



Libya and U.S. Policy

Twelve years after a 2011 uprising 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 (**Figure 1**), but militias, local leaders, and subnational coalitions backed by competing foreign patrons have remained the most powerful arbiters of public affairs. The postponement of planned elections in 2021, Libyans' continuing lack of consensus over constitutional and legal arrangements, the potential fragility of a United Nations (U.N.)-backed ceasefire, and the reemergence of institutional rivalry are prolonging Libya's instability and pose challenges for U.S. decisionmakers.

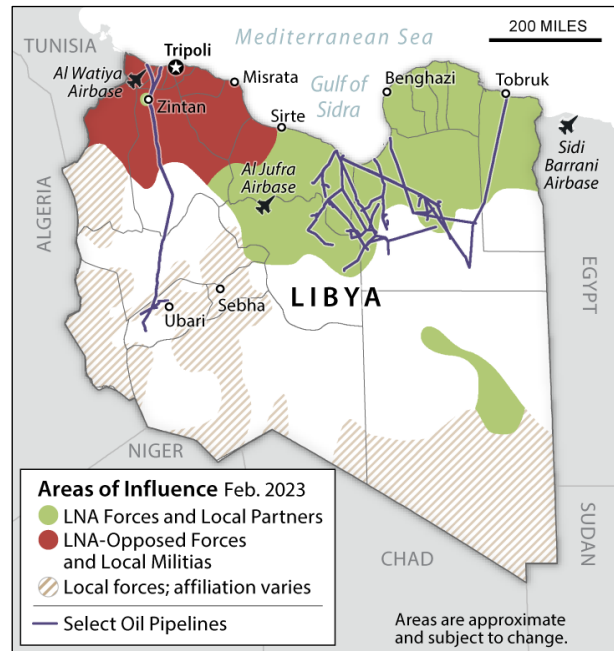
Successive U.S. Administrations have sought to prevent Libya from serving as a permissive environment for transnational terrorist groups and have taken different approaches to conflict and competition among Libyans. The Biden Administration supports the holding of new elections in Libya and has used U.S. influence to bolster U.N.-led mediation efforts to that end. Congress has appropriated funds to enable U.S. diplomacy and aid programs, and some Members have called for more assertive U.S. engagement.

War, Ceasefire, and a Deferred Election

Conflict reerupted 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 (LNA, alt. "Libyan Arab Armed Forces," LAAF), attempted to seize the capital, Tripoli, from the internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA). Russia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Egypt, and leaders of Libya's House of Representatives (HOR, an interim parliament last elected in 2014) backed the LNA. With Turkish military support, the GNA and anti-LNA western Libyan militias forced the LNA to withdraw. Libya has remained divided since, with foreign forces still present, and opposing coalitions separated by a line of control west of Sirte (**Figure 1**). During 2020, multilateral diplomatic initiatives helped achieve a ceasefire, and the U.N. has deployed civilian monitors at Libyans' request.

In 2021, members of a U.N.-appointed Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) and the HOR approved an interim executive authority and Government of National Unity (GNU) to replace the GNA, with a mandate to serve until elections or through June 2022. In 2021, the U.N. Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) facilitated discussions among LPDF members, the HOR, and the High Council of State (HCS, an advisory representative body) in an attempt to establish a constitutional and legal basis for parliamentary and presidential elections planned for December 24, 2021. However, disputes over candidacy criteria and constitutional and legal issues persisted, leading to an indefinite postponement of the elections. U.N. and U.S. officials have sought to preserve momentum toward elections, amid contending Libyan proposals and initiatives.

Figure 1. Libya: Areas of Influence and Timeline



- 2011** Uprising topples Muammar al Qadhafi.
- 2012** Parliamentary elections. Transitional cabinet seated.
- 2014** Elections for constitutional drafting body and parliament. Disputed results fuel conflict. U.S. diplomats depart.
- 2015** International mediation yields agreement to form Government of National Accord (GNA).
- 2016** House of Representatives (HOR) withholds GNA endorsement. Islamic State forces defeated in Sirte with U.S. military support.
- 2018** Libyan National Army (LNA) controls eastern Libya.
- 2019** LNA offensive against Tripoli; Turkey intervenes.
- 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. HOR approves interim Government of National Unity (GNU). U.N. Security Council endorses ceasefire monitoring and election date, but election postponed.
- 2022** HOR selects replacement interim government. GNU leaders object and, after militia clashes, retain control of the capital.
- 2023** U.N. plans High Level Steering Panel to organize elections.

Source: Prepared by CRS using ArcGIS and media reporting.

Competing Governments Reemerge

In the wake of the election postponement, consultation and political competition among Libyans intensified. Haftar, the LNA, and competing western Libyan militias remain powerful security actors with diverse political aims and influence. HOR Speaker Aqilah Saleh, who had stepped back from his role in 2021 to seek election as president, moved to dismiss GNU Prime Minister Abdul Hamid

Dabaiba and the GNU cabinet. Dabaiba, who also had presented himself as a presidential candidate despite a previous pledge not to do so, has asserted a continuing mandate and refused to yield to anything but a nationally elected government. In February 2022, the HOR endorsed former GNA Interior Minister Fathi Bashaga as Prime Minister-designate, and, in March 2022, endorsed Bashaga's proposed cabinet. Bashaga made multiple attempts to enter and assert authority in Tripoli, but met resistance from Dabaiba and local militias, resulting in some armed confrontations and the defeat of Bashaga allies. Bashaga and his would-be government continue to operate in eastern Libya but have no effective national authority.

Libya's fiscal and economic dependence on the oil and gas sector make Libyan National Oil Corporation (NOC), the Central Bank, and budgetary and fiscal processes objects of intense competition, as rivals seek access to oil export revenues to pay salaries, provide subsidies, and otherwise generate political and security support. In July 2022, Dabaiba replaced longtime NOC Chairman Mustafa Sanalla with Farhat Bengdara. Allies of Haftar and the LNA subsequently suspended their protest blockade of national oil facilities, which had severely reduced oil exports.

Libya has the largest proven crude oil reserves in Africa, but conflict, political rivalry, and neglected infrastructure impede the energy sector's operations and limit its potential. Oil revenues accrue to a National Oil Corporation account for transfer to the Central Bank to support government spending.

In September 2022, Abdoulaye Bathily of Senegal became the Special Representative of the U.N. Secretary-General for Libya. Bathily has consulted with Libyan and foreign parties since to build consensus on a constitutional basis for planned elections. In February 2023, Bathily announced he would establish a High Level Steering Panel to organize and hold legislative and presidential elections in 2023 on an agreed constitutional basis, saying "most institutions lost their legitimacy years ago." HOR Speaker Saleh and LNA leaders reportedly insist on terms that would allow Haftar to stand as a candidate, which Haftar's opponents reject. Military officers of the Joint Military Commission ("5+5") that negotiated the 2020 ceasefire met under U.N. auspices in Sirte in October 2022 and established a subcommittee on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.

U.S. Policy and Selected Issues

During and prior to armed clashes in 2019 and 2020, rival executive authorities based in western and eastern Libya competed for power and recognition. International mediators intended the formation of the GNU and the holding of new elections to provide a basis for the reunification of Libyan institutions and an end to serial interim arrangements. U.S. officials have supported U.N. leadership of these initiatives, emphasized the importance of maintaining the ceasefire and the neutrality of institutions such as the NOC, and sought to avoid accusations of illegitimate interference by not insisting on specific outcomes. U.S. officials encourage dialogue among Libyans and have stated that elections are required to resolve disputes over legitimacy. U.S. officials continue to balance Libya-related concerns with other U.S. goals in

relation to Russia, Egypt, Turkey, France, Italy, and the UAE.

U.S. Special Envoy for Libya Ambassador Richard Norland has led U.S. diplomatic engagement since 2019. U.S. officials operate from a Libya External Office at the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia. The executive branch continues to assess requirements to reestablish a lasting U.S. diplomatic presence in Libya. Congress may consult with the Administration on related security needs and costs.

Terrorism and Foreign Military Forces

U.N. and U.S. reporting describe transnational terrorist threats in Libya as reduced and contained. Successive U.S. Administrations have sought to foster the departure from Libya of foreign military forces and mercenaries. The U.S. military has monitored and reported on the activities of Russian mercenaries and military equipment in Libya. Press accounts suggest that some Russian mercenaries may have left Libya to support operations in Ukraine, although Libya reportedly remains a logistical hub for their operations in sub-Saharan Africa. Forces in eastern Libya shot down a U.S. unmanned aerial vehicle there in August 2022; U.S. investigation continues. Turkish military advisers train and assist western Libyan forces in accord with a 2019 Turkey-GNA security agreement. The LNA and its opponents reportedly have used fighters from Syria, Chad, and Sudan.

Sanctions and U.N. Bodies

The U.N. Security Council has authorized financial and travel sanctions on entities threatening peace in Libya, undermining the political transition, or supporting others who do so. U.S. executive orders provide for comparable U.S. sanctions. The Security Council has extended UNSMIL's mandate through October 2023.

Humanitarian Needs and Migration

The U.N. estimates more than 800,000 people in Libya (out of 7 million) require some form of humanitarian aid. U.N. agencies have identified nearly 680,000 foreign migrants, more than 134,000 internally displaced persons, and more than 44,700 refugees in Libya. Migrants remain especially vulnerable to extortion and other abuses. The State Department reported in 2022 that "endemic corruption and militias' influence over government ministries contributed to the GNU's inability to effectively address human trafficking."

Issues in the 118th Congress

Congress has conditionally appropriated funding for transition support, stabilization, security assistance, and humanitarian programs for Libya since 2011. The Biden Administration sought \$44.5 million in FY2023 funding for Libya aid programs, and in 2022 named Libya as a priority country for the purposes of the Global Fragility Act (Title V of Division J, P.L. 116-94). The 117th Congress did not include House-passed Libya-related provisions in the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (P.L. 117-263) that would have authorized future U.S. assistance, enacted U.S. sanctions in statute, and established new reporting requirements.

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