

# Bombing of Libya

The United States bombing of Libya (code-named Operation El Dorado Canyon) comprised the joint United States Air Force, Navy and Marine Corps air-strikes against Libya on April 15, 1986. The attack was carried out in response to the 1986 Berlin discotheque bombing. For over a decade, Libyan dictator Muammar al-Gaddafi had been involved in terrorism in Europe and elsewhere. After December 1985 Rome and Vienna airport attacks, which killed 19 and wounded around 140, Gaddafi indicated that he would continue to support the Red Army Faction, the Red Brigades, and the Irish Republican Army as long as European countries support anti-Gaddafi Libyans. The Foreign Minister of Libya also called the massacres "heroic acts". After years of occasional skirmishes with Libya over Libyan territorial claims to the Gulf of Sidra, the United States contemplated a military attack to strike targets within the Libyan mainland. In March 1986, the United States, asserting the 12-nautical-mile (22 km; 14 mi) limit to territorial waters recognized by the international community, sent a carrier task force to the region. Libya responded with aggressive counter-maneuvers on March 24 that led to the Gulf of Sidra incident.

On 5 April 1986, Libyan agents bombed "La Belle" nightclub in West Berlin, killing three people and injuring 229 people who were spending the evening there. Germany and the United States obtained cable transcripts from Libyan agents in East Germany involved in the attack. More detailed information was retrieved years later when Stasi archives were investigated by the reunited Germany. Libyan agents who had carried out the operation from the Libyan embassy in East Germany were identified and prosecuted by Germany in the 1990s. After several days of diplomatic talks with European and Arab partners, President Ronald Reagan ordered a strike on Libya on April 14. Eighteen F-111F strike aircraft of the 48th Tactical Fighter Wing, flying from RAF Lakenheath supported by four EF-111A Ravens of the 20th Tactical Fighter Wing, from RAF Upper Heyford in England, in conjunction with fifteen A-6, A-7, F/A-18 attack aircraft and EA-6B Prowler Electronic Warfare Aircraft from the aircraft carriers USS Saratoga, USS America and USS Coral Sea on station in the Gulf of Sidra, struck five targets at 02:00 on April 15, with the stated objective that their destruction would send a message and reduce Libya's ability to support and train terrorists. Reagan warned that "if necessary, [they] shall do it again."

The actual attack mission against Libya, had been preceded in October 1985 by an exercise in which the 20th TFW stationed at Upper Heyford airbase in the UK, which was equipped with F-111Es, received a top secret order to on October 18 launch a simulated attack mission, with ten F-111s armed with eight 500 lb practice bombs, against a simulated airfield located in Newfoundland, Canada south of CFB Goose Bay. The mission was designated Operation Ghost Rider. The mission was basically a full rehearsal for a long range strike against Libya. The mission was completed successfully, with the exception of one aircraft that had all but one of its eight bombs hang up on one of its wing racks. The lessons learned were passed on to 48th TFW which was equipped with the newer "F" models of the F-111. Elements of the then-secret 4450th Tactical Group (USAF) were put on standby to fly the strike mission against Libya. Over 30 F-117s had already been delivered to Tactical Air Command (USAF) and were operating from secret bases in Nevada. Commanders in the North Africa/Mediterranean theaters knew nothing about the capabilities of the F-117, or that the aircraft even existed. Within an hour of the planned launch time for the F-117s, the Secretary of Defense scrubbed the stealth mission, fearing a compromise of the secret aircraft and its development program. The airstrike was carried out with conventional US Navy and US Air Force aircraft. The F-117 would remain completely unknown to the world for several months until it was unveiled in 1988 and featured prominently in media coverage of Operation Desert Storm.

## The raid

For the Libyan raid, the United States was denied overflight rights by France, Spain and Italy as well as the use of European continental bases, forcing the Air Force portion of the operation to be flown around France, Spain and

attack began at 0200 hours (Libyan time), and lasted about twelve minutes, with 60 tons of munitions dropped. Eighteen F-111 bombers supported by four EF-111 electronic countermeasures aircraft flying from the United Kingdom bombed Tripoli airfield, a frogman training center at a naval academy, and the Bab al-Aziziya barracks in Tripoli. During the bombing of the Bab al-Aziziya barracks, an American F-111 was shot down by a Libyan SAM missile over the Gulf of Sidra. Some bombs landed off-target, striking diplomatic and civilian sites in Tripoli, while the French embassy was only narrowly missed. Some Libyan soldiers abandoned their positions in fright and confusion, and officers were slow to give orders. Libyan anti-aircraft fire did not begin until after the planes had passed over their targets. Twenty-four A-6 Intruders and F/A-18 Hornets launched from aircraft carriers bombed radar and anti-aircraft sites in Benghazi before bombing the Benina and Jamahiriya barracks. A number of bombs missed their targets and hit residential areas, along with a number of Western embassies in Benghazi.

## Casualties

**Libyan.** The attacks failed to kill Gaddafi. Forewarned by a telephone call from Malta's Prime Minister, Karmenu Mifsud Bonnici, that unauthorized aircraft were flying over Maltese airspace heading south towards Tripoli, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and his family rushed out of their residence in the Bab al-Azizia compound moments before the bombs dropped. According to Giulio Andreotti (the 42nd Prime Minister of Italy) and Abdel Rahman Shalgham (Libya's Foreign Minister from 2000 until 2009), Italian politician Bettino Craxi was the person who actually warned Gaddafi.

According to medical staff in the nearby hospital, two dozen people arrived in military uniform and two without uniform. The total Libyan casualties is estimated at 60, including the bombed airbases. However, the regime created a propaganda campaign with varying stories about killed civilians. For example, the regime's media claimed that Gaddafi's "adopted daughter" had been killed. The name "Hanna" was given to the press. Nobody had ever heard of such daughter. Information about her was also conflicting, for example, her age varied from 12 months to 6 years. Despite absurdity and variations of the stories, the campaign was so successful that a large proportion of the Western press reported the regime's stories as facts.

In July 2008, Gaddafi's son Saif al Islam announced that an agreement was being negotiated with the United States whereby Libya would make any future compensation payments to American victims of terror attacks conditional upon the settlement of claims by victims of the U.S. bombing of Libya in 1986. On August 14, 2008 the resultant U.S.-Libya Comprehensive Claims Settlement Agreement was signed in Tripoli by Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, David Welch, and by Libya's Secretary for American Affairs, Ahmad Fituri.

In October 2008 Libya paid US\$1.5 billion, over three installments of US\$300 million on October 9, 2008, US\$600 million on October 30, 2008, and a final US\$600 million October 31, 2008, into a fund which will be used to compensate relatives of the:

- Lockerbie bombing victims an additional US\$2 million each, after having paid them US\$8 million earlier;
- American victims of the 1986 Berlin discotheque bombing;
- American victims of the 1989 UTA Flight 772 bombing; and,
- Libyan victims of the 1986 US bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi.

As a result, On August 4, 2008, President George W. Bush signed into law the Libyan Claims Resolution Act, which had unanimously passed Congress on July 31. The Act provides for the restoration of Libya's sovereign, diplomatic, and official immunities before U.S. courts if the Secretary of State certifies that the United States Government has received sufficient funds to resolve outstanding terrorism-related death and physical injury claims against Libya.

On August 14, 2008, the United States and Libya signed a comprehensive claims settlement agreement. Full diplomatic relations were restored between the two nations.

**American.** Two U.S. Air Force captains — Fernando L. Ribas-Dominicci and Paul F. Lorence — were killed when their F-111 fighter-bomber was shot down over the Gulf of Sidra. On December 25, 1988, Gaddafi offered to release the body of Lorence to his family through Pope John Paul II. The body, returned in 1989, was identified as

Ribas-Dominicci's from dental records. An autopsy conducted in Spain confirmed that he had drowned after his plane was shot down over the Gulf of Sidra. Libya denies that it holds Lorence's body. However, Lorence's brother said that he and his mother saw television footage of a Libyan holding a white helmet with the name "Lorence" stenciled on the back. Furthermore, William C. Chasey, who toured the Bab al-Azizia barracks, claimed to have seen two flight suits and helmets engraved with the names "Lorence" and "Ribas-Dominicci", as well as the wreckage of their F-111.

In 2001, Theodore D. Karantsalis, a reference librarian at Miami-Dade College, enlisted the aid of Congressman Wally Herger's office to petition Libya to return Lorence's remains on behalf of his family and friends. Karantsalis also created a website and invited visitors to sign a petition to Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart seeking the return of Capt. Lorence's remains. On January 27, 2005, Karantsalis filed a federal lawsuit under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) against the Department of Defense and the Department of the Air Force seeking "to know where Captain Paul Lorence's remains are located." Karantsalis had hoped to locate the remains before the 20th anniversary of Lorence's death.

Gaddafi announced that he had won a spectacular military victory over the United States and the country was officially renamed the "Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyah". However, his speech appeared devoid of passion and even the "victory" celebrations appeared unusual. Criticism of Gaddafi by ordinary Libyan citizens became more bold, such as defacing of Gaddafi posters.

## **Libyan retaliation**

Libya responded by firing two Scud missiles at United States Coast Guard stations on the Italian island of Lampedusa which passed over the island and landed in the sea.

The Libyan government was alleged to have ordered the hijacking of Pan Am Flight 73 in Pakistan on September 5, 1986, which resulted in the deaths of 20 people. The allegation did not come to light until it was reported by The Sunday Times in March 2004—days after British Prime Minister Tony Blair paid the first official visit to Tripoli by a Western leader in a generation.

In May 1987, Australia deported diplomats and broke off relations with Libya, claiming Libya sought to fuel violence in Australia and Oceania.

In late 1987 French authorities stopped a merchant vessel, the MV Eksund, which was delivering 150 tons of Soviet arms from Libya to European terrorist groups.

In Beirut, Lebanon, two British hostages held by the Libyan-supported Abu Nidal Organization, Leigh Douglas and Philip Padfield, along with an American named Peter Kilburn, were shot dead in revenge. In addition, journalist John McCarthy was kidnapped, and tourist Paul Appleby was murdered in Jerusalem, Israel. Another British hostage named Alec Collett was also killed in retaliation for the bombing of Libya. Collett was shown being hanged in a video tape. His body was found in November 2009.

On December 21, 1988, came the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, which exploded in mid-air and crashed on the town of Lockerbie in Scotland after a bomb set by Libyan agents detonated, killing all 259 people aboard, and 11 people in Lockerbie. Iran was initially thought to have been responsible for the bombing in revenge for the downing of the Iranian Airbus by the USS Vincennes, but in 1991 two Libyans were charged, one of whom was convicted of the crime in a controversial judgment on January 31, 2001. The Libyan Government formally accepted responsibility for the Pan Am Flight 103 bombing on May 29, 2002, and offered \$2.7 billion to compensate the families of the 270 victims. However, the convicted Libyan, Abdelbaset al-Megrahi, who was suffering from terminal prostate cancer, was released in August 2009 by the Scottish Executive on compassionate grounds. The extent and severity of al-Megrahi's cancer have since come into doubt.

## Aftermath

Libya Gaddafi quashed an internal revolt, the organization of which he blamed on the United States, although Gaddafi appeared to have left the public sphere for a while in 1986 and 87.

The Libyan Posts (GPTC General Posts and Telecommunications Company) dedicated several postage stamp issues to the event, from 1986 until 2001. The first issue was released in 1986, July 13. The last issue was released in 2001, April 15.

The attack was condemned by many countries. By a vote of 79 in favor to 28 against with 33 abstentions, the United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 41/38 which "condemns the military attack perpetrated against the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriya on 15 April 1986, which constitutes a violation of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law."

The Government of Libya said that the United States had fallen prey to the arrogance and madness of power and wanted to become the world's policeman. It charged that any party that did not agree to become an American vassal was an outlaw, a terrorist, and a devil. A meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement said that it condemned the "dastardly, blatant and unprovoked act of aggression". The League of Arab States expressed that it was outraged at the United States aggression and that it reinforced an element of anarchy in international relations. The Assembly of Heads of State of the African Union in its declaration said that the deliberate attempt to kill Libyans violated the principles of international law. The Government of Iran asserted that the attack constituted a policy of aggression, gunboat diplomacy, an act of war, and called for an extensive political and economic boycott of the United States. Others saw the United States motive as an attempt to eliminate Libya's revolution. China stated that the US attack violated norms of international relations and had aggravated tension in the region. The Soviet Union said that there was a clear link between the attack and U.S. policy aimed at stirring up existing hotbeds of tension and creating new ones, and at destabilizing the international situation. West Germany stated that international disputes required diplomatic and not military solutions. France also criticized the bombing and had not allowed American aircraft to fly over its territory en route to Libya, forcing them to make a lengthy trip through the Strait of Gibraltar.

Some observers held the opinion that Article 51 of the UN Charter set limitations on the use of force in exercising the legitimate right of self-defense in the absence of an act of aggression, and affirmed that there was no such act by Libya. It was charged that the United States did not bother to exhaust the Charter provisions for settling disputes under Article 33. Others asserted that Libya was innocent in the bombing of the West Berlin discothèque.

The U.S. received support from the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Israel, and 25 other countries. Its doctrine of declaring a war on what it called "terrorist havens" was not repeated until 1998, when President Bill Clinton ordered strikes on six terrorist camps in Afghanistan. Margaret Thatcher's approval of the use of Royal Air Force bases led to substantial criticism, including an unprecedented story in *The Sunday Times* suggesting the Queen was upset by an "uncaring" Prime Minister. Widespread criticism of the raid caused a temporary rift in UK-US relations and American tourists stayed away from Britain during the spring. Gaddafi himself responded by saying "Thatcher is a murderer...Thatcher is a prostitute. She sold herself to Reagan."

Although the Soviet Union was ostensibly in cooperation with Libya, it had, by the time of the Libya bombing, made its increasing ambivalence toward Libya apparent in public communications. Gaddafi had a history of verbally attacking the policy agendas and ideology of the Soviet Union, and he often engaged in various international interventions and meddling that conflicted with Soviet goals in a variety of spheres. During a period where the Soviet Union was apparently attempting to lead a subtle diplomatic effort that could impact its global status, close association with the whims of Gaddafi became a liability.

In the entire crisis, the Soviet Union explicitly announced that it would not provide additional help to Libya beyond resupplying basic armaments and munitions. It made no attempt to militarily intimidate the United States, despite the ongoing American operations in the Gulf of Sidra and its previous knowledge that the United States might launch an attack. The Soviet Union did not completely ignore the event, issuing a denunciation of this 'wild' and 'barbaric' act by the United States.

After the raid, Moscow did cancel a planned visit to the United States by foreign affairs minister Eduard Shevardnadze. At the same time, it clearly signaled that it did not want this action to affect negotiations about the upcoming summer summit between the United States and the Soviet Union and its plans for new arms control agreements.

Former U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, acting for Libyan citizens who had been killed or injured in the bombing raid by the U.S. using British air bases, brought suit under international law against the United States and the United Kingdom in U.S. federal court. The lawsuit was dismissed as frivolous. A subsequent appeal was denied, and monetary sanctions against Clark were allowed. *Saltany v. Reagan*, 886 F. 2d 438 (D.C. Cir. 1989).

[Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing\\_of\\_Libya](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bombing_of_Libya) Mar 2011 ++]