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Gaddafi ready for Libya's "Day of Rage"

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Cairo, Asharq Al-Awsat – Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi has dealt with the calls being issued by the National Conference for the Libyan Opposition [NCLO] and Libyan [political] activists for a Libyan "Day of Rage" to take place on 17 February, modeled on similar events in Tunisia and Egypt, by issuing an unprecedented warnings against any attempts to create chaos and instability in Libya.

In the last few days, Gaddafi privately met with Libyan political activists, journalists, and media figures and he issued severe warnings that these professions would be held responsible should they participate in any way in disturbing the peace or creating chaos in Libya. This was a source of frustration to those who attended these meetings and who had expected Gaddafi to inform them of his intention to carry out important political and economic reforms.

The opposition "Libya Al-Youm" website that is based in London quoted eye-witnesses who attended these meetings with Gaddafi, reporting that Gaddafi addressed the audience – the majority of whom were from cities in eastern Libya – in a tone of warning against the consequences of participating in any potential disturbances.

This represents the first official Libyan response to concerns about the opposition's calls for a "Day of Rage" on 17 February 2011, the anniversary of previous anti-Gaddafi protests in 2006. In these meetings which took place amidst a media blackout, Gaddafi – who has been in power since 1969 – also spoke about the problems that the cities of Benghazi, Al Bayda, Darna, and Tobruk, are suffering from, particularly those of neglect, the collapse of infrastructure, unemployment, and corruption.

Sources who attended these secret meetings revealed that Gaddafi expressed his concern and anger about what is happening in Egypt, and said that the Libyan leader particularly stressed his anger towards the Al Jazeera channel and Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for inciting the Egyptians to turn against Mubarak. Gaddafi reportedly asked "why doesn't Qaradawi incite [people] against the US military bases in the Gulf?"

Commenting on the popular uprising that is calling for Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak's resignation and the toppling of his regime, sources who attended these meetings say that Gaddafi described Mubarak as being "poor" and not even owning the price of the clothes he was wearing. Gaddafi also claimed that Libya is providing Mubarak with [financial] support, and accused the Israeli Mossad of being behind the current unrest in Egypt.

Gaddafi also reportedly defended his friend and ally former Tunisian President Zing El Abidine Ben Ali, saying "the Tunisians hate him because his wife is a Trabelsi [maiden name; meaning from Tripoli]." Gaddafi criticized the revolution that was carried out by the people of Tunisia and the toppling of Ben Ali's regime, before moving away from this and stressing his concern at the return of security and stability to Tunisia.

Libyan activists have claimed that the Libyan intelligence service has been carrying out a large-scale campaign to shut down Libyan websites based outside of the country due to their ongoing coverage of the situation in Libya.

The NCLO has called for mass protests to take place inside and outside of Libya on the anniversary of the 17 February 2006 uprisings in the city of Benghazi where protests against the Danish cartoons of the prophet Muhammad were transformed into mass demonstrations against Gaddafi and his regime, resulting in the death of dozens of protestors and the injury of many more.

In a statement to Asharq Al-Awsat, the NCLO said that all Libyan internal and external oppositional forces intend to carry out protests and demonstrations at various levels against Gaddafi and his regime on the anniversary of the 17 February 2006 protests. The NCLO official also told Asharq Al-Awsat that he hoped that the people of Libya had learned from the victory of the Tunisian popular uprising.



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