

By pkroy

Gaddafi has lost it ... Qaddafi Massing Forces in Tripoli as Rebellion Spreads

Libya — As rebellion crept closer to the capital and defections of military officers multiplied, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi called on thousands of mercenaries and irregular security forces on Wednesday to defend his bastion in Tripoli, in what residents said was a desperate and dangerous turn in the week-old uprising.

Distrustful of even his own generals, Colonel Qaddafi has for years quietly built up this ruthless and loyal force. It is made up of special brigades headed by his sons, segments of the military loyal to his native tribe and its allies, and legions of African mercenaries he has helped train and equip. Many are believed to have fought elsewhere, in places like Sudan, but he has now called them back.

Witnesses said thousands of members of this irregular army were massing on roads to the capital, Tripoli, where one resident described scenes evocative of anarchic Somalia: clusters of heavily armed men in mismatched uniforms clutching machine guns and willing to carry out orders to kill Libyans that other police and military units, and even fighter pilots, have refused.

Some residents of Tripoli said they took the gathering army as a sign that the uprising might be entering a decisive stage, with Colonel Qaddafi fortifying his main stronghold in the capital and protesters there gearing up for their first organized demonstration after days of spontaneous rioting and bloody crackdowns.

The fall of other cities to rebels on Wednesday, including Misurata, 130 miles east of the capital, left Colonel Qaddafi more embattled — and his opponents emboldened.

“A message comes to every mobile phone about a general protest on Friday in Tripoli,” one resident of Tripoli said. Colonel Qaddafi’s menacing speech to the country on Tuesday — when he vowed to hunt down opponents “house by house” — increased their determination “100 percent,” the resident said.

Dozens of checkpoints operated by a combination of foreign mercenaries and plainclothes militiamen lined the road west of Tripoli for the first time, witnesses said, requiring not only the presentation of official papers but also displays of flag-waving, fist-pumping enthusiasm for Colonel Qaddafi, who has long fashioned himself as a pan-African icon.

“You are trying to convince them you are a loyalist,” one resident said, “and the second they realize that you are not, you are done for.”

The overall death toll so far has been impossible to determine. Human rights groups say they have confirmed about 300 deaths, though witnesses suggested the number was far larger. On Wednesday, Franco Frattini, the foreign minister of Italy — the former colonial power with longstanding ties — said that nationwide more than 1,000 people were probably dead in the strife.

Egyptian officials said Wednesday that nearly 30,000 people — mostly Egyptians working in Libya — had fled across their border. People fleeing west into Tunisia said the rebellion was now taking off far from its origins just a week ago in the eastern city of Benghazi, Libya’s second largest city, which fell over the weekend.

There were reports for the first time of protests in the southern city of Sabha, considered a Qaddafi stronghold.

On Wednesday, in addition to the northwestern city of Misurata, protesters claimed victory in nearby Zawai, where local army units are said to have joined them. Some said there had been intense fighting in the past few nights in the town of Sabratha, home of an important Roman archaeological site 50 miles west of Tripoli, where witnesses on Wednesday reported a heavy deployment of machine-gun toting foreign mercenaries and Qaddafi loyalists known as revolutionary committees.

"The revolutionary committees are trying to kill everyone who is against Qaddafi," said a doctor fleeing Sabratha, declining to give his name for fear of reprisals if he returned.

But amid spreading rebellion and growing defections by top officials, diplomats and segments of the regular army, Colonel Qaddafi's preparations for a defense of Tripoli also reframed the question of who might still be enforcing his rule. It is a puzzle that military analysts say reflects the singular character of the society he has shaped — half tribal, half police state — for the past 41 years.

"It is all shadow and mirrors and probably a great deal of corruption as well," said Paul Sullivan, a professor at Georgetown who has studied the Libyan military.

Colonel Qaddafi, who took power in a military coup, has always kept the Libyan military too weak and divided to do the same thing to him. About half its relatively small 50,000-member army is made up of poorly trained and unreliable conscripts, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Kareem Fahim reported from Baida, Libya, and David D. Kirkpatrick from the Tunisian border with Libya. Reporting was contributed by Sharon Otterman, Mona El-Naggar, Neil MacFarquhar and Liam Stack from Cairo.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

An earlier version of this article misstated the location of Misurata. The city is roughly 130 miles east, of the capital, not west.

Page 2 of 2

Many of its battalions are organized along tribal lines, ensuring their loyalty to their own clan rather than to top military commanders — a pattern evident in the defection of portions of the army to help protesters take the eastern city of Benghazi.

Colonel Qaddafi's own clan dominates the air force and the upper level of army officers, and they are believed to have remained loyal to him, in part because his clan has the most to lose from his ouster. Other clans, like the large Warfalla tribe, have complained that they have been shut out of the top ranks, Professor Sullivan noted, which may help explain why they were among the first to turn on Colonel Qaddafi.

Untrusting of his officers, Colonel Qaddafi built up an elaborate paramilitary force — accompanied by special segments of the regular army that report primarily to his family. It is designed to check the army and in part to subdue his own population. At the top of that structure is his roughly 3,000-member revolutionary guard corps, which mainly guards him personally.

Then there are the militia units controlled by Colonel Qaddafi's seven sons. A cable from the United States Embassy in Libya released by WikiLeaks described his son Khamis's private battalion as the best equipped in the Libyan Army.

His brother Sa'ad has reportedly used his private battalion to help him secure business deals. And a third brother, Muatassim, is Colonel Qaddafi's national security adviser. In 2008 he asked for \$2.8 billion to pay for a battalion of his own, to keep up with his brothers.

But perhaps the most significant force that Colonel Qaddafi has deployed against the current insurrection is one believed to consist of about 2,500 mercenaries from countries like Chad, Sudan and Niger that he calls his Islamic Pan African Brigade.

Colonel Qaddafi began recruiting for his force years ago as part of a scheme to bring the African nations around Libya into a common union, and the mercenaries he trained are believed to have returned to Sudan and other bloody conflicts around Africa. But from the accounts of many witnesses Colonel Qaddafi is believed to have recalled them — and perhaps others — to help suppress the uprising.

Since the Libyan military withdrew from the eastern border, Egyptian officials said, tens of thousands of Egyptians — many of whom had worked in Libya's oil-propelled economy — have fled back to Egypt. About 4,200 crossed over on Sunday, a similar number on Monday, and about 20,000 on Tuesday, when border security collapsed.

The Egyptian authorities said the migrants brought the bodies of three people killed in the crackdown on Benghazi, five people wounded by bullets and 14 others who were taken to a hospital with serious injuries. Many complained that they had been attacked and robbed by the mercenaries, officials said.

Mustafa Said Ahmed, 26-year-old accountant who had worked in Benghazi, said in an interview that he saw 11 people killed by the mercenaries in "a massacre" after the noon prayer last Friday. The country's long-serving interior minister, Gen. Abdel Fattah Younes al-Abidi, said Wednesday that he had decided to resign after the people of Benghazi were shot down with machine guns. In an interview with CNN, he said he had argued against Colonel Qaddafi's intention to use airplanes to bomb that city, the nation's second largest, warning that it would kill thousands. State media, however, claimed he had been kidnapped by "gangs."

The justice minister has already resigned for similar reasons. Two Libyan bombers diverted to Malta rather than bomb civilians, and on Wednesday a Libyan newspaper reported that a third Libyan military pilot had downed his bomber in the eastern province rather than carry out a mission to bomb Benghazi.

After nightfall on Wednesday, witnesses reported sporadic bursts of gunfire around Tripoli neighborhoods. But they said the streets seemed eerily deserted. Green Square, which had been a rallying point for pro-Qaddafi forces, had only a few hundred left in it. And the state television headquarters, which had been heavily guarded, was left almost unattended.

Elsewhere, there were signs that Colonel Qaddafi's forces were refortifying. For the first time, witnesses said, at least four army tanks had rolled into the streets of the capital.

Kareem Fahim reported from Baida, Libya, and David D. Kirkpatrick from the Tunisian border with Libya. Reporting was contributed by Sharon Otterman, Mona El-Naggar, Neil MacFarquhar and Liam Stack from Cairo.

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

An earlier version of this article misstated the location of Misurata. The city is roughly 130 miles east, of the capital, not west.

Gaddafi has used bribes, blackmail and scare tactics, when necessary, to insure the tribes' loyalty to his regime

The Libyan leader has lost all three pillars of his rule - tribal, military and diplomatic. Judging from his desperate speech last night, he seems to be losing his mind and perhaps his nerves.

That's why it's only a question of time for his regime to breakdown.

For the last four decades, Gaddafi has based the stability of his rule on a careful balancing act among more than 100 tribes and clans, especially the 30 influential among them, that pride themselves on playing an important role in freeing Libya from colonialism.

Gaddafi has used bribes when possible, blackmail and scare tactics when necessary, to insure the tribes' loyalty to the regime, or at least its neutrality.

However, over the last few days, one after the other, Libyan tribes have declared their opposition to the Gaddafi regime and vowed their support and allegiance to the revolution of February 17.

Diplomatic breakdown

Gaddafi has also lost his diplomatic core as the country's overseas diplomats have been quitting their jobs in protest against the violence while others have expressed outright support of the revolution.

In reality, the Libyan regime no longer has diplomatic relations with the outside world, which for all practical purposes has severed all relations with his regime.

Much of the world considers Gaddafi's regime outlawed.

Last but not the least, the Gaddafi security regime has been losing support among its armed forces as fighter jet pilots, sailors and entire military bases disobey orders and take a stand in favor of the revolution.

Gaddafi has admitted that his police force has deserted and gone home refusing to use arms against the protesters. As a result, entire cities have been liberated from the grip of the regime.

Watching Benghazi, the largest city in the east, as well as other cities, celebrate their newly gained freedom illustrates the degree to which the Libyan regime has lost influence in the country.

The capital, Tripoli, might still prove to be the most dangerous. An escalation in the capital where Gaddafi's sons have concentrated their militias might lead to more bloodshed. As Gaddafi 'loses it', diving deeper in isolation and finding no way out, he is more than capable of ordering the worst crimes.

Unless he loses the loyalty of these militias, or they are deterred from carrying his orders, the last hours and days could prove to be violent.

Having said that, like the Tunisian and Egyptian military before them, the Libyan military and militias could still prove to be more conscientious than their dictators.

Gaddafi has virgin women as body guards

London, December 11: When it comes to protecting his body, it seems that Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi prefers the fair sex over the hefty male security personnel.

The flamboyant leader arrived in France on Monday flanked by 30 blue-uniformed females, all supposedly virgins, dangling their guns from their shoulders as they protect him round-the-clock. All the female bodyguards wear nail varnish, perfume and lipsticks, and style their hair probably to spare the loss of femininity suffered by their counterparts in the developed countries. But don't be deceived they are trained to kill.

Not only the bodyguards, Col Gaddafi, always seen dressed in Bedouin robes, has also brought his own tent and camel "to greet visitors in the true desert tradition" during his stay in Paris, the Daily Mail reported on Tuesday.

"His country traditions dictate that he travels with his tent and a camel, and arrangements are being made for this," a French Foreign Ministry Spokesman was quoted by the British daily as saying.

The Libyan leader also met French President Nicolas Sarkozy who extended the invitation after Paris' involvement in the release of five Bulgarian nurses and a doctor who were condemned to death in Libya earlier this year.

Since then, the two countries have been strengthening their ties with several billion pound trade deals, including the purchase of Airbus planes, fighter jets and a contract to build a nuclear reactor for civil use in Libya.

SPECIAL CONSULTANT NEW YORK TIMES