



Libya and U.S. Policy

Libyans Reach Truce, Look to Elections

Ten years after a 2011 uprising toppled longtime authoritarian leader Muammar al Qadhafi, Libya has yet to make a transition to stable governing arrangements. Militias, local leaders, and coalitions of national figures backed by competing foreign patrons have remained the most powerful arbiters of public affairs.

Conflict re-erupted in Libya in April 2019, when a coalition of armed groups led by Qadhafi-era military defector Khalifa Haftar known as the Libyan National Army movement (LNA, in Arabic: “Libyan Arab Armed Forces,” LAAF) leveraged support from Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt to attempt to seize the capital, Tripoli, from the interim Government of National Accord (GNA) and local militias. With Turkish military support, the GNA and western Libyan militias forced the LNA to withdraw. Libya has remained divided since, with opposing forces separated by a line of control west of Sirte (Figure 1).

From April 2019 through December 2020, fighting between LNA forces, GNA supporters, and anti-LNA militias killed more than 500 civilians and displaced more than 200,000 people according to United Nations (U.N.) estimates. U.S. and U.N. officials have condemned “persistent” weapons shipments to Libya as violations of the U.N. arms embargo.

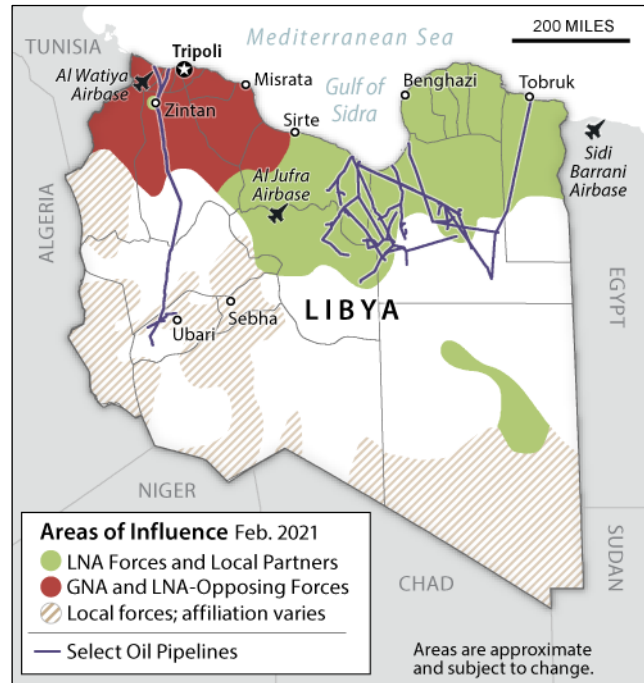
Since 2020, new multilateral diplomatic initiatives have sought to achieve a ceasefire among warring Libyan groups, reduce foreign interference, and relaunch political reconciliation. Meeting in Berlin in January 2020, Libyan rivals and foreign powers agreed to a 55-point agenda, including the establishment of a GNA-LNA Joint Military Commission (JMC, or “5+5” because of its ten members) to consult on requirements for a ceasefire. After U.N.-backed talks succeeded in October 2020 in establishing an interim, 90-day ceasefire, U.N. officials selected and convened a 75-member Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) to restart the country’s disrupted political transition.

Meeting under U.N. auspices, LPDF members agreed that Libya would hold a constitutional referendum prior to national parliamentary and executive elections on December 24, 2021 (the seventieth anniversary of Libyan independence). The LPDF also adopted rules for the selection of an interim executive authority to govern until the elections and oversee preparations. The Biden Administration supports maintaining the ceasefire and has pledged to assist in preparations for the planned elections.

Interim Executive Authority Selected

On February 5, members of the LPDF voted to select members for an interim three-person Presidential Council and interim Prime Minister. Choosing from lists that each drew members from Libya’s western, eastern, and southern regions, the LPDF narrowly selected a list of less well known figures over a list that included serving officials. The LPDF chose Mohamed Menfi of the eastern city of

Figure 1. Libya: Areas of Influence



- 2011** Uprising topples Muammar al Qadhafi.
- 2012** Parliamentary elections. Transitional cabinet seated.
- 2014** Constitutional referendum and parliamentary elections. Disputed results fuel conflict. U.S. diplomats depart.
- 2015** International mediation yields agreement to form Government of National Accord (GNA).
- 2016** Parliament withholds endorsement of GNA. Islamic State forces defeated in Sirte with U.S. military support.
- 2018** Libyan National Army consolidates control in east Libya.
- 2019** Libyan National Army launches offensive against Tripoli.
- 2020** U.N. supports ceasefire negotiations, selects Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) members. LPDF agrees to roadmap, plans December 2021 elections.
- 2021** LPDF selects Interim Executive Authority members.

Source: Prepared by CRS using media and social media reporting.

Tobruk to serve as chairman of the Presidential Council, with southerner Musa Al Koni and westerner Abdullah Al Lafi as his deputies. Misratan engineer and former Qadhafi-era official Abdul Hamid Dabaiba was chosen as Prime Minister-designate. Dabaiba must now propose a cabinet for a vote of confidence by the House of Representatives (HOR, Libya’s interim parliament, last elected in 2014). Should HOR members reject Dabaiba’s nominees, the LPDF may reconvene to consider the cabinet nominations.

Though many key actors have released statements welcoming the LPDF’s decisions, Libyan factions and their foreign supporters appear to retain deep differences in their preferred models for governance for the country, military command arrangements, resource sharing, the role of Islam

in public life, and Libya's international partnerships. Recent protests have demanded better services and economic relief. The United States and European leaders have jointly called "on all current Libyan authorities and actors to ensure a smooth and constructive handover of all competences and duties to the new unified executive authority."

Security Conditions Remain Tense

According to the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), "a de facto truce" prevailed in central Libya as of January 2021, and LNA forces have fortified positions along a front south and west of Sirte. The October 2020 ceasefire agreement called for the departure of mercenaries and foreign fighters along with the suspension of foreign training and the departure of trainers. However, as of February 2021, mercenaries reportedly remain in Libya, including forces affiliated with the Wagner Group of Russia. On January 22, 2021, press reports citing U.S. officials reported that Wagner Group mercenaries were constructing sophisticated defensive fortifications in LNA-controlled central Libya. Both sides have recruited and deployed Syrian militias. Turkish military advisers continue to train and assist GNA forces in accord with a 2019 Turkey-GNA security agreement. Weapons shipments to both sides reportedly continue.

U.N. officials estimate that as many as 1.2 million Libyans will require some form of humanitarian assistance in 2021. Recent U.N. data has identified more than 574,000 foreign migrants, more than 316,000 internally displaced persons, and nearly 44,000 refugees in Libya. Migrants remain especially vulnerable to extortion and other abuses.

U.N. Recommends Ceasefire Monitoring Mission

In December 2020, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres recommended that the Security Council amend UNSMIL's mandate to include support for a ceasefire monitoring mechanism. Guterres relayed the request of the Libyan JMC for "unarmed, non-uniformed individual international monitors to be deployed under the auspices of the United Nations." According to the Secretary-General, Libyan interlocutors "have also conveyed their firm position that no deployment of foreign forces of any kind, including United Nations uniformed personnel [i.e. peacekeepers], should occur on Libyan territory." In February, the Security Council directed the Secretary-General to deploy an advance monitoring mission.

UNSMIL is a "special political mission" and receives U.S. financial support indirectly through U.S. funding for the United Nations via the Contributions to International Organizations (CIO) account. Former U.N. Iraq and Lebanon envoy Ján Kubiš began serving as U.N. Special Envoy for Libya and head of UNSMIL on February 8.

Oil Sector Recovers, Finances Strained

Libya has the largest proven crude oil reserves in Africa, but conflict challenges and neglected infrastructure threaten the energy sector's operations. As of February, Libya produced more than 1 million barrels of oil per day, down from 1.4 million barrels per day in 2011. Oil revenues accrue to a National Oil Corporation account in accordance with an U.N.-brokered agreement. Since 2011, public debt has deepened and currency reserves have declined. Millions of Libyan households depend on public sector employment and subsidies, which dominate state spending.

Conflict Hampers COVID-19 Response

Years of division and conflict have weakened the Libyan health care system's ability to mitigate risks from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19). In August 2020, then-Acting UNSMIL head Stephanie Williams called "fragmented governance" a "serious obstacle to the COVID-19 response," but UNSMIL reported in January 2021 that it expected COVID-19 response plans would be consolidated in the near future. Libyan officials have reported more than 126,000 cases of COVID-19 and nearly 2,000 COVID-19 deaths, but there are clear limits in testing and gaps in public health monitoring capacity.

U.S. Policy and Outlook

U.S. officials engage Libyans and monitor U.S. aid programs via the Libya External Office (LEO) at the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia. For years, U.S. diplomats and officials have emphasized political solutions to Libya's conflicts, but have not convinced or compelled Libyans and their various patrons to disengage from confrontation. U.S. diplomats in July 2020 stated U.S. "opposition to all foreign interference," while engaging with all sides in an "active neutrality" approach. U.S. officials support the UNSMIL-led negotiation processes and (as noted) have called on all parties in Libya and foreign governments to support the decisions reached by the LPDF. Officials identify counterterrorism as the top U.S. priority in Libya, and balance Libya-related concerns with other U.S. goals in relation to foreign actors.

The U.S. military supported U.S. diplomatic initiatives and monitored and reported on the activities of Russian mercenaries and military equipment in Libya during 2020. U.S. forces have conducted intermittent targeted strikes against terrorist targets in Libya (most recently acknowledging strikes in September 2019) citing authority under the 2001 AUMF as well as constitutional authorities. According to UNSMIL, as of 2021, the Islamic State organization and Al Qaeda fighters have been "operationally weakened" in Libya but remain a threat.

The U.N. Security Council has authorized financial and travel sanctions on those responsible for threatening "the peace, stability or security of Libya," obstructing or undermining "the successful completion of its political transition," or supporting others who do so. In parallel to these U.N. measures, U.S. executive orders provide for U.S. sanctions on those threatening peace in Libya.

Congress has conditionally appropriated funding for transition support, stabilization, security assistance, and humanitarian programs for Libya since 2011. During the 116th Congress, the House passed the Libya Stabilization Act (H.R. 4644), which would have authorized future U.S. assistance, provided a legislative basis for U.S. sanctions, and established new reporting requirements. In December 2020, Congress allocated not less than \$30 million in FY2021 aid for "stabilization assistance for Libya, including support for a United Nations-facilitated political process and border security" under P.L. 116-260.

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