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## Libyan Leaders Talk Exit Strategies

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The surprise arrival of a top envoy to Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in Greece late on Sunday night is an indication of the two sides of the colonel.

In public and on state TV, he is belligerent, bullish and aggressive. Yet in private, it is becoming clear, Gaddafi believes he has options for an exit strategy from the trouble currently ripping his country apart.

Abdul Fattah Younis knows Gaddafi well. He is a former interior minister, but defected in the early days of the revolution and is now the commander of the rebel forces.

He says Gaddafi is very intelligent, listens to lots of advice and then goes off to make his decision:

He is stubborn, when the decision is made, that's it."

He has watched the appearances on state TV from the bizarre 15-second appearance under an umbrella to the long, unfocused rants to crowds of loyalists.

He is scared. You can see that. He is now acting out of panic."

It is that panic that has perhaps driven him to seek a diplomatic end, heartened by those who have objected to the continuing bloodshed. But as his envoy dots around the capitals of the Mediterranean, he may find his options very limited.

A report in a US newspaper suggests the mission has been sanctioned by Gaddafi's son Saif al-Islam. It's thought he is keen to take over a transitional government until new elections are held.

What happens to his father is perhaps not entirely clear, but the idea is regarded as a non-starter by many.

The smart and savvy Italian foreign minister Franco Frattini knew he was speaking for many when he said: "Any solution for the future of Libya has a precondition, that Gaddafi's regime leaves, and is out, and Gaddafi himself and the family leaves the country. This is the only political precondition."

Another option which has been bandied about half seriously, which would allow Gaddafi to remain in power, is the partition of the country. To the east, the current regime would keep Tripoli and Misurata and probably all the towns towards Brega. The new rebel state would have Benghazi as its capital and some of the oil producing and export power it would need to survive. Such an idea alarms many Libyans.

For 40 years they have listened to the Gaddafi lectures about one Libya, one people, and how a united country fought off the colonial powers and defied America. But the greater concern would be to keep a wounded Gaddafi anywhere near the levers of power.

Certainly for the transitional government in waiting, the rebel-led national council, the idea is a no go.

"The unity of Libya ... it's not acceptable to have any action or any process [that] can lead to dividing Libya. Libya is one unity and we will keep it united," says Ali al-Essawi, a senior member of that committee.

Exile has been suggested as perhaps the best hope for Gaddafi and for Libya. The former British foreign minister, David Owen, was one of those who called for a no-fly zone over Libya at the very beginning of the trouble. He is convinced it didn't arrive a moment too soon: "Without it, within hours, Benghazi would have fallen, and Gaddafi would have won."

Now he thinks Colonel Gaddafi's departure could bring the country together: "It may be that we arrange for some mechanism where they leave Libya. There are the purists who will say this can only be done ultimately by an international court, but that takes months or even years. If we get them out of the country, the forces in Benghazi and Tripoli will find it fairly easy to form a transitional government and then there will be elections."

Gaddafi has always openly boasted, he will fight to the death, he will remain in Libya and he will "join the martyrs" if necessary. If that is his true position, then a negotiated departure is out of the question. And the uprising in Libya will be bloody and long.