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Zimbabwe and Algeria sending troops to support Gaddafi in Libya war

Written by [International Business Times](#)

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The Libyan conflict has now been on-going for more than three months and Gaddafi has once again proved his resilience, holding onto power despite the leaders of the free world demanding he leave. When the Nato operation started in March most observers did not expect the Colonel to be able to hang on to power for so long. However as the conflict between Libyan forces and the rebel movement reached stalemate, the alliance was forced to up its game and has since then increased its bombing campaign. With strict sanctions imposed against the country, most of his assets frozen and many of his top government officials defecting, how does Gaddafi still manage to hang on to power?

While the Colonel certainly has a lot of enemies it seems some of his very few friends are extremely loyal as since the conflict started many reports of Zimbabwean and Algerian soldiers fighting for his regime have emerged.

While in February the media focused on the rebels and allegations from Gaddafi's former Chief of Protocol Nouri Al Misrahiya that the leader was using mercenaries from Kenya, Chad, Niger and Mali against his own people after losing control of the Libyan army, other reports suggested that while the mercenaries might have represented a very small part of Gaddafi's forces, the governments of Algeria, Zimbabwe and even South Africa were actively helping the leader.

Following the accusation against Zimbabwe, in March Zimbabwean MP Innocent Gonese, asked, the Defence Minister Emmerson Mnangagwa during a parliamentary session to respond to reports that soldiers from Zimbabwe are involved. The minister then replied "...that there are mercenaries who are African and are in Libya - I have no mandate in my duty as Minister of Defence to investigate activities happening in another African country" before confusedly advising the Zimbabwean MP to "direct his question to the Foreign Affairs Ministry, who might also enquire through foreign relations if there are any African countries participating there."

It would not be the first time that Mugabe sent Zimbabwean militia's without prior consultation as in 1997 the country's troops were sent to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to help Laurent Kabila against rebels backed by Rwanda and Uganda. Zimbabwe is also tipped as the favourite exile destination if Gaddafi ever decides to leave the country as President Robert Mugabe is the Libyan leader's closest ally in Africa. Over the years Gaddafi was said to have showered his counterpart with donations and subsidised oil shipments and in late 2010, Mugabe's party Zanu PF received hundreds of tractors and much farming equipment from Libya to use in election campaigns.

Also backing the reports, in March the Zimbabwean Mail stated that according to sources from the Zimbabwean military intelligence, "The Zimbabwe National Army and its Air force are heavily involved in the fierce battles between forces loyal to Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and the rebel's forces."

It also announced that "Libyan government soldiers backed by Zimbabwean troops battled rebels on the road to the insurgent stronghold of Benghazi as the United States raised the possibility of air strikes to stop Muammar Gaddafi's forces.

The sources in Harare also revealed that the President Mugabe has deployed over 500 troops in Libya to back his long-time ally Colonel Muammar Gaddafi." The newspaper claims."

At the same time reports also surfaced about Algeria's involvement in the conflict and its support of the Gaddafi regime. While Algeria has always been very vocal about being concerned by western imperialism on the continent, the alleged alliance came as a surprise, especially as President Bouteflika's government has cooperated for years with the US and Nato on its North Africa and Sub-Saharan anti-terrorist policies.

The accusations first emerged when an Algerian human rights group based in Germany, Algeria Watch, published a statement alleging that the Algerian government is providing material aid, in the form of armed military units to Gaddafi to help prop up his regime. Their statement read:

"It is with both sadness and anger that we have learned that the Algerian government has sent armed detachments to Libya to commit crimes against our Libyan brothers and sisters who have risen up against the bloody and corrupt regime of Muammar Kadhafi. These armed detachments were first identified in western Libya in the city of Zaouia where some among them have

been arrested. This has been reported in the media and confirmed by eye witnesses."

Algeria Watch also accused the Algerian government of having provided the air transport planes that have carried sub-Saharan African mercenaries from Niger, Chad and Darfur to Libya.

Following the allegations, Algerian observers claimed that both countries might have tried to plan a common oil embargo, which would have, as they both are important oil exporters in the continent, sent the oil prices up. The plan could not come to fruition however as the rebel movement soon acquired control over the National Oil Company and the Central Bank of Libya.

In Uganda, in April there were also reports that some troops of the UPDF, the President Yoweri Museveni's party had been sent to the country.

However the claims were rubbished by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Okello Oryem who added that there was no need for Ugandan forces to go to Libya as Uganda had not been requested to contribute fighting troops. Since then, President Museveni has however invited the Libyan leader to come to Uganda if he ever decided to leave Libya.

Finally, South Africa was accused to have contributed to the conflict by selling arms to the Libyan regime in late 2010, at a time where tensions in the country were already said to be rising. David Maynier of the Democratic Alliance said the DA understood that "more than 100 sniper rifles and more than 50,000 rounds of ammunition may have been exported to Libya in late 2010".

Apparently, other weapons systems sold appeared to include 40mm multiple grenade launchers, Hercules C130 aircraft, and armoured personnel carriers, he added.

While the Justice Minister and National Conventional Arms Control Committee chairman Jeff Radebe defended that while. "Some in the media or through the use of media as a platform have been quick to conclude that the deaths that have been reported in Libya during the period of political unrest have a direct link with the arms sold by the South African companies to Libya. There is no evidence available to back up such a claim", the transaction still remained illegal as South Africa has a legal obligation not to trade in conventional arms with states engaged in repression, aggression or terrorism.

The use of mercenaries might have been a clever cover up to attract the media's attention and hide seedier alliances between Libya and other African countries. Most of the reports emerged between February and April, and since then not much has been said on the subject. It seems however obvious that Gaddafi cannot have stayed in power for so long without any help coming from outside. Maybe then, the Colonel is not so lonely after all.

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