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Al Jazeera

Libyan rebels in retreat

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Libyan rebels, who for weeks rapidly advanced to the capital Tripoli in a bid to oust **Muammar Gaddafi**, appear to be losing momentum as the better armed government forces regain control of several towns in the east of the vast North African country.

Brega, the **scene of a fierce battle** just over a week ago, is the latest town recaptured by Libyan government forces on Saturday, as rebel fighters retreated in the face of intense air and ground firepower.

Al Jazeera's Nick Clark, reporting from the town of Tobruk, said that Gaddafi forces "are now in a good position to take on Benghazi," Libya's second largest city and a rebel stronghold.

Diplomatic pressure is having little impact on the fighting, as forces loyal to the Libyan leader continue to push eastward into territory held by the rebels.

Gaddafi's forces, with air supremacy and a big advantage in tanks, are maintaining the momentum on the ground.

But while his forces were advancing eastward, Al Jazeera's Tony Birtley reported from Benghazi that they were facing resistance from the rebels and that progress was slowed.

Gaddafi's forces have not used the full clout of their superior airpower, raising fears in the opposition stronghold of Benghazi.

"When all that is employed, as the full might of his force is unleashed, there's concern here," he reported.

'Global inaction'

There were conflicting reports on which side controls Ras Lanuf, the main oil port town, where the opposition's advance **stalled** on Thursday.

"We're hearing the opposition forces are back in control of Ras Lanuf at the moment, although during the day, Gaddafi forces come back in," Clark said.

Neither side had full control on Saturday, as fighting continued. Gaddafi's warplanes were carrying out air strikes seemingly unhindered by insurgent anti-aircraft guns mounted on pick-up trucks.

Many rebels were angry at what they perceive as international inaction.

"Where is the West? How are they helping? What are they doing," shouted one angry fighter.

The resurgent Gaddafi forces also crushed the revolt in Az Zawiyah, a town 50km west of Tripoli and held by rebels for days against a major offensive.

Al Jazeera's Charles Stratford reported that pro-Gaddafi forces appear to be in full control of the town on Saturday, though rebels are vowing to keep fighting.

Foreign journalists brought to the city centre by government forces on Friday saw buildings scorched, patches of fresh paint and loyalists chanting "I love Gaddafi".

"The situation is that nothing is happening. It's just some gangs and people who like to destroy the country. Then the Libyan army came and cleaned everything up as nothing had happened," Mohamed Ali, a Gaddafi supporter, said.

Witnesses said government forces had destroyed a graveyard where rebels had buried their dead.

Journalists were instructed to film what appeared to be hastily made graves.

It is unclear how many people, rebel fighters or otherwise, were killed in the fighting in Az Zawiyah.

The only town holding out in western Libya was Misurata, about 200km east of Tripoli. It was calm on Friday, but rebels said they were expecting an attack in the near future.