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Libya's Gadhafi Declares Holy War Against Switzerland

The feud between Libya and Switzerland has been simmering for months. On Thursday, Moammar Gadhafi went on the offensive, calling for a jihad against the Alpine country.

In a rambling address on Thursday, Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi called for holy war against Switzerland. The bizarre pronouncement belongs to a running feud between the two nations, but the Swiss Foreign Ministry declined to comment.

"Let us wage jihad against Switzerland, Zionism and foreign aggression," Gadhafi suggested at a meeting in Libya to mark the birth of the prophet Muhammad. "Any Muslim in any part of the world who works with Switzerland is an apostate, is against Muhammad, God and the Koran."

The Swiss and Libyan governments have been at odds since 2008, when Swiss police arrested Gadhafi's son Hannibal and Hannibal's wife, the model Aline Skaf. The couple was charged with abusing servants in a luxury hotel. They were quickly released on bail, and officials soon dropped charges, but Libya responded by withdrawing billions of dollars from Swiss banks, cutting off oil supplies, denying visas and recalling diplomats.

'Obscene State'

Last November, Swiss voters inflamed opinion around the Muslim world by approving a ban on minarets on mosques built in Switzerland. Gadhafi seemed to refer to this referendum on Thursday when he called Switzerland an "infidel, obscene state which is destroying mosques."

He was speaking at an outdoor square to representatives of several dozen Muslim countries in the Libyan city of Benghazi. "The masses of Muslims must go to all airports in the Islamic world and prevent any Swiss plane landing," he added, "to all harbors and prevent any Swiss ships docking, inspect all shops and markets to stop any Swiss goods being sold."

He also claimed he wasn't calling for terrorism. Al-Qaida-style terrorism was a "kind of crime and a psychological disease," he said, but insisted, "there is a big difference between terrorism and jihad, which is a right to armed struggle."

Visa Irregularities

The diplomatic spat with Switzerland has warmed up in recent weeks. On Feb. 15, Libya announced it would deny visas to citizens of Europe's visa-free travel area known as the Schengen bloc, to which Switzerland belongs. Tripoli said the move was in retaliation against a Swiss travel ban imposed last year on 200 Libyan citizens, including Gadhafi himself.

That ban blacklisted the Libyans from the whole Schengen area. It drew criticism this month from Italian officials, who said the Swiss had overreached.

On Feb. 23, Libyan police surrounded the Swiss embassy in Tripoli, where two Swiss businessmen had been sheltering since a few days after Hannibal's 2008 arrest. Libya refused to let them go home, charging them with visa irregularities and violating business rules, but denied it came in retaliation for the Hannibal affair.

In early February verdicts on the two men were decided *in absentia* by a Libyan court, and one of them, Rachid Hamdani, was allowed to leave. Police brought the other, Max Goeldi, to a low-security prison, where he's expected to serve a four-month sentence.