

Summary

Airstrikes in Zawiya by the west-Libyan UN-backed Government of National Unity (GNU) have complicated months of inter-militia clashes in western Libya, especially in Tripoli and Zawiya. PM Dbeibeh claims to have targeted a smuggling operation, but his opponents have denounced the airstrikes as a political power play. As a response, some militias have threatened with retaliations, increasing the likelihood of insecurity in the west. Meanwhile, tensions between east and west Libya remain as talks on national elections have not yet delivered result.

Recent events and developments

From May 25 to June 2, the Government of National Unity, led by PM Dbeibeh, carried out drone strikes aimed at Zawiya, about 45km west of Tripoli. At least 2 people died. As a result, some armed groups have threatened an escalation of violence as retaliation for the GNU's airstrikes. The attacks signify an escalation by Dbeibeh, whose position is weakened by months of inter-militia clashes in Tripoli, Zawiya, and other areas in the west of Libya, which his GNU formally controls. Usage of rocket-propelled grenades (RPG's) has been common, causing unintended civilian casualties. Battles have regularly taken place between militias aligned with the GNU, exemplifying the lack of GNU control over these groups. To consolidate his position, Dbeibeh on June 6 created a new government militia. Meanwhile, tensions persist between western Libya and eastern Libya, controlled by General Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA), as exemplified by the eastern administration's threat to halt the West's oil exports on June 24. The political situation in eastern Libya has also been destabilized by the suspension of PM Bashagha, who some critics blame for not being able to take Tripoli by force. On June 19, the UN stated that the conditions are currently not conducive for national elections.

Impact assessment

Whereas talks between the East and West are still ongoing, the internal instability and politicking in both camps suggest that neither Haftar nor Dbeibeh would be willing to cede power. If both parties attempt to continue their strenuous hold on power, the likelihood of elections being held in 2023 decreases significantly and the probability of renewed East-West conflict increases. Infighting in the West is especially likely to continue as Dbeibeh attempts to regain control. East-West relations are further complicated by claims that the compound of a member of the eastern House of Representatives was targeted in the GNU's airstrikes. Whereas terrorist activity has seen a decrease in 2022, terrorist organizations have been known for exploiting the government's lack of control, thus terrorist attacks remain possible. Furthermore, retaliations by armed groups may cause the unstable situation to spiral into a perpetual cycle of escalations. Civilians displeased with incessant insecurity may take to the streets in demonstrations, as has happened in the past. Demonstrations can turn violent without notice, as confrontations between protestors and security forces are common.

Advice from Forth Global

- Make sure contingency and security plans are updated to the current security circumstances and adequately distributed to employees on the ground. This includes the decision-making process on relocation, evacuation and hibernation.
- Make sure all employees travelling to Libya undertake a three-day HEAT training prior to deployment.
- Monitor local news and liaise with local contacts to be informed of relevant developments.
- Avoid all non-essential travel to Zawiya. If travel is necessary, plan your journey ahead, check the state of roads and travel with security detail in convoy.

Customized advice

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