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Libya says 64 killed in western military strikes

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At least 64 people have died in military strikes by European and US forces, a Libyan government official said Sunday.

Broadcaster Al Arabiya quoted the health official as saying that the toll had increased from the 48 cited by the Libyan armed forces. An estimated 150 people have been injured in the strikes.

Earlier Sunday, Al Arabiya reported that 90 people were killed, citing medical sources.

Libyan opposition forces warned that Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi could resort to the use of chemical weapons against rebels in the eastern city of Benghazi, according to a report published after the first air strikes overnight.

A French fighter jet launched the first attack Saturday evening, as the west began enforcing a UN-sanctioned no-fly zone over the conflict-ridden north African country. A Libyan military vehicle on the ground was destroyed in the bombing.

US and British ships later fired more than 100 Tomahawk cruise missiles at more than 20 air defences by the capital Tripoli, Gaddafi's stronghold, and the western city of Misrata.

In a statement carried by state television, the Libyan army said the cities of Sirte, Benghazi,

Misrata and Zuwarah were also hit.

Gaddafi vowed to defend his country against 'colonial aggression' and declared he would open arms depots to 'all Libyans' to defend the country's independence.

'It is possible that he (Gaddafi) would hit Benghazi using chemical weapons,' a member of the National Council, formed by the rebels to give the uprising a political face, was quoted as saying by the Asharq Al-Awsat newspaper.

The member, who spoke on condition of anonymity for security reasons, said the rebels have seized a weapons depot that contained internationally prohibited gas near the Benina airport in Benghazi, the rebel stronghold.

World leaders had given Gaddafi an ultimatum Friday to enforce a ceasefire against anti-government rebels and halt attacks on civilians, or face military action that was approved by the UN Security Council Thursday and earlier backed by the Arab League.

Russia and China have issued statements opposing the air strikes. The two countries, along with Brazil, Germany and India, abstained from voting on the draft resolution Thursday while the US, France and Britain voted in favour.