

-
-

• June 06, 2012

• **Rival Militias Still Fighting in Libya**

• by Carolyn Presutti

- Libya's first election in more than 40 years is scheduled in two weeks. But, some worry that the country's instability may mar the election or dim the hopes from last year's successful revolution.

Fadi Tarapolsi was at the White House the night Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's reign came to an end. "I'm on cloud nine right now, you know," he said.

Tarapolsi returned to Libya with his ailing father to celebrate his country's liberty.

"There's some frustration there and they want to see some movement, but, at the same time, we are basically building everything from scratch," he said. "So it's very important to do it right the first time."

In two weeks, Libyans will elect a 200-member assembly to write a constitution and select a cabinet - but the elections may be delayed. This week, Libyan authorities regained control of the country's main airport after it was briefly seized by militiamen armed with heavy machine guns.

Last month, several people died during a militia protest outside the prime minister's office. Several militias refuse to lay down their guns or join Libya's security force.

"A lot of the violence we've seen in the past six months has been the result of pre-existing tensions just boiling over," said Spencer Butts, with the Institute for the Study of War. "It's not necessarily violence that's directed at the authorities. A lot of it is tit-for-tat kidnappings or revenge killings that have spiralled out of control."

"It's almost at a tipping point now as far as with the small, little factions. It could develop into something more dangerous," said Tarapolsi.

Libyan American activist Ismail Suayah just returned from Libya, where he addressed several hundred people in Martyrs Square. He told Libyans to be patient and to support the national army as it establishes security and rebuilds the country.

"Young people are still in the militia? Yeah, for the lack of other things to do. The struggle for power? Sure, that's expected," Suayah stated. "The transitional government is not doing what people want? Sure, that's anticipated. These things are going to take time."

Suayah says when he visited Libya in years past, he'd see tears of joy, tempered with despair. Now he sees tears of joy, enhanced with hope, as Libyans await the election.

Four out of five eligible voters in Libya have registered to cast a vote. It will be the country's first democratic election after more than 40 years under the rule of Moammar Gadhafi.