



A wave of protests has spread across North Africa and the Middle East, from Libya to Yemen. More than 100,000 protesters banded together for a single rally for freedom in Bahrain. (Hassan Ammar/AP Images)

## Protests Sweep Middle East

Will Libya's leader step down like Egypt's did?

By [Laura Leigh Davidson](#) | February 24, 2011



On Wednesday, more than 100,000 men, women, and children in Bahrain turned out to protest their government's leadership. Protesters in Algeria, Iran, Jordan, Morocco, and Yemen have also crowded city streets in the past week to make their voices heard.

But all eyes are on Libya, where peaceful protests have turned violent. Protesters are demanding that the country's leader, Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi, give up power. In turn, Qaddafi has ordered Libya's military to use violent force to stop the demonstrations.

Qaddafi has ruled Libya since 1969. The large country is between Algeria and Egypt in North Africa. Qaddafi fears the protests will force him out of power, like [what happened to Egypt's former president](#) Hosni Mubarak two weeks ago. He has even sent the Libyan Air Force to strike areas that are now controlled by antigovernment forces.

Now, thousands are fleeing the country to escape the violence. The U.S. has warned Qaddafi that brute force against peaceful protesters will not be tolerated.

"This violence must stop," U.S. President Barack Obama said on Wednesday. "The United States also strongly supports the universal rights of the Libyan people. That includes the rights of peaceful assembly, free speech, and the ability of the Libyan people to determine their own destiny."

Many members of Libya's government and military refuse to stop the rallies or harm fellow citizens. Some have even joined the protests.

Still, the international organization Human Rights Watch estimates 300 people have been killed in Libya since rallies began 10 days ago. Other reports say the death toll is much higher.

Last month, successful protests in Egypt and Tunisia demanded that the **dictators** who ruled their countries step down. (A dictator is someone who has complete control of a country.) Rallies there have inspired people all across North Africa and the Middle East to demand freedom from governments they believe rule unfairly.

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