



### Rocket Attack in Tripoli Halts Libyan Peace Talks

An attack carried out by Libyan rebels has led to peace negotiations between Libya's warring factions being called off. A spokesman for the Libyan National Army (LNA), a rebel group led by General Khalifa Haftar, took credit for the rocket strike that targeted a port in Tripoli. The rebels said that the strike was aimed at a vessel that was carrying weapons supplied by Turkey, a claim that has been rebuked by officials in Ankara. After the strike, Libya's Tripoli-based and internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) withdrew from peace talks that were underway in Geneva. Representatives from various countries at the negotiations in Switzerland expressed displeasure at the escalation by Haftar's forces, including the Russian delegation, who has supported the rebels.

The peace talks in Geneva marked the first time that high-ranking military officials from both sides met face-to-face. The two sides, along with a number of mediators, were seeking to find agreement on a lasting ceasefire. Also included in the talks was finding a way to remove heavy weaponry from Libya. The weapons in question were imported illegally by both sides, breaking a United Nations-brokered arms embargo agreed upon in 2011. In recent days, European Union member states agreed to step up their efforts to enforce the arms embargo, which will increase in difficulty as a result of the escalation by the rebels.

Tripoli has been under siege for the best part of a year, as Khalifa Haftar seeks to overrun the Libyan capital and establish his own government. Following the rocket attack on the Tripoli port, Libya's national oil company had to order the evacuation of all tankers from the port, a move that can have a devastating effect on the civilian populace which relies heavily on shipping to sustain itself. Over 140,000 people have been displaced by the fighting near Tripoli as the power struggle in Libya continues. International leaders have warned that the more time passes without a political solution in Libya, the higher the likelihood of the situation devolving into a conflict resembling that of Yemen or Syria.

Khalifa Haftar reportedly agreed that a political solution was the way forward for Libya, but he has refused to this point to give the Government of National Accord any concessions. In previous peace talks, the GNA has demanded a withdrawal of Haftar's forces from the suburbs surrounding Tripoli, which the LNA has refused. The Government of National Accord has advocated for a political solution as well, but has now pulled out of the negotiations in Geneva. The United Nations' envoy to Libya, Ghassan Salame, was attempting to convince representatives from the GNA to continue talks in Switzerland, albeit with the condition of the negotiations restarting as indirect and through mediators. Further talks were scheduled to begin on February 26th, and those are now in jeopardy as well.