

# Libya: Clashes in Tripoli

May 14, 2025



## Summary

On the night between May 12 and 13, clashes erupted between governmental forces and armed groups in Tripoli, following the assassination of the leader of a major group, the Stability and Support Apparatus (SSA). The assassination occurred under unclear circumstances, possibly an ambush, and the subsequent clashes resulted in the killing of at least 6 combatants. At the moment, the crisis appears to have been contained and a ceasefire was announced by Government of National Unity's (GNU) officials. On May 13, the GNU announced the beginning of a security operation against irregular armed groups, likely aimed at strengthening its position in the capital.

## Recent events and developments

On the night between May 12 and 13, clashes erupted in Tripoli between the Stability and Support Apparatus (SSA) and the Government of National Unity (GNU) forces. Violence sparked in the Abu Salim, Salah al Din, and Mashrou areas following the assassination of Abdul Ghani al Kikli, the commander of the SSA, which occurred under unspecified circumstances. Six confirmed killed were reported and the number is expected to grow. GNU's Minister of Interior urged all Tripoli residents to remain at home and emergency protocols were activated to prepare local medical facilities to treat potential numerous casualties. On May 13, GNU's Prime Minister announced the execution of a security operation against irregular armed groups with the mobilization of the 444<sup>th</sup> and the 111<sup>st</sup> Brigades. Since the government was established in 2021, the SSA militia has served along the ranks of the GNU's security architecture together with other armed groups to provide political stability in western Libya and had become one of the most powerful militias. Abdul Ghani was a prominent figure in Tripoli, who exercised control over much territory and key institutions in the capital, including security agencies, ministries, financial entities, and prisons. This allowed to secure a strong grip on important affairs, such as the distribution of cash transfers and the smuggling of immigrants. On May 14, the security operation appears to have targeted another armed group, the Special Deterrence Force (RADA), with clashes reported in the areas of Ain Zara, Ras Hassan, and Ben Ashour. Flights at Tripoli's Mitiga International Airport were suspended and diverted to Misrata Airport until further notice. As of now, a de-escalation of the crisis was reported as well as the announcement of a temporary ceasefire by local authorities.

## Impact assessment

The circumstances around the assassination of SSA's leader are still unclear. Local media suggest that Al Kikli and some of his troops were caught in an ambush, with the excuse of conducting negotiations over unspecified subjects. Al Kikli's assassination and the resulting clashes are likely driven by a multitude of factors. Firstly, GNU's security operation likely stemmed from the government's necessity to reduce the SSA's grip over Tripoli and its affairs. This could be perceived as an attempt by the GNU to consolidate its position in the capital, by downsizing the role of armed groups, similarly to how General Khalifa Haftar seized control on Benghazi and the Cyrenaica over the last decade. Additionally, tensions between militias over territorial disputes and control on businesses may have fuelled the crisis. The prolonged fighting in Tripoli increases the risk of attracting further armed groups into the confrontation, potentially leading to a broader escalation. Although tensions were contained, it is not granted that the ceasefire will be respected and the next days will be crucial to understand how the situation will evolve. However, the scale of the crisis is likely to remain circumscribed to Tripoli, and perhaps its surrounding areas, and to limited local actors. The clashes could indirectly affect Libya's stability, by delaying the political efforts of the two administrations to restore unity and by increasing the friction among local – governmental and affiliated – actors. As the SSA appears to have been largely dismantled during a moment of unprecedented military movements around Tripoli, key changes in the governance of prisons and detention centres for immigrants could be expected but will unlikely alter the flow of immigrants departing from Libya to Europe, if not for negotiating purposes.

## Advice from Forth Global

- Avoid travelling to western Libya and specifically to Tripoli. If operating there, be ready to implement hibernation plans.
- Do not move inside Tripoli, if not for strictly necessary reasons and refrain from expressing any political opinion.
- Avoid areas where appealing targets are located (military bases and checkpoints, government buildings, prisons).
- Maintain constant contact with employees and partners on the ground to check for conditions and real time updates.
- Monitor governmental and reliable OSINT channels to remain up to date with timing and location of latest clashes.

### Customized advice

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