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Al Jazeera

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi arrested in Libya

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Muammar Gaddafi's son and one-time heir apparent Saif al-Islam has been detained in the southern desert, Libya's interim justice minister and other officials have said.

Fighters from the western mountain city of Zintan announced his capture on Saturday as gunfire and car horns marked jubilation across the country at the seizure of the British-educated 39-year-old who a year ago seemed set for a dynastic succession to rule.

Saif al-Islam and three armed companions were taken without a fight overnight, officials said, and Gaddafi's son was not injured, unlike Gaddafi himself, who was killed last month after being captured by fighters in his home town of Sirte.

"We have arrested Saif al-Islam Gaddafi in [the] Ubari area," Justice Minister Mohammed al-Alagy said, adding that the younger Gaddafi, wanted for crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague, was not injured.

Al Jazeera's Anita McNaught, reporting from the coastal city of Misrata, said that residents were out in their cars celebrating the news.

The Zintan fighters, one of the powerful militia factions holding power in a country still without a government, said they planned to keep him detained in Zintan until there was an administration to hand him over to.

Prime minister-designate Abdurrahim El-Keib is scheduled to form a government by Tuesday, and the fate of Saif al-Islam, who Libyans want to try at home before, possibly,

handing him over to the ICC, will be an early test of its authority.

Gaddafi's beating, abuse and ultimate death in the custody of former rebel fighters was an embarrassment to the previous transitional government. Officials in Tripoli said they were determined to handle his son's case with more order.

A fighter from the anti-Gaddafi force, the Khaled bin al-Waleed Brigade, which said it seized him in the wilderness near the oil town of Obari told Free Libya television: "We got a tip he had been staying there for the last month.

"They couldn't get away because we had a good plan," Wisam Dughaly added, saying Saif al-Islam had been using 4x4 vehicle: "He was not hurt and will be taken safely for trial so Libyans will be able to prosecute him and get back their money.

"We will take him to Zintan for safekeeping to keep him alive until a government is formed and then we will hand him over as soon as possible," Dughaly said.

He added that Saif al-Islam, once seen as a reformer who engineered his father's rapprochement with the West but who is now wanted at The Hague for war crimes against the rebels, appeared to have been hiding out in the desert since fleeing the tribal bastion of Bani Walid, near Tripoli, in October.

Justice minister Alagy said he was in touch with the ICC over how to deal with Gaddafi, either at home or The Hague.

He told Al Jazeera: "We Libyans do not oppose the presence of international monitors to monitor the trial procedures that will take place for the symbols of the former regime."

Other Libyan officials have said a trial in Libya should first address killings, repression and wholesale theft of public funds over the four decades of the elder Gaddafi's personal rule.

After that, the ICC might try him for alleged orders to kill unarmed demonstrators after February's revolt.

There was no word of the other official wanted by the ICC, former intelligence chief Abdullah al-Senussi.

Bashir Thaelba, a Zintan commander told reporters in Tripoli: "The rebels of Zintan announce that Saif al-Islam Gaddafi has been arrested along with three of his aides today," Thaelba said in remarks carried on Libyan television.

"We hope at this historical moment that the future of Libya will be bright."