

## Canadian Naval Operations in Libya (2011)

The wave of popular uprisings that swept the Arabic-speaking countries of North Africa and the Middle East in the “Arab Spring” movement of 2011 began in Tunisia on 18 December 2010. Demonstrations in Libya began on 13 January 2011 and rapidly developed into armed rebellion centred on Benghazi. The government of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi reacted with widespread systematic attacks by air and ground forces that frequently targeted non-combatant civilians.

The United Nations Security Council reacted with two resolutions. The first (26 February 2011) called for an international arms embargo on Libya and froze the assets of individuals close to the Gaddafi regime or implicated in major violations of human rights. The second resolution (17 March 2011) strengthened the arms embargo and imposed a no-fly zone over Libya to ensure the safety of civilians and civilian-populated areas.

On 1 March 2011, the Canadian Prime Minister announced that HMCS *Charlottetown* would deploy from Halifax on 2 March to take part in Canadian and international operations already under way in Libya. HMCS *Charlottetown* departed Halifax on schedule, cleared Gibraltar and joined Standing NATO Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) on 14 March, and arrived on station in the central Mediterranean Sea on 17 March.

With the launch of Operation Unified Protector on 22 March 2011, HMCS *Charlottetown* and the other ships of SNMG1 were assigned to Combined Task Group 455.01, a multinational formation of 16 surface vessels and two submarines built around the aircraft carrier *Giuseppe Garibaldi* and the replenishment ship *Etna*, both from the Italian Navy.

From 19 March to 18 August 2011, as Task Force Charlottetown, the maritime component of Operation Mobile, the frigate was under tactical operational command of the NATO Maritime Component Commander, through Combined Task Group 455.01, while remaining under Canadian national command and administrative control through the Commander, Task Force Libeccio.

For most of its deployment, HMCS *Charlottetown* patrolled the waters immediately off Misrata, Libya, in support of the arms embargo authorized by U.N. Security Council Resolution 1970. On 12 May 2011, when it was attacked by shore-based artillery, HMCS *Charlottetown* became the first Canadian warship to face hostile fire since the end of the Korean War.

Over five months, HMCS *Charlottetown* conducted 313 hailings and five boardings of vessels of interest; provided escort support and area security for vulnerable vessels such as minesweepers and replenishment ships; and on several occasions led Surface Action Groups defending Misrata against attacks by pro-regime forces in small boats.

HMCS *Vancouver* deployed from Esquimalt, B.C., on 10 July 2011, bound for the central Mediterranean Sea to join the NATO-led coalition fleet enforcing the arms embargo on Libya. The transfer of command authority formalizing the integration of HMCS *Vancouver* into Operation Mobile, relieving HMCS *Charlottetown*, took place at Palma de Mallorca, Spain, on 18 August 2011.

While HMCS *Vancouver* conducted maritime operations under Combined Joint Task Force Unified Protector, through the NATO Maritime Component Commander and Combined Task Group 455.01, it remained under Canadian national command and administrative control through the Commander, Task Force Libeccio.

Taskings for HMCS *Vancouver* included escorting and providing air defence for vulnerable vessels such as mine-countermeasures vessels and replenishment ships, and patrolling the embargo zone to gather information and ensure that prohibited materiel did not enter Libya.