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Missile hits Gaddafi compound in Tripoli

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A three-storey building in a military command centre used by Muammar Gaddafi has been destroyed in an air strike by coalition forces.

The Sunday-night strike was the first reported attack on the Bab al-Azizia, a sprawling compound in the Libyan capital, Tripoli, that Gaddafi has used several times as a setting for televised addresses, and which was bombed by the United States in 1986.

The regime invited journalists to visit the site of the attack early on Monday morning. Spokesman Mussa Ibrahim called it a "barbaric bombing" but said no one had been hurt. He declined to say whether Gaddafi himself was inside the compound.

Al Jazeera's Anita McNaught, reporting from Tripoli, was not invited to the scene but reported earlier that there had been an explosion in the area of the Bab al-Azizia and that smoke was rising from the area.

Coalition forces from France, the United Kingdom, United States and other nations began striking the regime's military assets on Saturday as part of an effort to enforce a UN Security Council resolution aimed at protecting Libyan civilians.

Coalition officials told journalists on Monday that the building hit in the attack was a military command and control centre for Gaddafi.

Tripoli hit for second day

Other loud explosions rocked Tripoli on Sunday night, as Britain's ministry of defence said one of its submarines had again fired guided Tomahawk missiles on Libyan air defence systems.

"The principle firing happened around nine o'clock in the evening local time and that's when we believe there was a strike in the region of Gaddafi's compound," McNaught said.

"We saw a large plume of smoke coming from an explosion somewhere in that general direction. It is likely there were plenty of useful military targets there if you were a major international force looking to persuade Gaddafi to make peaceful noises."

The blasts came two days after the United Nations Security Council authorised international military action to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya, as well as "all necessary measures" to prevent attacks by Gaddafi forces on civilians.

The uprising against Gaddafi broke out on February 15, and hundreds of civilians have died in the regime's brutal crackdown.

"Gaddafi not a target"

The US military said the coalition campaign, called Operation Odyssey Dawn in the United States, had succeeded in "severely degrading" Gaddafi's air defences.

US Navy Vice Admiral William E Gortney stressed in a press briefing on Sunday that the Libyan leader is not a target for the international military assault on the country.

Gortney, the US spokesman for the coalition, added that any of Gaddafi's ground troops advancing on pro-democracy forces are open targets for US and allied attacks.

"If they are moving on opposition forces ... yes, we will take them under attack," he told reporters.

"There has been no new air activity by the regime and we have detected no radar emissions from any of the air defence sites targeted and there's been a significant decrease in the use of all Libyan air surveillance radars."

Gortney said the coalition acting against Gaddafi, which originally grouped the US, Britain, France, Italy and Canada, had broadened to include Belgium and Qatar.

Libyan ceasefire

His comments came shortly after the Libyan military announced its second ceasefire since the UN resolution authorising the no-fly zone was passed. But the White House has said it will not recognise a ceasefire declaration.

"Our view at this point...is that it isn't true, or has been immediately violated," White House National Security Adviser Tom Donilon told reporters on Sunday.

Despite the strikes, the Libyan leader has vowed to fight on and in a televised address, a **defiant Gaddafi** promised a "long war" that his forces would win.

"We will fight for every square in our land," Gaddafi said. "We will die as martyrs."

He said the air attacks by foreign forces amounted to a "cold war" on Islam and threatened retribution against Libyans who sided with the foreign intervention.

"We will fight and we will target any traitor who is co-operating with the Americans or with the Christian Crusade," he said.

Conflicting casualty claims

The comments came as Tripoli's official media said the air strikes were targeting civilian objectives and that there were "civilians casualties as a result of this aggression".

However, Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff, denied that any civilians had been killed in the bombardment, which saw some **110 cruise missiles** being shot from American naval vessels in the Mediterranean sea.

Gaddafi "was attacking Benghazi and we are there to stop that ... we are ending his ability to attack us from the ground, so he will not continue to execute his own people," Mullen said.

"It was a significant point when the Arab League voted against this guy. This is a colleague [of theirs], and we've had a significant number of coalition countries who've come together to provide capability."

But Arab League chief Amr Moussa on Sunday condemned what he called the "bombardment of civilians" and called for an emergency meeting of the group of 22 states to discuss Libya.

He requested a report into the bombardment, which he said had "led to the deaths and injuries of many Libyan civilians".

"What is happening in Libya differs from the aim of imposing a no-fly zone, and what we want is the protection of civilians and not the bombardment of more civilians," Egypt's state news agency quoted Moussa as saying.