

Gaddafi to Meet With South Africa President Zuma, Peace Deal Ahead?

By [Anugrah Kumar](#)

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Two days before he plans to meet Muammar al-Gaddafi in Tripoli, South African President Jacob Zuma has claimed that the rebels accept African Union's peace efforts.

A source close to Zuma told South Africa's Mail & Guardian daily yesterday that it was the rebels who urged the South African president to meet Gaddafi. This contradicts reports in the international media saying pro-democracy rebels in Libya do not trust African Union's diplomatic efforts which are apparently sympathetic towards Gaddafi.

According to a newspaper in Libya, The Tripoli Post, Zuma's talks will focus on an "exit strategy" for Gaddafi as the South African president has working on the exit plan along with Turkey.

However, Zuma's endeavours to broker peace in Libya are likely to lack credibility. "The president is going to see if he can bring sanity to the issues. He wants to have a real discussion," Mail & Guardian quoted the source as saying. But the source added that Zuma's meeting with Gaddafi will be held in private. "He can't take other people along."

The African Union thinks the solution to the conflict lies in an immediate ceasefire leading to talks on transforming Libya to a democracy, a political settlement between the government and rebels, and suspension of NATO airstrikes. It also calls for unrestricted humanitarian aid and protection of foreign nationals in the areas under Gaddafi's control.

The Libyan government has welcomed Zuma's mediation efforts but rebels maintain that any initiative that intends to keep Gaddafi or his family in power will fail.

Libyan Deputy Foreign Minister Khaled Kaaim told the media late last night that the Gaddafi-led regime was not concerned by the Group of Eight's (G8) May 26 call for Russia's mediation role to end the civil war in Libya. "The G8 is an economic summit. We are not concerned by its decisions," Kaaim was quoted as saying. He stressed that the crisis could be resolved only through the African Union.

After his meeting with Gaddafi in Tripoli on April 10, Zuma claimed that the Libyan government had accepted a deal by the African Union to end the conflict. The African Union mission Zuma led in April comprised representatives from five nations, including Mauritania, Mali, Congo and Uganda, and had the approval of the European Union. While the other representatives of the mission travelled to Benghazi to also meet rebel leaders, Zuma returned to his country after meeting Gaddafi.

Amid intensified diplomatic efforts by the African Union, NATO has also strengthened its resolve. Tasked by a UN resolution to enforce a no-fly zone over Libya to protect civilians, NATO is now deploying attack helicopters over the North African country for the first time, British Prime Minister David Cameron confirmed today.

The deployment of British Apache helicopters follows the G8 summit in France which ended yesterday stating that Gaddafi and the Libyan government had failed to fulfil their responsibility to protect the Libyan population and had lost all legitimacy. "He has no future in a free, democratic Libya. He must go."

The ongoing armed conflict in Libya between anti-Gaddafi forces seeking his ouster and the Gaddafi-led government began over three months ago after a series of peaceful protests were violently repressed by security personnel.

The rebels' coalition Transitional National Council, based in Benghazi, is determined to force Gaddafi to go and is believed to be closer to Western nations than the African Union.

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