

US Checking Reports of Gadhafi's Capture, Death

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The  **Moscow Times**

U.S. officials scrambled to check reports on Thursday that deposed Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi had died, an outcome that could help stabilize the war-torn North African country.

Gadhafi was wounded in the head and legs as he tried to flee in a convoy that came under attack from NATO warplanes at dawn near his hometown of Sirte, a senior official with Libya's National Transitional Council told Reuters.

Administration officials, including those at the State Department and Pentagon, were trying to confirm the report.

In the past, some reports about Gadhafi's whereabouts and the fate of his sons have proved false.

NATO said its aircraft attacked two military vehicles near Sirte at about 8:30a.m. local time on Thursday but could not confirm that Gadhafi was a passenger.

U.S. warplanes were not involved in any air strikes in Libya at that time, a Pentagon spokesman said.

Gadhafi's death followed months of NATO military action in Libya that began over a government crackdown against pro-democracy protesters inspired by protests in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt that ended in the overthrow of longstanding autocratic leaders.

Senator John McCain, top Republican on the Armed Services Committee, said it was time for the United States to deepen its support for Libya's move toward democracy and safeguard human rights.

"The death of Moammar Gadhafi marks an end to the first phase of the Libyan revolution," McCain said in a statement. "Now the Libyan people can focus all of their immense talents on strengthening their national unity, rebuilding their country and economy."

It was not clear if McCain had independent confirmation of Gadhafi's death.

The United States led the initial air strikes on Gadhafi's forces but quickly handed the lead over to NATO, while taking a secondary role to Britain and France.

The NATO bombing campaign helped Libya's rebels take power.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on Tuesday became the most senior U.S. official to visit Tripoli since Gadhafi's four-decade rule ended in August.

Clinton hailed "Libya's victory." But her visit was marked by tight security in a sign of worries that the country's new rulers have yet to establish full control over the country.

Gadhafi was wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of ordering the killing of civilians.

He was believed to be hiding deep in Libya's Sahara desert. His wife, two sons and a daughter fled to neighboring Algeria shortly after Tripoli fell to rebel forces in August.

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