

The New York Times

Britain Sends Supplies to Libyan Rebels

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Published: July 01, 2011

Britain is providing limited assistance to the Libyan rebels fighting the forces of Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi, including protective clothing for police officers, Foreign Secretary William Hague said on Thursday, a day after France acknowledged providing light weapons to the rebels.

The British military has furnished 5,000 sets of body armor, 6,650 police uniforms, and 5,000 high visibility vests and T-shirts, Foreign Minister William Hague said in a written statement to Parliament, adding that the supply of such equipment was "fully in line" with United Nations resolutions governing arms embargoes.

"This equipment will enable the civilian police to carry out their functions more securely and better protect National Transitional Council representatives and the significant international and NGO communities in Benghazi, Misurata and other areas of Libya," Mr. Hague said.

On Wednesday, a spokesman in Paris said the French military had provided the rebels with arms and ammunition, including assault rifles, machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades and launchers, the first Western government to acknowledge having done so. The aid, which was delivered along with food and medicines, did not include heavy weapons, he said, and was appropriate for civilians to use in self-defense.

With a "no-boots-on-the-ground policy" in Libya, the French, British and United States governments are hoping that the rebels, with the aid of alliance airstrikes, will be able to topple the Qaddafi government.

The British government said that it believes shipping arms to the rebels would be legal in some cases, a Foreign Office spokesman said, but is not doing so now.

"We do think the United Nations resolutions allow in certain limited circumstances defensive weapons to be provided," said the spokesman, who cannot be identified in line with government rules. "But the U.K. is not engaged in that. Other countries will interpret the resolution in their own way."

Also Thursday, the NATO chief, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, said the alliance was not involved in the French operation, Reuters reported
