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Cameron of Britain and Sarkozy of France Visit Libya



1President Nicolas Sarkozy of France in the foreground and British Prime Minister David Cameron in Benghazi

By **ROD NORDLAND** and RICK GLADSTONE

TRIPOLI, Libya — The leaders of Britain and France visited Libya on Thursday in a triumphal but heavily guarded tour intended to boost the country's revolutionary leaders, whose forces were propelled to power with NATO's help last month by routing Col. [Muammar el-Qaddafi](#) and his military in the most violent conflict of the Arab Spring uprisings.

Prime Minister [David Cameron](#) of Britain and President [Nicolas Sarkozy](#) of France, who convened an international meeting two weeks ago in Paris in support of the new Libyan authorities, were the first world leaders to travel to the Libyan capital in the post-Qaddafi era. They pledged to keep up the NATO bombing — which their countries supervised — until the last of the recalcitrant Qaddafi forces surrendered. They also promised to help track down the elusive Colonel Qaddafi, and to provide political and economic aid to the new leaders seeking to fill the void left by his four decades of absolute rule.

The Cameron-Sarkozy visit, which also included a stop in the eastern city of Benghazi, where both were greeted warmly by residents, came as anti-Qaddafi forces claimed they had punched holes in the loyalist defenses surrounding the Mediterranean enclave of Surt, Colonel Qaddafi's tribal hometown and one of the redoubts of support for him.

Jalal al-Gallal, a spokesman for the Transitional National Council, the interim government, said that a large force of fighters from the port city of Misurata had attacked Surt from the city's western and the southern approaches, briefly beating back a defensive line of pro-Qaddafi troops. He said the Misurata fighters were able to reach a roundabout in the west of the city before the defenders drove them back out of town. "They met fierce resistance and had to withdraw," Mr. Gallal said. Mohammed Darrat, a spokesman for the Misurata brigade, said in a telephone interview that 11 of its fighters were killed and 25 wounded and that the brigade pulled back by nightfall.

Both sides in the Libya conflict have often overstated combat victories, and it was impossible to confirm the accounts of the Surt fighting. But Mr. Darrat's admission of casualties suffered by the anti-Qaddafi fighters suggested that the Surt defenses were resilient.

Both Mr. Cameron and Mr. Sarkozy, clearly enjoying the friendly reception they were getting from grateful Libyans in Tripoli and Benghazi, heaped praise on them. "This was your revolution, not our revolution," Mr. Cameron said to the Libyans, praising "incredibly brave" rebels for "removing the dreadful dictatorship of Qaddafi."

But with Colonel Qaddafi still at large, Mr. Cameron said, "this is not finished, this is not done, this is not over."

Both countries have interests in preserving potentially lucrative oil deals made under the Qaddafi government, and intend to compete for the contracts as part of the reconstruction and restoration of Libya's battered infrastructure.

For his part, Mr. Sarkozy called for Libyans to show forgiveness to their internal adversaries and not resort to vengeance and score-settling as the conflict winds down, echoing a theme expressed by the leaders of the Transitional National Council. He also said France expected no favorable treatment in exchange for pressing the NATO campaign.

"What we did we did without a hidden agenda, but because we wanted to help Libya," he said.

The visit to Tripoli itself was held under heavy security and was diplomatically awkward, at least, because Libya technically has no head of state. The leader of the Transitional National Council, Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, and the de-facto prime minister, Mahmoud Jibril, appeared with Mr. Cameron and Mr. Sarkozy at a news conference in Tripoli. But Mr. Abdel-Jalil has not even officially moved himself to Tripoli yet from the council's base in Benghazi, where the anti-Qaddafi revolt began in March.

While a growing number of Transitional National Council officials have come to Tripoli, the bulk remain in Benghazi. Their official position is that the government will not relocate here until they declare the conflict over — which will not happen until Colonel Qaddafi and one of his fugitive sons, Seif al-Islam el-Qaddafi, who had been considered his heir apparent and often acted on Colonel Qaddafi's behalf, are either captured or confirmed out of the country.

Mr. Cameron and Mr. Sarkozy said they would press for the release of billions of dollars worth of Libyan assets frozen under United Nations sanctions against Colonel Qaddafi. Mr. Cameron also said, “we will help you find Qaddafi and bring him to justice,” but did not explain how Britain would do that. Technically, NATO surveillance planes could be deployed to detect movements by or signals from Colonel Qaddafi.

British newspapers have reported that British Special Forces are on the ground in Libya, though the military does not generally comment on reports of such activity.

Referring to the former Libyan leader, Mr. Cameron declared, “It’s time for him to give himself up” and face justice.

France was the first country to recognize the rebels and took credit for initiating airstrikes that halted a loyalist column closing in on Benghazi. Mr. Sarkozy and Mr. Cameron have since said those initial strikes prevented the thousands of deaths that would have occurred if pro-Qaddafi forces had entered the city.

Mr. Cameron’s visit was announced here only after he landed — a measure of the continued concerns about security with pro-Qaddafi forces still holding out in several towns in other parts of Libya.

Rod Nordland reported from Tripoli, and Rick Gladstone from New York. Kareem Fahim contributed reporting from Tripoli, and Alan Cowell from London.