



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on January 16, 2012

Deadly Battles Still Rage in Libya as Rival Militias Clash

Sunday's outbreak of violence, however, was only the latest incident in what has become a deadly wave of turmoil across Libya. Rival militias struggling for power continue to wreak havoc — months after the death of Gadhafi — despite Western leaders such as President Obama having declared the international regime-change operation a success several months ago.



The new Libyan regime — [composed primarily of top-level Gadhafi functionaries, "former" terror leaders, and assorted radical Islamists](#) — has been trying in vain to disarm the various warring parties. Particular emphasis has been placed on subduing forces still loyal to the slain dictator.

So far, however, the disarmament campaign has met with little success, as roaming bands of heavily armed militants refuse to recognize the new rulers. Gadhafi is also reported to have distributed vast stockpiles of money and arms among his supporters before he was killed by NATO warplanes and insurgents on the ground.

The most recent round of violence in and around the capital began last week, [according to](#) the Associated Press. Militiamen from the town of Gharyan reportedly sought to arrest suspected Gadhafi loyalists supposedly being protected by a militia from the nearby village of Al-Asabia.

"They are supporters of the former regime still fighting and raising the green banner [associated with Gadhafi] of shame," an injured man lying in a hospital bed after the fighting [told](#) Al Jazeera. "They lift their banners and fight."

When the armed fighters in Asabia refused to surrender the suspects, a deadly shootout began. Eventually the confrontation escalated into rocket and mortar fire as interim "Defense Minister" Osama al-Juili arrived to broker a ceasefire agreement. He failed.

"A National Transitional Council (NTC) delegation is now in Gharyan," a spokesman for the city's "military council" was [quoted as saying](#) by Reuters on Saturday. "A ceasefire was reached about 3 p.m. but it did not hold."

The same spokesman, Ismail al-Ayeb, [told](#) Al Jazeera that the battle was started by fighters from the town of Asabia. He, too, blamed forces loyal to the old regime. "Our fight is not against Asabia, but against those who are pro-Gadhafi," Ayeb explained. "There is a huge stock of weaponry. This area hasn't been searched and disarmed. The weapons were not handed over to the defense ministry or the government, and the wanted people weren't turned in either."

Hospital officials in the area cited in news reports said at least five people had been killed in the clashes so far. Some 50 are reportedly wounded, with the tension showing no signs of abating any time soon.

But the deadly battle was hardly an isolated incident. Earlier this month, a powerful militia from the city



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of Misrata and an armed group from Tripoli exchanged machine-gun and anti-aircraft fire in the capital. At least four people were reportedly killed in that fight — one of many to rock Libya since the fall of Gadhafi.

Analysts and political leaders have been [warning](#) for months about the potential for more civil war. Foreign powers and the new rulers, meanwhile, have urged Libyans to submit to the National Transitional Council (NTC) as soon as possible to avoid further bloodshed.

But with so many competing interests and loyalties among Libyans and the foreign governments now deeply involved in the nation's affairs — not to mention the fresh memories on both sides of a bloody civil war — experts say that will not be easy. What will happen next remains to be seen, but the NTC is working feverishly to disarm militias or integrate them into government forces.

Since the fall of Gadhafi's brutal regime, human rights groups and self-styled international authorities have sought to investigate and prosecute war crimes committed by various parties to the civil war. Meanwhile, the new rulers in Tripoli — installed with massive Western military and financial assistance — have started an "integration" process with the terror regime ruling neighboring Sudan.

Western governments have remained relatively silent on Libya lately, having congratulated themselves and posed for photo-ops immediately following the brutal slaying of Gadhafi. But if something does not change soon in the oil-rich North African nation, the situation is expected to continue deteriorating, with dire consequences for the war-weary population — and possibly beyond.

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