

Cyprus: Military Relay for Launching Air Strikes on Libya

Libya-bound Qatari jets leave Cyprus after unscheduled refueling

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NICOSIA: Three Qatari military planes took off from Cyprus' Larnaca Airport to take part in operations against Libya on Tuesday, after an unscheduled stop-over for refueling.

Two Mirage 2000-5 jet fighters and a C-17 transport plane landed at the airport on the Mediterranean island's southeastern coast in the morning after their pilots requested permission to make an emergency landing due to fuel shortage.

A Cypriot government spokesman said in a written statement the Cyprus government had originally turned down the request to land because it did not want to get involved in any way in the Libyan operation.

Cyprus authorities had not been informed beforehand by Qatar about plans for the planes to be refueled at Larnaca, according to the spokesman.

"They then asked permission for a forced landing because of a fuel shortage," the statement said, "Civil Aviation, acting in accordance with international rules, was forced to grant permission for landing and refueling."

Cyprus has sought to stay out of the conflict and President Demetris Christofias said Sunday the government had conveyed to Britain its objection to the use of British military bases on Cyprus for operations in Libya.

Britain's Defence Ministry has said an air base on the south coast of Cyprus is used only by reconnaissance and air-refueling planes in support of the operation.

Qatar is the only Arab country which has agreed to take part in air operations against the forces of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi.

Cyprus, eager to attract more investment from wealthy Gulf states, is currently negotiating with Qatar for a huge joint land development project in the capital, Nicosia, worth hundreds of millions of euros.

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