

**PUBLIC**

**ANNEX 9.61**



Beta Version

First Published: 2011-03-15

## Gathafi's elite forces key to Libya conflict

Experts: Libyan leader no longer counts on regular army in battle with rebel forces.

Middle East Online

By Nick Morrison - LONDON

Libyan leader Moamer Gathafi's elite forces hold the key to crushing the rebellion in the north African country as he can no longer count on the regular army, analysts said Monday.

Gathafi's forces have won a string of victories in recent days as they move east from Tripoli, and were battling on Monday for Ajdabiya, a key town which the rebels have vowed to defend at all costs.

Dave Hartwell, a Middle East and north Africa analyst for IHS Jane's, the London-based defence information group, said Gathafi's paramilitary unit, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, was seen as his most loyal forces.

"The revolutionary guard is about 3,000 strong, and we are confident that they are fighting at the moment," Hartwell said.

"They have access to a variety of weapons, including battle tanks, armoured personnel carriers and helicopters."

Known as Liwa Haris al-Jamahiriya, the guard is hand-picked from Gathafi's tribal region around the port town of Sirte, "and their main duty is to protect Gathafi and his family," Hartwell said.

"They are pretty well knitted into the fabric of the regime."

Soviet-made battle tanks T72s, dating from the early 1970s, are the most modern vehicles available to Gathafi's forces, the analyst said.

A second crack battalion, the Khamis Brigade commanded by Gathafi's youngest son, Khamis, in theory has access to 260 of the tanks, though it is unclear how many are fully functional.

The regular Libyan army, meanwhile, numbered 45,000 before the rebellion started, but Hartwell said only a third are still fighting after several thousand either defected to the rebels or "just melted away."

"Loosely, we estimate that only 10,000-15,000 troops are loyal to Gathafi -- but this is probably still enough to seize the initiative," Hartwell said.

Morale is probably improving due to victories over the rebels in the key towns of Zawiyah, Ras Lanuf and Brega, he said. "If they maintain the advance (in the east) of the country, that will continue to boost morale."

A 40,000-strong reserve force, or People's Militia, which have strong tribal links to Gathafi, is another, "more ideological" asset that Gathafi can call on, Hartwell said.

"Militarily it is not considered an effective force, but they have a stake in the preservation of the status quo," he said.

Gary Li, of the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), said there were signs Gathafi was altering his military strategy away from air attacks to more ground-based assaults.

"The forces that took Zawiyah last Friday were the dreaded Khamis Brigade, one of the best equipped of Gathafi's forces," Li said.



"Well knitted into the fabric of the regime"

Search

Share

### NEWS

Hezbollah backed Lebanon PM-designate: Hezbollah is 'tumor'

Palestinian leaders end four-year feud

Deadline for Libyan rebels to surrender expires

Syria protesters call for sit-ins

Journalists pay dear price in Arab uprisings

Clashes between Yemen police, gunmen kill seven

Cardinal: Christians should pray for bin Laden

Ex-Hezbollah chief mourns death of bin Laden

Palestinian factions sign unity deal in Cairo

Sarkozy: Morocco bombing will not go unpunished

Spain jails Somali pirates for 439 years

Sarkozy hints France could recognise Palestinian state

GCC to Iran: Gulf is Arab

Israeli PM calls on Abbas to 'cancel' Palestinian unity deal

Exodus of Libyan civilians to southern Tunisia interrupted by border clashes

50,000 civilians flee Somalia in first quarter of 2011

Surviving war in Misrata

Iraq army chief moots 'regional security' group



Arabian Culture



Arabian Culture



Lebanon



"Arguably even their tanks would have been vulnerable to RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) attacks from the lightly armed rebels but what seems to have been the deciding factor was artillery.

"The Gathafi forces moved away from relatively ineffectual air attacks to more traditional ground based artillery barrages."

He said using artillery "smacks of desperation", but the psychological impact of artillery strikes on untrained volunteers "far outweigh actual damage -- which in itself was already considerable".

Li believes the change of tactics was a sign of Gathafi's increasingly ruthless approach towards the rebels.

"I think the general feeling is that Gathafi has abandoned any thoughts of possible reconciliation with the rebels and the gloves are now well and truly off so to speak," Li said.

"The employment of heavy artillery on his own people is ten times worse than air strikes."

He also conceded that a no-fly zone would have "no impact" on an artillery-led battle.

[Add a Comment](#) ▶

Palestinian factions sign  
unity deal in Cairo

Somalia faces 'worst  
drought in a lifetime'

Concern grows for  
civilians in south Sudan  
clashes

Libya rebels: no plans to  
resume oil exports

Occupied Palestinian  
village cut off from  
healthcare

Syria urged to lift block on  
access to Daraa casualties

Libya rebels try to turn  
youthful zeal into military  
might

Sudan troops clash with  
SPLA forces in Abyei

American Muslims: bin  
Laden got his just deserts

Syria's 'Bashar generation'  
shaken by protests

Gathafi tanks probe rebel  
city as son is buried

With raid, US avoids trial,  
tomb for Bin Laden

Rites administered for bin  
Laden by US

Yemen army vacates south  
base after tribal attacks

Syria protesters given  
surrender ultimatum

Gunfire, slogans as  
crowds attend Gathafi  
son's funeral

GCC: Iran's claims over  
Gulf 'aggressive'

Nine hurt in student demo  
in Algiers

Experts: Morocco attack  
video threat dates back to  
2007

Analysis: without Bin  
Laden, Qaeda still a threat

Gulf pact to renew Yemen  
mediation

British, Italian missions  
torched after Gathafi son  
killed

Hundreds arrested in Syria  
sweep



US troops kill Bin Laden in  
Pakistan firefight

Syrian protesters plan  
week 'to break the siege'

Embattled Saleh refuses to  
sign Gulf-brokered pact

Gathafi youngest son  
killed by NATO air strikes

..Middle East Online:..Gathafi's elite forces key to Libya conflict