

UN envoy warns of ‘widening conflagration’ amid Haftar's push to seize Tripoli



United Nations, April 19 (RHC)-- The United Nations envoy to Libya has warned of a “a widening conflagration” in the North African country amid a Saudi-backed push by strongman Khalifa Haftar to seize the capital Tripoli.

Ghassan Salame said that international divisions have emboldened Haftar, the leader of the so-called Libyan National Army (LNA), to launch his offensive to oust the government in Tripoli.

Libya has been divided between two rival governments -- the House of Representatives based in the eastern city of Tobruk and the Government of National Accord (GNA) headed by Fayeze al-Serraj in Tripoli.

Haftar, who is presumably loyal to the government in the east, commenced his deadly campaign on April 4th to conquer Tripoli, in a move rebuked by UN chief Antonio Guterres and the UN Security Council.

Salame, the head of the UN Support Mission in Libya, said the fighting south of Tripoli between Haftar's forces and those of the GNA have reached a “deadlock.” He said that after the very first successes of the

Libyan National Army two weeks ago, we are witnessing a military stalemate,

Earlier this week, the Security Council was divided on how to defuse the crisis after fresh talks on a draft resolution demanding a truce in Tripoli failed to yield an agreement. During the council's session, Germany -- which holds the council presidency -- proposed the draft resolution but Russia and South Africa opposed it, arguing that Haftar's offensive is unlikely to produce a humanitarian crisis.

The 75-year-old Haftar who enjoys the loyalty of a group of armed militia and backing from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Egypt has taken upon himself to protect the government in Tobruk. Armed forces and militia loyal to the GNA have been fighting back.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the fighting has so far killed at least 205 people and wounded more than 900 others. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that more than 25,000 people have been displaced by the clashes.

Libya has been the scene of increasing violence since 2011, when the country's leader Muammar Gaddafi was toppled from power after an uprising and a NATO military intervention. His ouster created a huge power vacuum, leading to chaos and the emergence of numerous groups, including the Daesh terrorist organization.

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