealth into an outsize role on the world stage.

He embraced a string of titles: "the brother leader," "the guide to the era of the masses," "the king of kings of Africa" and — his most preferred — "the leader of the revolution."

But the labels pinned on him by others tended to stick the most. President Ronald Reagan called him "the mad dog of the Middle East." President Anwar el-Sadat of neighboring Egypt pronounced him "the crazy Libyan."

As his dominion over Libya crumbled with surprising speed, Colonel Qaddafi refused to countenance the fact that most Libyans despised him. He placed blame for the uprising on foreign intervention — a United Nations Security Council resolution intended to defend civilians became the contentious basis for NATO airstrikes on his troops.

"I tell the coward crusaders: I live in a place where you can't get me," he taunted defiantly after the uprising against his rule started in February 2011. "I live in the hearts of millions."

That attitude endured to the end. In one of his last speeches, made weeks after Tripoli fell and he was a fugitive, he exhorted Libyans to defeat the uprising.

"The people of Libya, the true Libyans, will never accept invasion and colonization," he said in remarks broadcast by a Syrian television station because he had lost control of Libya's airwaves. "We will fight for our freedom, and we are ready to sacrifice ourselves."

### Captured and Killed

Following the fall of Tripoli in in August 2011, Colonel Qaddafi and his loyalists fled to his hometown of Surt, where the eight-month conflict reached its bloody climax. Libyan fighters and NATO forces watched for an attempt by Colonel Qaddafi's armed loyalists to flee and seek safety elsewhere. Soon after dawn on Oct. 20, they did, leaving urban bunkers in the Mediterranean town and heading west.

Colonel Qaddafi was captured and killed following a NATO airstrike on his convoy. In a cellphone video, the deposed Libyan leader was seen splayed on the hood of a truck and then stumbling amid a frenzied crowd. His body was shown in later photographs with bullet holes apparently fired into his head at what forensic experts said was close range, raising the strong possibility that he was executed by anti-Qaddafi fighters.

One of Colonel Qaddafi's feared sons, Muatassim, also was captured in Surt and killed, apparently while in custody.

### Uneasy Celebration; New Beginnings

### Multimedia



#### Timeline: Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi

Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, who ruled Libya since 1969, was killed Oct. 20, after rebel forces took control of the ousted leader's hometown, Surt.

### The Lede

Follow the latest Libya updates on The Times's news blog.



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Within an hour of the news of Colonel Qaddafi's death, Libyans were celebrating. "We have been waiting for this moment for a long time," Mahmoud Jibril, the prime minister of the Transitional National Council, the interim government, said.

"It is a historic moment," said Abdel Hafez Ghoga, a spokesman for the Transitional National Council. "It is the end of tyranny and dictatorship. Qaddafi has met his fate."

But also voiced in the Middle East was unease at the fact that a bloody revolution ended with yet more bloodshed. "It's not acceptable to kill a person without trying him," said Louay Hussein, a Syrian opposition figure in Damascus. "I prefer to see the tyrant behind bars."

The day after Colonel Qaddafi's death, [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) called for an inquiry into his death amid conflicting accounts of how he met his end and video that appeared to show him alive after his capture.

"We believe there is a need for investigation to see whether he was killed in fighting or some form of execution," Rupert Colville, the spokesman for Navi Pillay, the human rights commissioner, told reporters in Geneva.

The circumstances of Colonel Qaddafi's death also raised questions about the government's control of the militias in a country that has been divided into competing regions and factions.

Several days after Colonel Qaddafi's death, the head of Libya's interim government announced the creation of a formal committee of inquiry. The announcement, by Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, the chairman of the Transitional National Council, acknowledged the calls by foreign powers and rights groups — including some that supported the rebellion against Colonel Qaddafi's rule — for an investigation. But it was unclear from Mr. Abdel-Jalil's announcement how much authority the committee would have to pursue an investigation and whether anyone might be held accountable.

On October 23, Mr. Abdel-Jalil formally proclaimed to thousands of revelers in Benghazi that the revolution was officially over. The announcement laid the basis for elections and a new government within 20 months, but left unanswered the enormous challenge confronting the interim leaders over how to disarm and unify the brigades of anti-Qaddafi fighters who brought him down and are a law unto themselves.

#### Overview

For decades, the West, fascinated and regularly horrified, had watched Col. Qaddafi's every move. The financier of an eclectic array of guerrilla groups around the globe, he had been responsible, according to Western intelligence, for many of the deadliest terrorist attacks in the mid-80s, including the 1988 bombing of [Pan Am Flight 103](#) over Lockerbie, Scotland, that killed 270.

In February 2011, rebellion erupted in Libya, the latest and bloodiest of the uprisings that swept across the Arab world. Colonel Qaddafi lashed out with a level of violence unseen in the other uprisings, but the rebels fought back and seized the eastern half of the country. Momentum seemed to shift in March, as the superior Qaddafi forces sought to retake several eastern oil cities that had slipped from the government's control in the first days of the uprising, and the rebels faced the prospect of being outgunned and outnumbered in what increasingly looked like a mismatched civil war. With the government forces closing in on the rebel stronghold of Benghazi, the United Nations Security Council authorized the use of force to protect civilians.

On March 19, American and European forces began a broad campaign of airstrikes against the government of Colonel Qaddafi, unleashing warplanes and missiles in a military intervention on a scale not seen in the Arab world since the Iraq war.

Colonel Qaddafi remained defiant. On May 31, he rebuffed a mediation effort by South Africa's president, Jacob Zuma, saying he would fight on. His words appeared to reflect a deepening sense of isolation, brought on by 10 weeks of NATO bombing, rebel advances, Western leaders' recent reaffirmation of demands for Colonel Qaddafi to quit, and the fact that Russia, an old ally of Libya, had joined those demands.

On June 27, the [International Criminal Court](#) in The Hague issued arrest warrants for Colonel Qaddafi, his son Seif al-Islam and his chief of intelligence, Abdullah Senussi, on charges of crimes against humanity, including murder and persecution, stemming from the first two weeks of the uprising. The presiding judge said there were "reasonable grounds" to hold the three men criminally responsible for killing, wounding and imprisoning hundreds of civilians.

#### Fall from Power

At the end of August, in a sudden breakthrough after six months of fighting, rebels swept through Libya's capital, Tripoli, declaring victory. Colonel Qaddafi's whereabouts remained unknown, and news reports said loyalist forces still held pockets of the city, stubbornly resisting the rebel advance. On August 23, rebel fighters flooded Colonel Qaddafi's sprawling headquarters compound, overwhelming what remained of its defenses.

As rebels sought to strengthen their control of Tripoli, they placed a nearly \$2 million bounty on Colonel Qaddafi's head and dispatched fighters toward one of his last bastions of support, his tribal hometown of Surt. Colonel Qaddafi said in a radio broadcast that his retreat from the Bab al-Aziziya compound was only a tactical maneuver. He blamed months of NATO airstrikes for bringing down his government and vowed "martyrdom" or victory in his battle against the alliance. Urging Libyan tribes across the land to march on the capital, he said: "I call on all Tripoli residents, with all its young, old and armed brigades, to defend the city, to cleanse it, to put an end to the traitors and kick them out of our city."

Colonel Qaddafi was as unpredictable on the lam as he was in power for 42 eccentric years.

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People lined up to see Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's body, lying on a mattress in a meat locker.

##### Battle for Libya | October 25, 2011

The aftermath of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's death and the end of the revolution in Libya.



##### Battle for Libya | October 23, 2011

The leader of Libya's transitional government declared to thousands of revelers in Benghazi that Libya's revolution had ended, setting the country on the path to elections.



##### Battle for Libya | October 22, 2011

Libya's new leaders will declare liberation on Sunday, officials said, a move that will start the clock for elections after months of bloodshed that culminated in the death of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, the longtime dictator.



##### Battle for Libya | October 21, 2011

Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi's blood-streaked body was placed in a commercial freezer at a shopping center Friday as Libyans tried to keep it away from angry crowds as they figure out where to bury the longtime dictator.

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#### Muammar el-Qaddafi Navigator

A list of resources from around the Web about Muammar el-Qaddafi as selected by researchers and editors of The New York Times.

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## Background

The United States withdrew its ambassador from Libya in 1972 after Colonel Qaddafi renounced agreements with the West and repeatedly inveighed against the United States in speeches and public statements.

After a mob sacked and burned the American Embassy in 1979, the United States cut off relations. The relationship continued to spiral downward and, in 1986, the Reagan administration accused Libya of ordering the bombing of a German discothèque that killed three people, including two American servicemen. In response, the United States bombed targets in Tripoli and Benghazi.

The most notorious of Libya's actions was the bombing in 1988 of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed 270 people. Libya later accepted responsibility, turned over suspects and paid families of victims more than \$2 billion.

After a surprise decision to renounce terrorism in 2003, Colonel Qaddafi re-established diplomatic and economic ties throughout Europe. He also changed with regard to Israel. The man who once called for pushing the "Zionists" into the sea advocated the forming of one nation where Jews and Palestinians would live together in peace.

Rather than trying to destabilize his Arab neighbors, he founded a pan-African confederation modeled along the lines of the European Union. On Feb. 2, 2009, Colonel Qaddafi was named chairman of the African Union. His election, however, caused some unease among some of the group's 53-member nations as well as among diplomats and analysts. The colonel, who had ruled Libya with an iron hand, was a stark change from the succession of recent leaders from democratic countries like Tanzania, Ghana and Nigeria.

The most significant changes had been the overtures Colonel Qaddafi made toward the United States. He was among the first Arab leaders to denounce the Sept. 11 attacks, and he lent tacit approval to the American-led invasion of Afghanistan. To the astonishment of other Arab leaders, he reportedly shared his intelligence files on Al Qaeda with the United States to aid in the hunt for its international operatives. He also cooperated with the United States and Europe on other terrorism issues, nuclear weapons and immigration.

In August 2009, Colonel Qaddafi embarrassed the British government and drew criticism from President Obama with his triumphant reaction to the release from prison on compassionate grounds of Abdel Basset Ali al-Megrahi, the only person convicted in the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103. Mr. Megrahi was given a hero's welcome when he arrived in Libya, and Colonel Qaddafi thanked British and Scottish officials for releasing Mr. Megrahi at a time when both governments were trying to distance themselves from the action.

Colonel Qaddafi, born in 1942, was the father of many sons, including Seif al-Islam el-Qaddafi. Until the uprising, Seif Qaddafi was his father's second-in-command and likely successor.

## The Uprising Begins

In February 2011, protests broke out in several parts of Libya on a so-called [Day of Rage](#) to challenge Colonel Qaddafi's 41-year-old iron rule — the region's longest. Thousands turned out in the restive city of Benghazi; in Tripoli, and at three other locations, according to [Human Rights Watch](#). The state media, though, showed Libyans waving green flags and shouting in support of Colonel Qaddafi.

Trying to demonstrate that he was still in control, Colonel Qaddafi appeared on television on Feb. 22, 2011, speaking from his residence on the grounds of an army barracks in Tripoli that still showed scars from when the United States bombed it in 1986.

In the long, rambling address, he blamed the unrest on "foreign hands," a small group of people distributing pills, and on brainwashing and the naïve desire of young people to imitate the uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia. Without acknowledging the gravity of the crisis in the streets of the capital, he described himself in sweeping, megalomaniacal terms. "Muammar Qaddafi is history, resistance, liberty, glory, revolution," he declared.

## The Colonel's Security Forces

Colonel Qaddafi, who took power in a military coup, always kept the Libyan military too weak and divided to rebel against him. About half of Libya's relatively small 50,000-member army was made up of poorly trained and unreliable conscripts, according to the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#). Many of its battalions were organized along tribal lines, ensuring their loyalty to their own clan rather than to top military commanders — a pattern evident in the defection of portions of the army to help protesters take the eastern city of Benghazi.

Distrustful of his own generals, Qaddafi built up an elaborate paramilitary force, accompanied by special segments of the regular army that reported primarily to his family. It was designed to check the army and subdue the population. At the top of that structure was his roughly 3,000-member revolutionary guard corps, which mainly guarded him personally.

## A Culture of Corruption

Libyan culture had become rife with corruption, kickbacks, strong-arm tactics and political patronage since the United States reopened trade with Colonel Qaddafi's government in 2004.

With an agreement on a settlement over Libya's role in the Pan Am bombing over Lockerbie, Scotland, finally reached in 2008, officials at the [United States Commerce Department](#) began to serve as self-described matchmakers for American businesses, including Boeing, Raytheon, ConocoPhillips, Occidental, Caterpillar and Halliburton.

Colonel Qaddafi, the State Department said, was personally involved in many business decisions. He also learned how to hide money and

[WikiLeaks: Guide to Qaddafi's Family](#)

[The Guardian \[UK\]](#)

[Foreign Policy: The "Qaddafi Family Scrapbook"](#)

[BOOKS AND WRITINGS BY MUAMMAR QADDAFI](#)

[Poem: Recollections of My Life Mathaba.net](#)

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[BOOKS ABOUT MUAMMAR QADDAFI](#)

[Libya's Qaddafi: The Politics of Contradiction](#)

[By Mansour O. El-Kikhia \(1997\)](#)

[Qaddafi: His Ideology in Theory and Practice](#)

[By Mohamed El-Khawas \(1986\)](#)

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['The West is to be Forgotten. We will not give them our Oil'](#)  
[RT News, March 16, 2011](#)

['All my People Love Me'](#)  
[BBC News, Feb 18, 2011](#)

['Switzerland Should be Dissolved as a State'](#)  
[Der Spiegel, May 3, 2010](#)

[Libyan Leader says Palestinians and Jews should live in a Single, Unified State](#)  
[Al Jazeera, Sept 26, 2009](#)

[Qaddafi on Obama, Israel and Iran](#)  
[Time, Sept 25, 2009](#)

[Address to the U.N. General Assembly](#)  
[United Nations, Sept 23, 2009](#)

[Interview with Charlie Rose](#)  
[60 Minutes II, Feb 27, 2001](#)

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[Criminal Court Prosecutor Calls for Arrest of Qaddafi](#)  
[International Criminal Court, May 16, 2011](#)

[Qaddafi Nurse Lifts Lid on Couscous and Camel-Meat-Loving Leader](#)  
[The Guardian, April 5, 2010](#)

[For Reagan, Qaddafi Was A Frustrating 'Mad Dog'](#)  
[NPR, March 4, 2011](#)

[Qaddafi's Legacy](#)  
[The Brookings Institution, Feb 24, 2011](#)

[A Qaddafi by any other Name would still be a Bloodthirsty Dictator](#)  
[The Economist, Feb 23, 2011](#)

[How Qaddafi Lost Libya](#)  
[The New Yorker, Feb 21, 2011](#)

[How to Squander a Nation's Potential](#)  
[The Economist, Aug 20, 2009](#)

[Circle of Fire](#)  
[The New Yorker, May 8, 2006](#)

investments in case sanctions were ever imposed again, as they were in 2011.

As American and international oil companies, telecommunications firms and contractors moved into the Libyan market, they discovered that Colonel Qaddafi or his loyalists often sought to extract millions of dollars in "signing bonuses" and "consultancy contracts" — or insisted that the strongman's sons get a piece of the action through shotgun partnerships. Colonel Qaddafi's huge cash deposits allowed him to pay his troops, African mercenaries and political supporters in the early days of the uprising and initially diminished the impact of economic sanctions on his government.

### The Ongoing Conflict

On Feb. 25, security forces loyal to Colonel Qaddafi used gunfire to try to disperse thousands of protesters [who streamed out of mosques after prayers](#) to mount their first major challenge to the government's crackdown in Tripoli. Rebel leaders said they were sending forces from nearby cities and other parts of the country to join the fight.

A bold play by Colonel Qaddafi to prove that he was firmly in control of Libya appeared to backfire as foreign journalists he invited to the capital [discovered blocks of the city in open defiance](#). Witnesses described snipers and antiaircraft guns firing at unarmed civilians, and security forces were removing the dead and wounded from streets and hospitals, apparently in an effort to hide the mounting toll.

The [United Nations Security Council](#) voted unanimously to impose sanctions on Colonel Qaddafi and his inner circle of advisers, and [called for an international war crimes investigation](#) into "widespread and systemic attacks" against Libyan citizens.

Air power proved to be Colonel Qaddafi's biggest advantage, and rebels were unable to use bases and planes they captured in the east. Planes and helicopters gave the Qaddafi forces an additional advantage in moving ammunition and supplies, a crucial factor given the length of the Libyan coast between the rebel stronghold of Benghazi and Tripoli.

As Colonel Qaddafi's forces tried to retake a series of strategic oil towns on the east coast of the country, which fell early in the rebellion to antigovernment rebels, the West continued to debate what actions to take, including the creation of a possible no-flight zone to ground Libyan warplanes.

On March 12, the Arab League asked the [United Nations Security Council](#) to impose a no-flight zone over Libya in hopes of halting Colonel Qaddafi's attacks on his own people, providing the rebels a tincture of hope even as they were driven back from a long stretch of road and towns they had captured in the three-week war. That request appeared to tip the balance for President Obama and a majority of the Security Council, paving the way for a resolution allowing the use of force to protect civilians in Libya, a mandate that NATO countries interpreted broadly, launching strikes against Colonel Qaddafi's ground forces as well as destroying his air force.

### Western Involvement

After days of often acrimonious debate played out against a desperate clock, [the Security Council authorized member nations to take "all necessary measures" to protect civilians](#), diplomatic code words calling for military action. Benghazi erupted in celebration at news of the resolution's passage.

A military campaign against Colonel Qaddafi, under British and French leadership, was launched less than 48 hours later. American forces mounted a campaign to knock out Libya's air defense systems, firing volley after volley of Tomahawk missiles from nearby ships against missile, radar and communications centers. Within a week, allied air strikes had averted a rout by Colonel Qaddafi of Benghazi and established a no-fly zone over Libya.

The campaign, however, was dogged by friction over who should command the operation, with the United States eventually handing off its lead role to NATO, and by uncertainty over its ultimate goal. Western leaders acknowledged that there was no endgame beyond the immediate United Nations authorization to protect Libyan civilians, and it was uncertain whether even military strikes would force Colonel Qaddafi from power.

In a nationally televised speech March 28, [President Obama](#) defended the American-led military assault, emphasizing that it would be limited and insisting that America had the responsibility and the international backing to stop what he characterized as a looming genocide. At the same time, he said, directing American troops to forcibly remove Colonel Qaddafi from power would be a step too far, and would "splinter" the international coalition.

### The Endgame

Six months of inconclusive fighting gave way within a matter of days to an [assault on Tripoli](#) that unfolded at a breakneck pace. By the night of Aug. 21, 2011, rebels surged into the city, meeting only sporadic resistance and setting off raucous street celebrations.

The report of Colonel Qaddafi's death by the highest ranking military officer in Libya's interim government on Oct. 20 appeared to put an end to the fierce manhunt for the former leader who remained on the lam in Libya for weeks after the fall of his government.

Libya's interim leaders had said they believed that some Qaddafi family members — possibly including Colonel Qaddafi and several of his sons — were hiding in the coastal town of Surt or in Bani Walid, another loyalist bastion that the anti-Qaddafi forces captured.

As rumor of his death spread in the capital, Tripoli, car horns blared as many celebrated in the streets.

After permitting four days of public viewing of the slowly decomposing corpses of Colonel Qaddafi, his son Muatassim and his former defense minister Abu Bakr Younes, the military council in Misurata said On Oct. 25 that the three were buried early in the day at a secret location.

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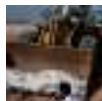
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