

Libyan Commander in Chad Joins Opposition

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[Text] London, March 25 (AFP) — The commander of Libyan forces in Chad, Colonel Khalifah Bilqasim Haftar, has defected to the principal Libyan opposition group, the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL), a Front communique said here Friday.

Col. Haftar announced his decision Friday on the Front's radio station, the Voice of the Libyan People. He is committed to overthrowing the "terrorist and tyrannical" regime of Colonel Mu'ammar Qadhafi, the communique said.

According to Col. Haftar, hundreds of Libyan officers and soldiers captured by Chadian forces in fighting between Chad and Libya are prepared to fight "for the removal of (Colonel) Qadhafi from power and the establishment of a national constitutional rule in a free Libya".

Col. Haftar, 45, took part in the 1969 coup which overthrew the Libyan monarchy. He was named commander of the Libyan Armed Forces in Chad in 1980-81 and again in 1986.

Since 1973 Libya has been engaged in a territorial dispute with Chad over the Aozou Strip, in northern Chad, which it claims under the terms of an unratified 1935 treaty between Italy and France, the former colonial powers.

The NFSL, formed in 1981 and based in Sudan, is led by Muhammad Yusif Maqaryaf.