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Situation Report – Libya’s Worsening Factional Struggles

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In the midst of Libya's capital, rival factions clashed on Saturday, marking the most severe violence in two years. What was once a months-long political standoff has now escalated into urban warfare, raising concerns about the potential for a broader conflict to erupt. This sustained battle for control over the government could easily plunge Libya back into a state of full-scale war, undoing the relative peace that had prevailed for the past two years—a period that saw attempts at a political resolution and plans for national elections, which unfortunately remained unrealized.

Reports emerged of clashes erupting in Tripoli, the Libyan capital, following the capture of Mahmoud Hamza, the commander of the formidable 444 brigade, by a rival armed force known as the Special Deterrence Force. This event has exacerbated tensions further.

444 Brigade is known for its role in establishing security and combating smuggling activities in the country. The two dominant factions, having consolidated their military might, are now engaged in fierce confrontations, a situation that poses grave risks. Although clashes have periodically occurred in various parts of northwest Libya, the ongoing violence in Tripoli is particularly intense and unsettling. The history of Libya has been marred by turmoil ever since the NATO-backed uprising in 2011, with territorial control split between opposing eastern and western factions since 2014. Although a ceasefire has nominally been in place since 2020, prospects for a lasting political solution have remained elusive. The struggle for power in Libya has crystallized between the Government of National Unity (GNU) based in Tripoli, led by Abdulhamid al-Dbeibah, and a competing administration led by Fathi Bashagha, backed by the parallel parliament in the eastern part of the country. Notably, an offensive launched in 2019 by eastern commander Khalifa Haftar, supported by the eastern-based parliament, ultimately collapsed in 2020. This event led to a ceasefire agreement and a United Nations-backed peace process.



The ceasefire framework established Dbeibah's GNU with the aim of governing the entire country and overseeing planned national elections, initially set for the previous December.

Regrettably, disputes surrounding the election prompted its abandonment. The situation escalated when the parliament declared Dbeibah's mandate expired and appointed Bashagha as the replacement. Dbeibah vehemently rejected the parliament's authority to replace him and pledged to step down solely after elections were held. A pivotal moment occurred in May when Bashagha attempted to enter Tripoli, resulting in a violent confrontation that forced him to leave the city. Subsequent developments have brought about shifts within armed factions aligned with the major coalitions in the Tripoli region. While Haftar maintains close ties with the eastern-based parliament, certain groups within Tripoli still staunchly oppose any coalition involving his influence. The latest round of clashes in Tripoli has been attributed to fighters aligned with Bashagha, who reportedly opened fire on a convoy within the capital.

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