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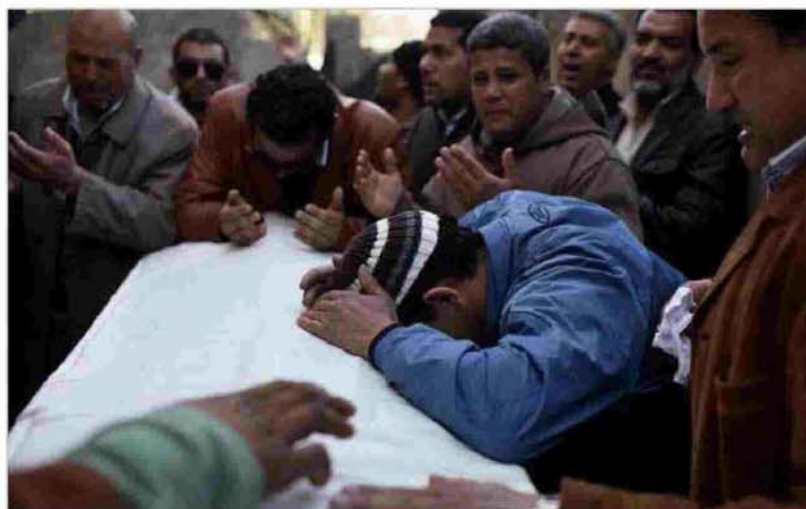
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In Libya Capital, Long Bread Lines and Barricades



Moises Saman for The New York Times

The funeral for Anwar Elgadi, 44, in Tripoli on Saturday. He was shot in the head on Friday during clashes with security forces. [More Photos »](#)

By DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK
Published: February 26, 2011

TRIPOLI, Libya — A bold play by Col. [Muammar el-Qaddafi](#) to prove that he was firmly in control of [Libya](#) appeared to backfire Saturday, as foreign journalists he invited to the capital discovered blocks of the city in open defiance of his authority.

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Witnesses described snipers and anti-aircraft guns firing at unarmed civilians. Many said security forces had been removing the dead and wounded from streets and hospitals, apparently in an effort to hide the mounting toll.

But when government-picked drivers escorted journalists on tours of the city on Saturday morning, the extent of the unrest was unmistakable. Workers were still hastily painting over graffiti calling Colonel Qaddafi a "bloodsucker" and demanding his ouster.

Just off the tour route were long bread lines where residents said they were afraid to be seen talking to journalists.

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Voices From Tripoli

David D. Kirkpatrick talks to Libyans on the streets of the capital about the recent violence and their thoughts on the future.

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The Dead and Injured

Hussein, a medical doctor.



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And though government forces dominated the city center — heavily armed checkpoints staked out downtown while orange-suited cleanup crews were out in force around the central Green Square — there were signs of defiance in other neighborhoods, where the streets were blocked by makeshift barricades of broken televisions, charred tree trunks and cinder blocks left over from protests and street fights the night before.

"I have seen more than 68, I think, people killed," said a doctor who had been helping out at a neighborhood clinic in Tajoura and gave his name only as Hussein. "But the people who have died, they don't leave them in the same place.

We have seen them taking them in the Qaddafi cars, and nobody knows where they are taking the people who have died." He added, "Even the ones with just a broken hand or something they are taking away."

In some ways, the mixed results of Colonel Qaddafi's theatrical gamble — opening the curtains to the world with great fanfare, even though the stage is in near-chaotic disarray — are an apt metaphor for the increasingly untenable situation in the country.

There were unconfirmed reports Saturday that thousands of armed rebels from other regions of the country were marching toward Tripoli. Rebels have already taken over and held the eastern half of the populous coast. On Saturday, after days of fighting, they also reportedly took Sabratha, a town near the capital known for its Roman ruins.

At the birthplace of the revolt, in the eastern city of Benghazi, a group of senior military officers who had defected were forming a council to lead their troops against Colonel Qaddafi's forces. One of them, an air force general, said three air bases had defected to the rebels, along with the region's military police.

And the rebels said they were in the process of forming an interim government to oversee the areas no longer under Colonel Qaddafi's control. It is expected to include Mustafa Mohamed Abd al-Jalil, a former justice minister who quit to join the insurrection and may now assume the role of interim prime minister.

"The temporary location of the government will be Benghazi, until the liberation of Tripoli," said Iman Bugaighis, a spokeswoman for a coalition of antigovernment activists.

But so far, the protesters say, the rebel force heading for Tripoli has been stymied at Surt, a Qaddafi stronghold on the coastal road where his tribe is concentrated. In Tripoli, home to nearly two million of Libya's roughly six and a half million people, Colonel Qaddafi and his special militias may have unleashed enough

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Lynsey Addario for The New York Times
 Libyans rallied against Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi in Benghazi on Saturday. Rebels have taken over and hold much of the east. [More Photos »](#)

firepower to enable them to keep a firm grasp on the city for some time.

His plainclothes police and uniformed security forces appeared in control of most of the city's largely deserted streets on Saturday, and there were unconfirmed reports that he was following through on his threats to distribute weapons to his supporters.

Clearly, both the rebels and Colonel Qaddafi appear to have the will and the wherewithal to fight on for some time.

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Kareem Fahim contributed reporting from Benghazi, Libya.

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