



Libya and U.S. Policy

Updated July 21, 2026

Fifteen years after a 2011 uprising and U.S.-backed military intervention that toppled longtime authoritarian leader Muammar al Qadhafi, Libya has yet to make a transition to stable governing arrangements. Elections and diplomacy have produced a series of interim governments, but militias, local leaders, and subnational coalitions backed by competing foreign patrons have remained powerful. Rival networks in western and eastern Libya have competed for national control. After the eastern Libya-based Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF, alt. Libyan National Army) coalition [attempted to seize the capital](#), Tripoli, in 2019, UN-backed diplomacy halted fighting and produced a Government of National Unity (GNU). Planned elections were [postponed](#) in 2021, and Libyans have remained mired in confrontation, with a rival government re-emerging in the east. A lack of national consensus over electoral and constitutional arrangements and factional disputes over energy, financial, and security issues have prolonged Libya's instability.

The Trump Administration has attempted to help Libyans unify security, financial, and administrative institutions, reportedly [proposing](#) the creation of a new, inclusive executive authority to govern until elections can be held. Senior Adviser to the President for Arab and African Affairs Massad Boulos, Chargé d'Affaires Jeremy Berndt, and U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) officials have visited Libya repeatedly since 2025, encouraging agreement in April 2026 on Libya's [first unified national budget](#) in over a decade and promoting [bilateral](#) and [intra-Libyan](#) security cooperation.

Successive U.S. Administrations have sought to prevent Libya from serving as a permissive environment for transnational terrorist groups while managing the consequences of Libya's internal divisions and interventions there by other countries. The increased [presence and influence](#) in Libya of Russian officials and security actors since 2020, paired with the effects of ongoing conflict and political instability to Libya's south, have appeared to motivate successive U.S. Administrations to seek to unify Libyan institutions. Hurdles have included deep-seated Libyan animosities and lingering international and local concerns about the behavior, legitimacy, and intentions of prominent actors in eastern and western Libya.

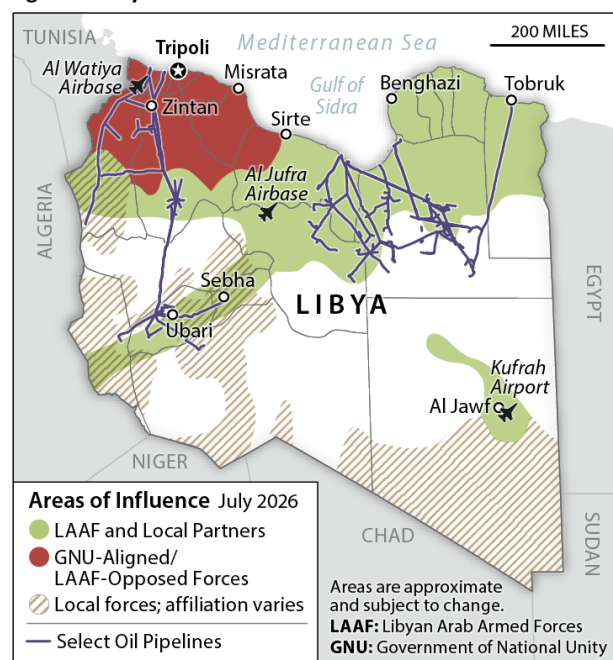
In 2025, the Trump Administration made changes to U.S. foreign aid programs and implementing agencies, resulting in changes to or termination of some U.S. assistance efforts in Libya, including programs under the Global Fragility Act (GFA, Title V of Division J, [P.L. 116-94](#)). Since 2024, Congress has provided funds to support additional U.S. diplomatic engagement in Libya and to enable the future reestablishment of a full-time U.S. diplomatic presence.

War, Ceasefire, and a Deferred Election

After Qadhafi's ouster and killing, Libya's 2012 election produced governing arrangements that devolved into conflict in 2014, effectively dividing the country along ideological,

geographic, and institutional lines. Conflict re-erupted in 2019, when the LAAF, a coalition of eastern Libya-based armed groups led by Qadhafi-era military defector Khalifa Haftar, attempted to seize Tripoli from the then-internationally recognized government. Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, and leaders of Libya's House of Representatives (HOR, an interim parliament elected in 2014) backed the LAAF. With Turkish military support, anti-LAAF western Libyan militias forced the LAAF to withdraw. Libya has remained [effectively divided](#) since, with foreign forces still present, and opposing coalitions separated by a line of control west of Sirte ([Figure 1](#)). A UN mission supports implementation of an October 2020 ceasefire. Haftar's forces have asserted more influence and security control in southern Libya, partnering with local forces in the [southwest](#) toward Algeria and south toward the remote borders with [Niger](#), [Chad](#), and [Sudan](#).

Figure 1. Libya: Areas of Influence



Source: Prepared by CRS using ArcGIS and media reporting.

In 2021, the [UN Support Mission in Libya](#) (UNSMIL, established by the UN Security Council) backed a Libyan-led process that selected a three-member Presidential Council and Government of National Unity (GNU), with a mandate to serve until elections or through June 2022. Abdul Hamid Dabaiba was chosen as GNU Prime Minister. Elections were postponed indefinitely amid disputes over electoral laws and sequencing. Dabaiba has remained in power in Tripoli, challenged by an LAAF-backed government in the east, led by Osama Hamad. To break the deadlock, UNSMIL has proposed a [roadmap](#) and [convened](#) dialogues on [electoral arrangements](#) and other national [issues](#). Libyan political bodies in June 2026 [set](#) a 2027 target for presidential and parliamentary elections.

Intense Libyan competition for control over the National Oil Corporation (NOC) and Central Bank fueled confrontation and crises through 2024; these institutions govern the oil operations, revenues, and public sector payments on which most Libyans (and both rival governments) rely. The UN Panel of Experts for Libya [reported in March 2026](#) that leaders from the west and east have colluded with NOC officials and others to provide “an umbrella of impunity” for [large-scale irregular financing schemes](#) that have drained state coffers. Libya [holds](#) the largest proven oil reserves in Africa, and its ~1.4 million barrel per day [output](#) provides nearly all state revenues.

Since 2024, the LAAF has [improved](#) its military [capabilities](#) (including drones) and strengthened its control in the east and south. Khalifa Haftar’s [sons](#) have assumed leadership roles in reconstruction and security bodies. In [May 2025](#), GNU forces killed a prominent militia figure, setting off [violence](#) and protests in Tripoli. In [May 2026](#), militia fighting [resumed](#) in the western port of Zawiya. Major east-west fighting has not resumed since 2020.

Division, Unity, Elections, and U.S. Policy

U.S. engagement is expanding in a context shaped by continuing Libyan division and fragile security. U.S. naval ships have [visited](#) western and eastern Libya, and, in 2026, AFRICOM held part of its annual FLINTLOCK exercise near Sirte. U.S. officials have engaged actors across Libya’s internal divides, travelling frequently to Libya and also hosting GNU and LAAF envoys in Washington, DC, including separate June 2026 visits by GNU Deputy Defense Minister [Abdulsalam Al Zoubi](#) and LAAF Deputy Commander [Saddam Haftar](#) (Khalifa’s son). U.S. officials have promoted commercial ties, including 2026 oil and gas agreements with [Chevron](#) and a \$20 billion [production improvement deal](#) with ConocoPhillips and TotalEnergies.

UNSMIL mediation is continuing in parallel, with Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General (SRSG) for Libya and head of UNSMIL Hanna Tetteh proposing and seeking Libyan and international support for a [roadmap](#) to elections and an end to Libya’s transition. In June 2026, Tetteh [briefed](#) the Security Council on the recommendations of an UNSMIL-convened [Structured Dialogue](#), which she [said](#) “call for the restoration of unified, effective, legitimate and accountable state institutions” and emphasize “the need for broad political consensus on credible national elections and through clear legal frameworks, with adequate resources and effective governance across institutions including the security sector.” Boulos has described U.S. policy as “[completely complementary](#)” to UNSMIL’s efforts and a short-term initiative to stabilize the country in [support](#) of UNSMIL’s longer-term vision. Some [observers argue](#) U.S.-backed unity talks risk further entrenching fractious Libyan [elites](#).

Terrorism and Foreign Military Forces

Terrorists killed four U.S. personnel in Libya in the [2012 Benghazi attacks](#), including U.S. Ambassador Christopher Stevens. UN and U.S. reports describe transnational terrorist threats in Libya as much reduced since peaking circa 2015-2016, when [U.S. military strikes](#) helped local forces defeat an [Islamic State affiliate](#).

Egypt, Turkey (Türkiye), the UAE, Russia, France, and Italy all have pursued discrete interests, influencing the actions and positions of Libyan groups. U.S. officials have balanced Libya goals with other priorities in bilateral relations with these countries. Successive U.S. Administrations have sought to foster the departure from Libya of foreign military forces and mercenaries. U.S. officials have expressed concern about Russia’s presence in Libya since 2018, including [reported transfers](#) of Russian personnel and weapons systems to LAAF-controlled eastern and southern Libya. Since 2024, Libya [reportedly has been a growing logistical hub for Russian operations](#) in North Africa and the Sahel. LAAF-controlled areas reportedly also have served as [a conduit for support](#) to the [Rapid Support Forces](#) in neighboring Sudan. Turkish [military advisers](#) have trained and assisted western Libyan forces, while [cooperating at times](#) with the LAAF.

UN Bodies and UN and U.S. Sanctions

The UN Security Council has [authorized](#) UNSMIL through [October 2026](#). The Security Council has [established](#) an arms embargo on Libya and financial and travel sanctions on entities threatening peace there, undermining the political transition, or supporting others who do so. [Resolution 2819 \(2026\)](#) addresses the arms embargo and illicit oil exports. In February 2026, President Trump [extended](#) for one year the national emergency related to Libya cited in Executive Orders [13566](#) and [13726](#) that provide for comparable U.S. sanctions. UN sanctions have frozen [tens of billions](#) of dollars in Qadhafi-era state assets abroad, and Libyans have sought access and accommodations to enable fund management.

Migration

Libya remains a transit point for irregular migration to Europe, and migrants remain vulnerable to extortion, detention, sexual violence, and other abuses. In 2026, UN agencies have identified more than [936,000 foreign migrants](#), and [nearly 113,000](#) refugees and asylum seekers in Libya, most of the latter of whom are new arrivals since 2023 from Sudan. The State Department reported in [2025](#) that “armed groups, militias, and criminal networks infiltrated the administrative ranks of the government and engaged in illicit activities, including human trafficking.”

Issues in the 119th Congress

Congress appropriated funding for transition support, stabilization, security assistance, and humanitarian programs for Libya from 2011 to 2024. In 2025, the Trump Administration terminated some programs undertaken pursuant to a March 2023 10-year [GFA plan](#) for Libya. International Military Education and Training (IMET) assistance has continued in support of efforts to promote unity among military officers affiliated with western and eastern forces. Since 2014, U.S. officials have operated from a Libya External Office (LEO) at the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia. Congress has made funds available for an interim Diplomatic Travel and Support Operations Facility in Tripoli and to eventually resume embassy operations. Congress may conduct oversight of and/or seek to shape the Administration’s policy, including on aid, engagement with the LAAF and others, security cooperation, commercial ties, frozen Libyan assets, and the U.S. diplomatic presence.

Christopher M. Blanchard, Specialist in Middle Eastern
Affairs

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