

Instability in Libya



2025

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May 2025



**THE GLOBAL POLICY HORIZONS
LAB**

Empowering Evidence-Based Solutions

For a Better World



Note from the Lead Author, Person One

This International Security Report aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the causes and consequences of instability in Libya.

We hope that this report will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, scholars, practitioners, and all those interested in understanding and addressing the complexities of contemporary conflicts.

We express our deepest gratitude to our donor, the Don Maland Scholarship Fund, for their invaluable and generous support for this research and publication.





About the Author

Sara El Mir is a master's candidate in International Relations at Webster University in St. Louis. She holds a bachelor's degree in International Business, earned in France. At the Global Policy Horizons Lab, El Mir's research centers on North Africa, with a specific emphasis on Libya. Her work investigates the persistent instability in Libya, characterized by political divisions between two rival governments and ongoing tensions and conflicts that disrupt the country. By analyzing the root causes of Libya's political divisions and their implications for regional stability, she aims to assess potential scenarios for the country's and region's trajectory in the coming year.



About the Global Policy Horizons Research Lab

Webster University's Global Policy Horizons Lab is a policy-focused research entity where students, Lab researchers, affiliated faculty, as well as members of the policy community from across disciplines, can explore national and global security issues, generate original research, as well as produce peer-reviewed policy papers and commentaries. The Lab pursues innovative research focusing on unconventional threats, identity and security, role of technology in security, economic security, as well environmental and food security. The goal of the Lab is to become a knowledge hub that informs national governments and other members of the global policy community on contemporary and future security challenges.



The current Director of the Lab is Professor Dani Belo, PhD.



Executive Summary

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has struggled to regain stability. What was intended to be an uprising filled with hope and a move toward democracy turned into a civil war causing various issues across the country. It has been marked by power struggles between rival governments in the east and west, the growing influence of local militias and deep foreign interference.¹ General Khalifa Haftar's 2019 offensive to seize Tripoli only worsened these divisions, pushing the country further into violence instead of bringing the stability he had promised. The United Nations has made several attempts to implement peace and bring the parties to the negotiations. While some efforts, like the call for a ceasefire and a national conference, offered brief moments of hope, real political dialogue has often depended more on battlefield developments than on diplomacy. The lack of unity among the international actors some of whom continue to arm and support opposing sides has weakened the UN's impact, making its role a mix of positive intentions and limited results.^{2 3} International interventions in Libya, whether from foreign powers or the UN, have often worsened internal divisions by supporting rival factions, making the reconciliation and stabilization process more difficult. Libya's economy, heavily reliant on oil, has proven to be both a source of wealth and a source of vulnerability. Before 2011, oil made up nearly 95% of Libya's GDP⁴, making the country wealthy in theory, but dangerously fragile in reality. Since the fall of Gaddafi, armed clashes, political instability and frequent blockades have repeatedly disrupted oil production. With no stable economy or functioning central authority everyday life has become increasingly difficult for ordinary Libyans.

In many areas, people now lives under the control of armed groups who use access to fuel, jobs, and even basic services as tools of power.⁵ The breakdown of the state didn't just damage institutions it deeply affected livelihoods, hopes, and trust among communities and tribes.⁶ Entire generations are growing up in uncertainty, where survival depends less on education or opportunity and more on allegiance, luck, or proximity to power.

Background

Libya's history has been deeply influenced by a strong tribal structure which persisted despite colonial policies. The country went through different phases of rule, starting with the Ottoman Empire, which defined the regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. In the 18th century, the Karamanli dynasty emerged as a significant political force.⁷ Before the 2011 revolution, Libya was one of Africa's leading countries in terms of economic growth and development. Its citizens had the highest GDP per capita and life expectancy on the continent achievements largely made possible by the discovery of oil in the 1950s.⁸ Gaddafi's regime took an anti-imperialist stance and used oil revenues as a political



tool to support revolutionary causes abroad. ⁹Libya gained its independence in 1951 and was then placed under United Nations administration. Gaddafi's regime created a unique political system called the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) and aimed to build a rentier and socialist society where the state provided for most of the basic needs of the population. ¹⁰Gaddafi also took an anti-imperialist stance and used oil revenues to support revolutionary movements around the world. ¹¹In 1969, a group of young officers led by Muammar Gaddafi carried out a successful coup d'état, overthrowing the monarchy and marking the beginning of a new era in Libya's history. ¹²In 1992, the UN imposed sanctions because Libya was financing subversive and terrorist activities abroad using oil revenues, including attacks on two planes and a nightclub in Berlin. These sanctions politically and economically isolated Gaddafi as he used oil money to promote his ideology abroad, supporting terrorist activities, including the destruction of two planes. ¹³The sanctions were lifted in 2003 when Libya took responsibility for these attacks and agreed to compensate the victims. ¹⁴The Arab Spring in 2011 marked a major turning point. Protests broke out across the Middle East and North Africa. These protests showed deep dissatisfaction with Gaddafi's long-standing authoritarian regime. ¹⁵ Gaddafi's regime responded to these protests with brutal and violent repression. This state violence quickly turned the protests into an armed uprising and a large-scale revolution. ¹⁶ Gaddafi's violent crackdown on protesters led to an eight-month civil war during which the National Transitional Council (NTC) emerged, the UN authorized the international aerial and naval intervention, and Gaddafi's regime fell, culminating in his death. ¹⁷ Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011, Libya has struggled to rebuild its institutions. In July 2012, the transitional government handed over power to the General National Congress (GNC), which was formed through the first democratic elections. However, the General National Congress (GNC) quickly faced serious challenges, including armed militias and the Islamist attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi in 2012. The GNC was criticized for its inefficiency, lack of legitimacy, and partial control by Islamist militias. ¹⁸ ¹⁹ In June 2014, new elections were held to replace the General National Congress (GNC). A new assembly was elected, which became the House of Representatives (HoR). These results led to a new civil war, as the Islamists, feeling a reduction in their power within the new authority, decided to reinstate the General National Congress (GNC) based in Tripoli, in the western part of the country where they had more influence. As a result, the House of Representatives (HoR) fled to Tobruk in the eastern part of the country. In 2015, with the mediation of the United Nations (UN), a Libyan political agreement (Skhirat Agreement) was signed, creating the Government of National Accord (GNA), based in Tripoli. The GNA was supposed to be a national unity government, but it was not recognized by the House of Representatives (HoR) in the east in Tobruk. The GNA failed to exercise authority over the entire country. ²⁰Moreover, the war continued between the eastern forces, led by General Khalifa Haftar and the western forces, several peace attempts failed in 2019. After years of conflict a ceasefire was signed in October 2020, marking an important step toward stabilizing Libya. In March 2021 following the UN-led Libyan Political Dialogue Forum a new unified government was formed, the Government of National Unity (GNU), led by Abdul Hamid Dbeibah. This



government's main task was to prepare national elections. Although the Government of National Unity (GNU) officially replaced the Government of National Accord (GNA), political and territorial divisions between the east and west of the country remained, making unification of power difficult in practice. In Libya, power remains divided between two main authorities: in the west, the Government of National Unity (GNU), based in Tripoli and recognized by the UN, and in the east the House of Representatives (HoR), located between Tobruk and Benghazi, supported by General Khalifa Haftar, leader of the Libyan National Army (LNA).^{21 22}

Primary Stakeholders

Actor	Impact	Effect
Government of National Unity (GNU) 	Positive	(+)The GNU is recognized by the international community as the legitimate authority for managing oil resources. (+) The GNU, led by Fayeze al-Sarraj, took part in international efforts to resolve the Libyan crisis. (-)The dependence on militias and armed groups, especially during the clashes in Tripoli between August 27 and September 25th The control of militias in the city showed how weak the GNU's power really was. ²³
Libyan National Army (LNA) 	Negative	(+) Most of Libya's territory is under the control of the LNA.²⁴ (-) Item There are a significant number of Salafist militias that form a strong core within the LNA, adding complexity to the nature of the force and its objectives.²⁵ (-) Tried to take control of the country by force, which reignited the civil war. This led to continued fighting and no political progress.²⁶ (-)The LNA is not a legitimate or neutral state force, but rather a complex mix of military units and tribal groups. It lacks official recognition and has effectively become a personal army serving Haftar's political interests. ²⁷
National Transitional	Negative	(+)At first, they were seen positively by some for standing up against Gaddafi's dictatorship. ²⁸



Actor	Impact	Effect
Council (NTC) 		(-) However, after his fall, they failed to create a unified control over the country, which led to division and instability. They also supported and encouraged foreign military intervention. ²⁹

Secondary Stakeholders

Actor	Impact	Effect
NATO 	Mixed	(+) Its military intervention in 2011 helped bring down Gaddafi, Some see it as a successful humanitarian action, (-) While others point out that it may have worsened the long-term conflict and caused civilian casualties. NATO carried out many airstrikes that weakened the government's ability to resist and launch offensives. There were criticisms about the lack of follow-up on the impact of these strikes on civilians. ^{30 31}
European Union (EU) 	Negative	(-) Accused of funding militia armament. (-) The EU's migration policy and its deals with Libyan authorities and militias give control of migration to groups that ignore human rights and increase rivalry between armed factions. ^{32 33}
Gulf States (Qatar, Egypte, Saoudi Arabie, and Turquie) 	Negative	(-) Qatar and Turkey supported Islamist groups, while Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE backed other actors like Haftar. These external supports extended and complicated the conflict, turning internal dynamics into a proxy war. ^{34 35} (-) Fueling the conflict by providing financial and military support to rival factions, often based on ideological or geographical ties. ³⁶



Actor	Impact	Effect
		
United Nations (UN) 	Mixed	(+) On March 17, 2011, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1973, authorizing member states to take all necessary measures to protect civilians.³⁷ (+) The promotion of the Responsibility to Protect (RtoP) with the UN Secretariat focusing on human protection and preventing mass atrocities.³⁸ (+) The UN Security Council condemned the attempts of illegal oil exports by parallel institutions not operating under the authority of the GNA.³⁹ (-) Some commentators believe that Resolution 1973 was deliberately drafted to allow for regime change, going beyond its original objective of protecting civilians.^{40 41} (-) Many international actors, while committing to support UN-led negotiations, intervened in the country by backing one faction or another. This undermined the UN's efforts by creating overlapping and separate forums for discussion, all while pursuing their own specific interests.⁴²

Risk Assessment Indicators

Extremely High Risk

High Risk

Medium Risk

Low Risk

History of Armed Conflict

Level: Extremely High Risk

Trend: Declining



Destabilizing Factors

Arab Spring : The pro-democracy movements of the Arab Spring, which began in 2011, reached Libya, where they were met with violent repression by Gaddafi's regime. He responded to the



protests with brutal force, threatening to eliminate the demonstrators.⁴³ These events marked a major turning point. Across the Middle East and North Africa, protests expressed deep dissatisfaction with Gaddafi's long-standing authoritarian rule.⁴⁴ In response to these protests, the regime escalated the use of violence, quickly turning the demonstrations into an armed protest and a large-scale revolution⁴⁵.

Foreign Intervention: Following the UN resolution authorizing the use of force under the “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P) principle, NATO intervened militarily in Libya, with the support from some Arab countries, like Qatar, which provided training and military aid to the rebels. However, critics argue that NATO exceeded the original mandate of Resolution 1973, which was meant to protect civilians. Instead, NATO launched a large-scale war against Gaddafi's forces, aiming for regime change.⁴⁶ NATO provided the anti- The rebels against Gaddafi received air support, weapons, and ammunition, mostly from France. NATO's airstrikes played a crucial role in weakening Gaddafi's military, enabling the rebel forces to gain ground and shift the course of the conflict. Gaddafi was eventually killed on October 20, 2011, ending his 40-year rule.⁴⁷ Many critics argue that the intervention went beyond its humanitarian goal and contributed to Libya's long-term instability, worsening human rights conditions. Some believe Western powers were more interested in geopolitical goals than in protecting civilians while others describe the intervention as a “war of encroachment,” aiming to strip Libya of its autonomy and resources.^{48 49}

Assessment

The history of armed conflict in Libya has been deeply influenced by the Arab Spring, which sparked pro-democracy protests in 2011. These were met with violent repression by Gaddafi's regime, which escalated the conflict into a full-scale revolution^{50 51}. The fall of Gaddafi, followed by NATO's intervention, led to his eventual death and the end of his 40-year rule. The absence of a central authority post-Gaddafi, compounded by the influence of tribal groups, has contributed to weak governance and political fragmentation.⁵²

Governance and Political Instability **Level: Extremely High Risk** **Trend: Declining** 

Destabilizing Factors

Absence of centralized power: Weakness of state institutions and lack of an effective central government: Since Gaddafi's overthrow in 2011, Libya has struggled to build strong state institutions.⁵³ Libya was devastated by civil war and left facing a major security vacuum. The absence of an effective, recognized government that can control the entire country is a major cause of instability.⁵⁴

The Rise of Armed Factions: The instability of the country This has created a power vacuum exploited by various factions and armed groups.⁵⁵ The rise of many armed militias competing for



power and resources highlights the fragmented state of the government. ⁵⁶These groups fund themselves through illegal activities like corruption, extortion, and smuggling. Under Gaddafi, they were under state control, but after his fall, they began fighting each other to influence the future of the country. ⁵⁷

Lack of justice and impunity: The collapse of the government weakened the rule of law and allowed crimes to go unpunished. ⁵⁸Armed groups commit abuses without facing consequences, which fuels violence and prevents the country from achieving peace and stability. ⁵⁹

Corruption and networks of privilege: Corruption, which was already present under Gaddafi's regime, has intensified since 2011. Complex networks of favoritism and personal gain involve various actors, undermining transparency and the proper management of state resources. ⁶⁰ This widespread corruption erodes trust in the political system and fuels discontent. ⁶¹

Assessment

Despite having relatively high revenues, Libya, like other countries in the MENA region, suffers from weak governance. Since Gaddafi's fall, the Libyan state has struggled to rebuild strong and legitimate institutions. The country's power vacuum has been filled by armed groups, each competing for control, which has only deepened the fragmentation and instability. ⁶²⁶³ This has led to political fragmentation, the rise of unofficial armed groups, and a general lack of trust in the authorities. Corruption and networks of privilege, which were present under Gaddafi, have only grown stronger, eroding public trust and further blocking any real progress. ⁶⁴. This combination of factors has kept Libya trapped in a cycle of instability, making a true democratic transition nearly impossible. ⁶⁵

Population Heterogeneity

Level: High Risk

Trend: Stable



Ethnic Diversity: The Libyan population is composed of 97% Amazigh and Arab, while the remaining 3% includes Egyptian, Greek, Indian, Italian, Maltese, Pakistani, Tunisian, and Turkish communities. ⁶⁶

Religious diversity : Libya's population is predominantly Muslim (96.6%, mostly Sunni), with a small Christian minority making up 2.7%. ⁶⁷

Destabilizing Factors

Tribal Influence: Libya has long been shaped by deeply rooted tribal traditions, which continue to fuel conflicts and divisions within society. Even with growing urbanization, many Libyans remain closely connected to their tribal identity. This influence extends into the political sphere, where tribal networks play a significant role in decision-making. ⁶⁸Gaddafi, aware of this dynamic, strategically exploited tribal loyalties to strengthen his grip on power. However, after



Gaddafi's fall, there was an explosion of tribal conflicts. Minority groups such as the Toubou, Amazigh, and Tuareg have been marginalized after the revolution, which remains a potential source of instability.⁶⁹

Regional Divisions: Libya's history has been deeply influenced by the social and cultural divides among its three main regions: Cyrenaica, Tripolitania, and Fezzan. These regional disparities, rooted in historical power balances, have often fueled internal tensions.⁷⁰ They played a role in triggering both the 1969 coup and the 2011 revolution, both of which began in Cyrenaica, particularly in Benghazi.⁷¹ Even today, this region tends to favor a federal system. Before the rise of the Karamanli dynasty, Libyan Bedouin tribes were more influenced by political forces in Tunisia and Egypt, which helped reinforce natural divisions between the country's main regions.

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Assessment

It is important to highlight that divisions within the population have played a major role in sustaining political instability and the fragmentation of governance in Libya. Efforts to stabilize the country have often been hindered by the complex internal and external dynamics of the conflict. According to Ladjal, any political process in modern Libya that overlooks the social factors related to tribal cohesion (*asabiyya*) is destined to fail. The growing role and influence of tribes since the revolution underscores the need for a deep understanding of the local reality in order to achieve genuine and meaningful national reconciliation.

Demographic Stress

Level: High Risk

Trend: Stable



Population Density: Approximately 7,361,263 (recent estimate). Mostly urban, concentrated in coastal areas such as Tripoli, Benghazi, and Misrata, while the vast southern regions (like Fezzan) remain underdeveloped and sparsely populated.⁷³ Libya count around 705,746 migrant from 44 nationalities⁷⁴

Stabilizing Factors

Youth engagement: The potential for electoral engagement is an important stabilizing factor in Libya. A significant number of young people (50%) have recently registered to vote, showing growing interest in politics. This participation could transform young people into key players in the political transition. Additionally, despite their hopes often being disappointed, young Libyans continue to dream of a prosperous and modern Libya. This aspiration for a better future could become a driving force for reform, provided these aspirations are supported by appropriate policies.⁷⁵



Population growth and urbanization: Over the past five decades, Libya has experienced rapid population growth, with an average annual growth rate of 3.8%. The majority of the Libyan population already lives in cities, and it is expected that the urban population will increase by 50% over the next 25 years. Nearly 97.5% of the Libyan population resides in concentrated urban areas along the coast, making the country one of the fastest urbanizing regions in North Africa. According to the last general census in 2008, Libya's population reached 5.32 million. This rapid growth is partly due to the country's youthful population structure, with over one-third of Libyans being under the age of 15. ⁷⁶

Destabilizing Factors

Youth Bulge and Unemployment: More than 50% of the Libyan population is under 30 years old. Although educated, many young people face high unemployment and economic exclusion. This situation generates frustration and disillusionment, with some young people ultimately joining militias or emigrating. The youth are largely excluded from decision-making processes and political life, further marginalizing them. This fuels tensions and disengagement. ⁷⁷

Assessment

Libya's population presents both a significant opportunity and a serious challenge. The country is young and rapidly urbanizing, with many young people showing growing interest in political engagement. If supported by inclusive policies, this energy could become a strong driver for positive change. However, high youth unemployment, limited opportunities, and political exclusion are fueling frustration. As a result, some young Libyans are turning to militias or choosing to emigrate. The heavy concentration of people in coastal cities is straining public services, while vast southern regions remain neglected and underdeveloped.

Economic Performance

Level: High Risk

Trend: Declining



Stabilizing Factors

Dependence on oil: The revenue generated from oil production. Although often disrupted by conflicts and local militias' control, oil production and export remain Libya's main source of income. ⁷⁸⁷⁹ Periods of relatively high production, such as that seen for most of 2018, can provide some short-term financial stability, enough to cover salaries and essential needs, with around one million barrels per day (bpd) generating about \$25 billion in revenue per year. ⁸⁰Oil revenues account for about 95% of its export earnings, 25% of GDP, and 60% of public sector salaries. The country has transformed from one of the poorest nations in the world to one of the largest oil producers. ⁸¹



Destabilizing Factors

Dependence on oil: Libya's economy has long been heavily dependent on oil, which accounted for about 95% of the country's GDP before 2011.⁸² Despite its abundant natural resources, this over-reliance, combined with poor management, has fueled instability particularly during the civil war.⁸³ Armed clashes severely disrupted oil production and exports, while the weakening of state institutions allowed armed groups to control certain areas and use violence to maintain power, creating an economy where force plays a central role.⁸⁴ ⁸⁵This fragile situation also encouraged the emergence of local protection economies.⁸⁶ The political instability caused the GDP to fall by 2.7% in 2011,⁸⁷ and inflation mainly driven by rising costs of food, housing, and electricity remained moderate but noticeable.⁸⁸ Une contraction économique de 31% en 2020 due à la COVID-19 et au blocus pétrolier confirme l'impact direct des perturbations dans le secteur pétrolier.⁸⁹

Political instability and armed conflicts: Ongoing violence and insecurity have serious impacts on the economy.⁹⁰ Events such as the "new battle for Tripoli" in August-September 2018, the offensive on Derna, and unrest in the south have significantly disrupted economic activities, oil exportation have dropped by nearly 50%.⁹¹ Control over oil facilities has become a key issue in the conflict, directly affecting the production and exports.

High unemployment: The World Bank estimates that the unemployment rate among Libyans remains at 20%, reaching 27% for women and 30% for young people.⁹² The unemployment rate was 7.7% in 2001 but it nearly doubled to 13% in 2005 due to the political instability.⁹³ In the 2000s, unemployment reached levels of 20 to 25%.⁹⁴ The country's unstable political situation has led to a rise in unemployment, especially among youth, and this widespread lack of job opportunities fuels social and economic frustration, potentially adding to the country's instability.

Assessment

The high oil export revenues have significantly improved living standards and helped fund infrastructure projects and social services. However, Libya's economy remains heavily reliant on the oil sector, making the country vulnerable to external shocks and internal conflicts. Other sectors, such as agriculture and tourism, have struggled and remain underdeveloped. Armed conflicts, poor management, and political instability frequently disrupt oil production, hindering economic growth. Unemployment especially among youth remains high, fueling social and economic tensions. Without long-term stability, diversification, and stronger governance, Libya's economic prospects remain fragile.





Stabilizing Factors

Oil revenue impacts: The high standard of living achieved through oil revenues, since 1970, Libya has achieved one of the highest standards of living in Africa due to oil revenues. This is especially remarkable considering that in 1951, it was officially the poorest country in the world.

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Destabilizing Factors

Immigration traffic: Although the country is unstable it remains a major transit route for migrants from East and West Africa trying to reach Europe. Its closeness to southern Europe and weak border controls make it a key departure point across the central Mediterranean. As of August 2022, around 135,000 people were also displaced within Libya due to fighting between armed groups and tribal clashes. ⁹⁶ Libya is facing a large flow of migrants, and the instability that followed the fall of Muammar Gaddafi has allowed smuggling networks and armed groups to expand human trafficking operations. ⁹⁷ Migrants first have to cross the desert and they often fall into the hands of traffickers or are sold to criminal groups. They are victims of kidnapping, violence, torture, and exploitation. Women in particular face sexual assault and are sometimes forced into sex work. This fear follows them throughout their journey in Libya, even as they wait on the coast, often hiding in abandoned houses, hoping to board a boat to Europe. Traffickers hold migrants to demand ransoms from their families. Those who cannot pay are kept in terrible conditions deprived of food and water, beaten, threatened, and constantly abused. ⁹⁸ This trafficking has many human and humanitarian consequences, such as overcrowded refugee camps, injuries, and deaths. ⁹⁹

Insecurity: Ongoing violence, insecurity and the various clashes between militias have severely impacted daily life in Libya, causing population displacement and hindering development efforts. The "new battle for Tripoli" in August and September 2018 is a striking example of this instability. ¹⁰⁰

Assessment

Libya's human development is at an extremely high risk level and continues to decline due to ongoing insecurity, economic dependence on oil, and the expansion of human trafficking networks. While oil revenues have allowed Libya to achieve one of the highest standards of living in Africa, this wealth remains unequally distributed and fragile, especially in a context of weak governance and conflict. The instability that followed the fall of Gaddafi has allowed armed groups to profit from a lucrative trafficking industry. Migrants and refugees, among the most vulnerable populations, are frequently subjected to arbitrary detention, torture, and sexual violence. At the same time, Libyan citizens themselves face daily insecurity, limited access to basic services, high unemployment especially among youth and the ongoing effects of



displacement and conflict. These combined pressures continue to erode both social cohesion and the prospects for sustainable human development across the country.

Militarization Level: Extremely High Risk **Trend: Declining** 

Stabilizing Factors

Ceasefire in 2020: The 2020 ceasefire helped end six years of civil war between rival political factions. To support this agreement, a Joint Military Commission known as the "5+5" was created bringing together officers from both the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the Libyan National Army (LNA). This group has worked to maintain the ceasefire and deal with other security issues, even though removing foreign fighters remains a challenge.¹⁰¹ Despite ongoing mistrust and a fragile peace, violence has stayed relatively low since the truce, which has allowed space for renewed political dialogue.¹⁰²

Destabilizing Factors

Foreign Military Involvement: Description Turkey actively supports the Government of National Unity (GNU), largely due to strategic maritime, oil, and gas agreements. This support includes military equipment, drones, and the deployment of military trainers, which significantly strengthens the GNU's operational capacity. Alongside Turkey and Egypt has also taken a bold step by authorizing troop deployments in Libya making both countries key military players in the conflict.¹⁰³ At the same time, the presence of foreign fighters within the ranks of both the GNU and the Libyan National Army (LNA) further destabilizes the country.¹⁰⁴ While the GNU is backed militarily by Turkey, the LNA receives support from Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and Egypt. This foreign intervention turns Libya into a battleground for proxy warfare, intensifying the conflict and weakening any efforts to achieve peace and long-term stability.

Hybrid War : The United States and its allies carried out a "hybrid war" against Libya. This means they used different methods not just military attacks, but also indirect strategies like supporting certain groups, spreading disinformation, or applying political pressure. Their goal was to destabilize and weaken Gaddafi's regime and to prevent the Libyan revolution from succeeding. NATO's intervention in 2011 is seen as the peak of this strategy.¹⁰⁵

Dependence of GNU on militias: The Government of National Unity (GNU) is fragile and does not have full control over security in Tripoli. It relies heavily on local armed groups and militias to maintain order. This dependence is clearly illustrated by the frequent clashes in the capital, such as the "new battle for Tripoli" from August to September 2018. Security in Tripoli is dominated by a small number of powerful militias particularly four main groups which creates a form of shared power with no real central authority.¹⁰⁶



Assessment

Militarization in Libya remains a major high-risk factor for its future. Although the 2020 ceasefire brought some calm, the situation remains fragile due to foreign interference, dependence on militias, and proxy conflicts. Countries like Turkey, Egypt, and Russia back rival factions, fueling violence and making national reconciliation difficult. In Tripoli, the presence of powerful militias further weakens the government's authority, impeding the long-term stability. In short, Libya is in a situation where militarization continues to undermine its chances of achieving lasting peace and sustainable development for the future.

International Linkages	Level: High Risk	Trend: Declining 
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Stabilizing Factors

The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1973: authorized measures to protect civilians and was initially seen as a way to halt the atrocities committed by the Gaddafi regime.¹⁰⁷ The early activism of the UN Secretariat played an important role in identifying the imminent risk of mass atrocities and framing the crisis as a matter of human protection.¹⁰⁸

Nato's military intervention in Libya: The launched was officially aimed at protecting civilians by enforcing a no-fly zone and carrying out targeted strikes against Gaddafi's forces. The alliance also imposed an arms embargo and quickly established air and maritime control to limit the regime's capabilities.¹⁰⁹ While the intervention helped weaken Gaddafi's regime and supported rebel forces, allowing them the time and space needed to eventually overthrow him it also led to the collapse of state institutions without ensuring stable political transition. Evidence suggest that NaTO's airstrikes had long- term effects, as the government was less likely to regain control in areas where high number of targets had been hit over time.¹¹⁰

Australia Intervention: Although Australia did not participate militarily, it took a proactive diplomatic stance in support of the international response and the implementation of the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P). The foreign minister at the time, Kevin Rudd, actively sought to mobilize broad international support to address the crisis. Australia's diplomatic activism helped create favorable conditions for intervention by reinforcing the legitimacy of the R2P principle.¹¹¹

Destabilizing Factors

Illicit Trade and Local Power: Illicit flows revealed the deep divisions within Libyan society, which Gaddafi had managed to control through force and by manipulating both legal and illegal economic interests. After his fall, these flows had different effects depending on the region. On the coast, some groups took advantage of controlling ports and airports to engage in illegal activities, while still receiving money from the state and financial support from Gulf countries



involved in a power struggle. In the south, trafficking routes became major sources of local power. All of this further fragmented the country and made rebuilding a central state even more difficult.¹¹²

NATO Intervention: NATO claimed it made significant efforts to avoid civilian casualties, many Libyan civilians who were not involved in the fighting were killed or injured by NATO airstrikes. Amnesty International documented at least 55 identified civilian deaths caused by NATO strikes. Some of these airstrikes hit homes in residential and rural areas where no military targets were found.¹¹³ Some critics argue that NATO went beyond its original mandate of protecting civilians by actively contributing to the fall of Gaddafi's regime.¹¹⁴ NATO's air campaign mainly aimed to weaken the government's ability to target and resist rebel forces. As a result, the strikes had a short-term impact by creating gaps in the regime's defenses, allowing the rebels to gain territory. However, even though the rebels advanced, this did not necessarily lead to long-term stability.¹¹⁵

Foreign Arms Supply : After the 2011 revolution, several international actors, especially some Arab states, tried to influence the Libyan conflict by funding and supporting different armed groups. This outside involvement helped make Libyan society even more militarized and deepened internal divisions. First, there is a continuous flow of weapons from European countries and other regions to the UAE or other regional players, such as Egypt who then redirect these weapons to their local allies in Libya. For example, Germany approved arms exports worth €331 million to countries accused of supporting warring parties in Libya. while Italy sold €872 million worth of weapons to Egypt.¹¹⁶

Assessment

While there have been some positive steps, such as the 2020 ceasefire and diplomatic efforts, foreign interference continues to deepen the country's divisions. Military interventions, external support for armed groups, and the flow of weapons have exacerbated the internal conflict, making a stable political transition more difficult. These external factors have fueled the militarization of Libyan society with foreign fighters. After Gaddafi's fall, Libya became a battleground for international powers, each supporting different groups to serve their own interests. This has created a unstable situation where peacebuilding efforts are consistently undermined by foreign involvement. Ongoing foreign influence and arms supplies have left the country fragmented and unstable. Although there were some early efforts to stabilize Libya but the foreign interference has only complicated the situation. Rather than promoting unity, this external involvement has deepened internal divisions, militarized society and made it increasingly difficult to rebuild a peaceful and stable nation.

Possible Scenarios for the Next Year



Best Case Scenario

A significant breakthrough in the political process would be the most optimistic scenario. This would involve Libyan actors, with international support, reaching a new political agreement to resolve their differences. An inclusive national conference like the one proposed in 2018 could give all stakeholders a voice and help build consensus, leading to a clear roadmap. Transparent and secure national elections could then take place, resulting in a stable and permanent government to replace the current one. To stabilize Libya's economy, it is crucial to better manage its natural resources, particularly oil which is a real strength for the country. This would ensure stable revenues and encourage investment in other sectors, thus reducing dependence on oil. At the same time, strengthening international relations and diversifying trade partnerships would help develop external trade, better integrating Libya into the global economy and paving the way for sustainable growth. At the same time, the threat from terrorist groups like ISIS would be greatly reduced thanks to unified and effective security forces. International cooperation would be coordinated and actively support the country's stabilization.

Worst Case Scenario

The worst-case scenario for Libya's future would involve an escalation of the conflict, potentially leading to a prolonged civil war. The offensive by General Haftar to capture Tripoli, which began in 2019 with roots in 2018, could either resume or intensify, resulting in more violence and displacement. The lack of a lasting political agreement would perpetuate the division of the country, deepening rivalries between various factions and militias. Terrorist groups like ISIS and Al-Qaeda could seize the opportunity to strengthen their presence, carrying out attacks and further destabilizing the region. The “war economy” that emerged in 2018 would continue to thrive, fueling violence and instability. Institutions might engage in illegal oil exports, depriving the state of vital revenue and worsening tensions. International divisions over Libya would likely persist or deepen hindering any meaningful mediation efforts. The situation for migrants and refugees would remain dire, with ongoing trafficking and exploitation, leading to constant violations of their fundamental rights. In this scenario, Libya's future would be mired in endless conflict, economic decline, and widespread human suffering. Life for its citizens would become even more difficult, with increased financial challenges, high unemployment, and growing instability, making each day more painful and uncertain.

Most Likely Scenario

The most likely scenario for the coming year is the continuation of the current instability and political deadlock. Despite international efforts a lasting political agreement would remain difficult to achieve due to the differing interests of Libyan actors and foreign interference. Periods of relative calm could alternate with localized conflicts, especially over control of oil resources and territories. The country will struggle to leverage its oil resources to stabilize its



economy and attract investment. The threat of terrorist groups would persist, particularly in the south of the country. The "predatory economy" of militias and armed factions would continue to thrive, hindering the development of a legitimate economy. The international community would maintain its mediation efforts but divisions and unstable policies would limit their effectiveness. The humanitarian situation for migrants would remain concerning, but no real action would be taken. The prospect of national elections would remain uncertain delayed by security instability. Libya would remain divided politically and continue to be a battleground for regional and international influences, with each side backing its own allies and interests.

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