

PUBLIC

ANNEX 9.28

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Royal Air Force airlifts 150 in second Libya rescue

Three RAF Hercules aircraft have rescued a further 150 people - including 20 Britons - from the Libyan desert, the defence secretary has said.

The first and second aircraft have landed in Malta and the third is due to arrive shortly, said Liam Fox.

One plane suffered minor damage after coming under small-arms fire, the Ministry of Defence has since revealed.

David Cameron said he was "delighted" at the rescue and called on Libyan leader Col Muammar Gaddafi to "go now".

The prime minister paid tribute to the armed forces' bravery in carrying out an operation "that was not without its difficulties".

Some of those rescued have described the moment the Hercules was shot at above a strip south west of Benghazi, forcing it to abandon a landing.

One British oil worker said: "The aircraft took two hits on the right hand side of the fuselage, you just heard "bang bang" as the rounds actually struck."

Another said after failing to land at two blocked off fields, the Hercules was trying again at a third when the firing started, forcing them to abort.

The Ministry of Defence said: "We can confirm that during the operation... one of our C130 aircraft appears to have suffered minor damage consistent with small arms fire.

"There were no injuries to passengers or crew and the aircraft returned safely to Malta."

Meanwhile, the Royal Navy frigate HMS Cumberland has left Benghazi for Malta carrying about 200 civilians, including 50 Britons.

The Foreign Office believes the bulk of British nationals who want to leave are now out of Libya, said BBC security correspondent Frank Gardner.

Two RAF Hercules flew 150 oil workers, many of them British nationals, to the safety of Malta on Saturday.

One flight carrying some of the rescued workers - 79 of whom are British - arrived at Gatwick on Sunday, followed by a second, carrying 25 Britons, early on Monday morning.

Quality control manager Mike O'Donoghue, from Bridlington, North Yorkshire, was among those rescued from a compound in the southern region of Libya.

"About a week ago... we were overrun by local criminal militia. They were coming on site with guns and knives, and intimidating and threatening - loosening off rounds."

The Foreign Office made arrangements to evacuate people from that region, he said, adding that their rescuers were "magic people".

"They're the best in the world. You know we owe them perhaps our lives. We don't know. But they were certainly risking theirs."

Embassy closed

Those on board HMS Cumberland will be met in Malta, after a 12-hour sea journey - and flown to the UK on Monday or Tuesday.

The government said HMS York remained in the region and was "ready to assist as required".

More details about routes out of Libya are on the [Foreign Office website](#) and all options to depart Libya will also be updated on the [Foreign Office on Twitter](#).

The FCO is also urging those who have already left Libya to contact them on 0207 008 0000 to ensure they have been accounted for.

About 100,000 people have fled anti-government unrest in Libya over the past week, the UN estimates.

As the Libyan leader, Col Muammar Gaddafi, battles for political survival amid an uprising that began in the east of the country, the UK's foreign secretary said it was time for him to step down.

William Hague told the BBC: "Of course, it is time for Col Gaddafi to go, that is the best hope for Libya."

The UK has frozen his British-held assets and those of his family, and withdrawn their diplomatic immunity on British soil.

It followed UN Security Council sanctions agreed on Saturday backing an arms embargo and asset freeze, and referring Col Gaddafi to the International Criminal Court for alleged crimes against humanity.

Business Secretary Vince Cable has also banned the unlicensed export of any uncirculated Libyan banknotes.

It came after the Libyan regime had asked to ship an estimated £900m worth of British-printed banknotes to Tripoli.

The Foreign Office has closed the British embassy in Tripoli, leaving a skeleton staff working in a different building.

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