

# Gadhafi defiant in face of defections

## ENVOY: HIGH-RANKING LIBYANS WANT OUT

### Government's forces pushing rebels back

BY HADEEL AL-SHALCHI  
AND RYAN LUCAS  
The Associated Press

TRIPOLI, Libya — Moammar Gadhafi struck a defiant stance Thursday after two high-profile defections from his government, saying he's not the one who should go, it's the Western leaders who have ravaged his military with airstrikes who should resign immediately.

Gadhafi's message was undercut by its delivery: a scroll across the bottom of state TV as he remained out of sight. The Obama administration said the strongman's inner circle was clearly crumbling with the loss of Foreign Minister Moussa

Koussa, who flew from Tunisia to England on Wednesday.

Ali Abdessalam Treki, a former foreign minister and U.N. General Assembly president, announced his departure on several opposition websites Thursday, saying "It is our nation's right to live in freedom and democracy and enjoy a good life."

Gadhafi accused the leaders of the countries attacking his forces of being "affected by power madness."

His government's forces have regained momentum on the rapidly moving front line of the battle with opposition forces, retaking the town of Brega after pushing the rebels miles back toward the territory they hold in eastern Libya.

Most high-level Libyan officials are trying to defect but are under tight security and are having difficulty

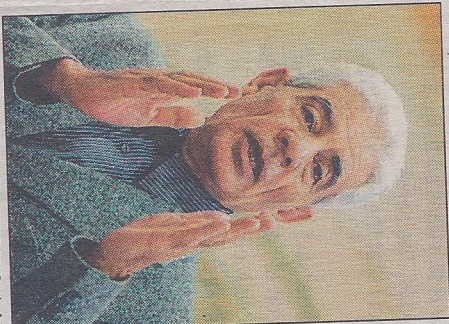
leaving the country, said Ibrahim Dabbashi, the deputy ambassador in Libya's U.N. mission, which now backs the opposition.

Koussa was privy to all the inner workings of the government, so his departure could open the door for some hard intelligence, although Britain refused to offer him immunity from prosecution.

"Koussa is one of the pillars of Gadhafi's regime since the 1970s," said Abdel Moneim al-Houmi, a former Libyan Arab League representative who was among the first wave of Libyan diplomats to defect. "His defection means that he knew that the end of Gadhafi is coming and he wanted to jump from the sinking boat."

Libyan officials, who initially denied Koussa's defection, said he had resigned because he was sick with diabetes and high blood pressure.

Nations behind the campaign of international airstrikes that have hobbled



BEN CURTIS / AP

Libya's Foreign Minister Moussa Koussa, a longtime aide of Moammar Gadhafi, flew from Tunisia to England on Wednesday.

Libya's military hailed Koussa's resignation as a sign of weakness in Gadhafi's 42-year rule.

Koussa was Libya's chief of intelligence for more than a decade. The opposition blames him for the assassinations of dissidents in western capitals and for orchestrating the 1988 Lockerbie bombing over Scotland and the bombing of another jet over Niger a year later. The links have never been confirmed.

In later years, he played an important role in persuading Western nations to lift sanctions on Libya and remove its name from the list of state sponsors of terrorism. He led settlements of Lockerbie, offered all information about Libya's nuclear program and gave Britain and the U.S. information about Islamic extremists after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Scottish prosecutors say they've asked Britain's Foreign Office to speak with Koussa about the Lockerbie bombing, which killed 270 people.

Despite setbacks and airstrikes — now led by NATO — Gadhafi loyalists have retaken much of the territory the rebels had captured since airstrikes began March 19. Rebels had advanced overnight to the west gate of Brega, a town important to Libya's oil industry that has gone back and forth between rebel and loyalist hands. They were in Brega at dawn, but they soon pulled out under heavy shelling from Gadhafi's forces.

The fighting has highlighted the rebels' weaknesses: Some ran screaming to cars after being frightened by the outgoing fire from their own side.