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## Divided, France Welcomes and Condemns Qaddafi

By [ELAINE SCIOLINO](#)PARIS, Dec. 10 — Redemption, at last, seems to have come for Col. [Muammar el-Qaddafi](#).

The veteran Libyan leader began a five-day official visit to [France](#) on Monday — his first in more than three decades. His French hosts even pitched his heated Bedouin-style tent for receiving guests in the garden of the Paris mansion that houses visiting dignitaries.

But the visit was sharply criticized, even within the ranks of President [Nicolas Sarkozy](#)'s government.

“Colonel Qaddafi must understand that our country is not a doormat on which a leader, terrorist or not, can come to wipe the blood of his crimes off his feet,” France’s secretary of state for human rights, Rama Yade, said in an interview in Monday’s issue of the newspaper *Le Parisien*. “France must not receive this kiss of death.”

Calling the timing of Colonel Qaddafi’s visit on World Human Rights Day “scandalously powerful,” Ms. Yade added of [Libya](#): “People disappear in this country, and no one knows what has become of them. The press is not free. Prisoners are tortured. The death penalty has been abolished for Libyans but it is still used for sub-Saharan Africans.”

She told RTL radio that she would be attending the annual dinner at the International Federation of Human Rights in the evening — not the dinner in the colonel’s honor at the Élysée Palace, to which she had not been invited anyway.

Foreign Minister [Bernard Kouchner](#), a long-time human rights activist, said he would not attend the Élysée dinner either. “By happy coincidence,” Mr. Kouchner explained, he had another commitment. The Foreign Ministry said he was having dinner with his German counterpart.

After meeting with Colonel Qaddafi in the afternoon, Mr. Sarkozy told reporters he had insisted to the Libyan that “it was necessary to continue to move forward on the path of human rights.”

Mr. Sarkozy also replied to his critics, saying, “It is rather beautiful the principle that consists in not getting yourself wet, not taking risks,” he said, and “being so certain of everything you think while you’re having your latte on the Boulevard Saint-Germain.”

The visit to Paris was Mr. Sarkozy’s reward to Colonel Qaddafi for his orchestration of the release last July of Bulgarian medical workers and a [Palestinian](#) doctor who had been convicted of deliberately infecting children with the virus that causes AIDS.

That gesture removed a major irritant in the relationship between France and Libya, opening the way for improved political ties — and billions of dollars in trade.



“If we don’t welcome countries that are starting to take the path of respectability, what can we say to those that leave that path?” Mr. Sarkozy said at a news conference in Lisbon over the weekend.

Jean-David Levitte, Mr. Sarkozy’s diplomatic adviser, recently said that a country like Libya had a “right to redemption.”

Mr. Sarkozy visited Libya last July immediately after his wife, Cécilia, helped to arrange the release of the medical workers. (The Sarkozys have since divorced.)

At that time, the French leader showered his host with good wishes, and the two countries announced a generous arms deal. They also signed a memorandum of understanding for France to build a nuclear reactor in Libya to power water desalinization.

Since their release, two of the medical workers have written memoirs in which they say they were tortured by Libyan guards.

Colonel Qaddafi, who is in his mid-60s, last visited France 34 years ago, his first trip to a Western country after he seized power in 1969 in a coup that overthrew the monarchy. He was received at the Élysée Palace by Georges Pompidou, then the French president.

During that trip, he declared that the “only permanent settlement” of the Middle East conflict was for all Jews who moved to Israel after 1948 to return to their lands of origin.

After all this time, the French government was so eager to make Colonel Qaddafi comfortable that it abandoned protocol and let him pitch his receiving tent in the garden of the Hotel Marigny, the 19th-century mansion close to the president’s Élysée Palace that serves as an official guest house for state visits.

“I don’t think that Colonel Qaddafi sleeps in the tent, but conforming to the tradition of the desert that he follows to the letter, Colonel Qaddafi always travels with a tent that he pitches as soon as he can,” David Martinon, the Élysée spokesman, said last week.

Before the dinner Monday evening, Mr. Sarkozy met with Colonel Qaddafi at the Élysée Palace; they will meet again on Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Colonel Qaddafi — or “Brother Guide” as he is known back home — will visit the National Assembly, where a parliamentary committee is investigating the warming of France’s relationship with Libya. According to press reports, he also will meet a delegation of women from France’s troubled suburbs, deliver a speech at [Unesco](#), the Paris-based [United Nations](#) cultural organization, and take a tour of Versailles.

The Sarkozy government hopes to complete a number of deals during the trip. Colonel Qaddafi signed a “cooperation agreement” with France to develop civilian nuclear energy, including the purchase of one or several nuclear reactors. A memorandum on the subject was signed in July in Tripoli. The two countries also signed a memorandum of cooperation saying Libya would enter exclusive negotiations with France to purchase military equipment, Agence France-Presse said.

Libya has steadily shed its rogue-state reputation since 2003, when it announced the end of its nuclear weapons program, turning over crucial information to the [International Atomic Energy Agency](#). That year, Libya formally took responsibility for the bombing of a Pan Am flight over Scotland in 1988 and agreed to pay compensation to the families of 270 people killed in the crash.

France's relationship with Libya improved after the two countries reached agreement in 2004 on a Libyan compensation package for the victims of a French commercial airliner bombed over Niger in 1989. The crash killed 170 people, including 54 French citizens.

*Ariane Bernard contributed reporting.*

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