



Libya and U.S. Policy

Over a decade 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 the most powerful arbiters of public affairs. The postponement of planned elections since 2021, Libyans' continuing lack of consensus over electoral and constitutional arrangements, the potential fragility of a United Nations (UN)-backed ceasefire, and 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 while reacting to Libya's internal conflict and interventions 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 appeared to motivate the Biden Administration to attempt to unify Libyan institutions, despite lingering international and Libyan concerns about the behavior, legitimacy, and intentions of key Libyan actors. The Trump Administration has continued to engage with actors from across Libya, and U.S. officials continue to promote cooperation among Libyans.

The 118th Congress appropriated funds for U.S. diplomacy and aid programs, including pursuant to the Global Fragility Act (GFA, Title V of Division J, P.L. 116-94). Changes by the Trump Administration to U.S. foreign aid programs and implementing agencies have resulted in changes to or cancellation of some U.S. assistance efforts in Libya. Congress provided funds in 2024 to enable the future reestablishment of a U.S. full-time diplomatic presence in Libya, which could enable more robust U.S. engagement.

War, Ceasefire, and a Deferred Election

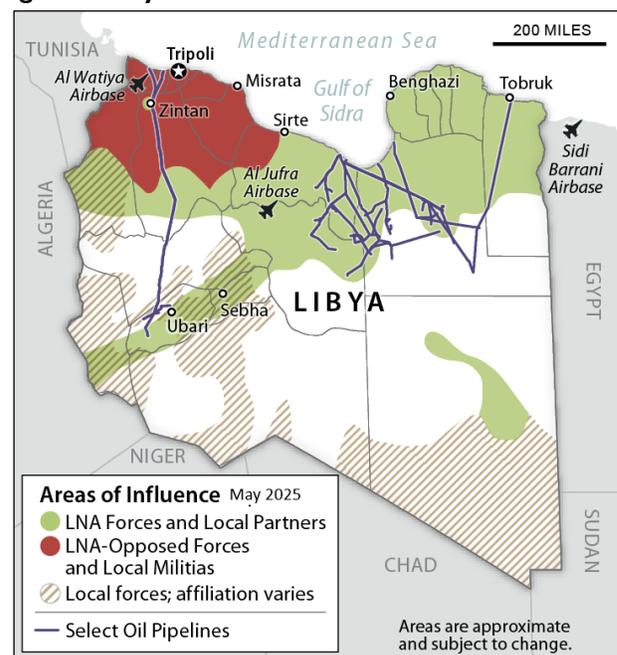
Libya's 2012 election produced governing arrangements that devolved into conflict in 2014, effectively dividing the country along ideological, geographic, and institutional lines. Conflict re-erupted in April 2019, when a coalition of eastern Libya-based armed groups led by Qadhafi-era military defector Khalifa Haftar known as the Libyan National Army (LNA, alt. "Libyan Arab Armed Forces," LAAF), attempted to seize the capital, Tripoli, from the then-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**). Multilateral diplomacy in 2020 helped achieve a ceasefire, which the UN monitors.

In 2021, members of a UN-appointed Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) and the HOR approved an interim Presidential Council and Government of National Unity (GNU) to replace the GNA, with a mandate to serve until elections or through June 2022. The LPDF and HOR endorsed Abdul Hamid Dabaiba as GNU Prime Minister, along with a three-member Presidential Council. The UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) facilitated discussions among the GNU, the HOR, and the High Council of State (an advisory representative body), but was unable to establish a constitutional and legal basis for parliamentary and presidential elections then-planned for December 2021.

The elections were postponed indefinitely and have yet to be rescheduled amid ongoing disputes over electoral laws and the possibility of a new interim government. Since that time, eastern Libya-based actors have revived efforts to have a rival government, led by Osama Hamad, recognized as legitimate. Competition among Libyans has intensified for control over the National Oil Corporation (NOC) and Central Bank, which govern the oil operations, revenues, and public sector payments on which most Libyans rely. As of 2025, some Libyans are pushing for the replacement of the Dabaiba-led GNU and the Hamad government with a unified interim government to lead the country to elections.

Figure 1. Libya: Areas of Influence and Timeline



Source: Prepared by CRS using ArcGIS and media reporting.

Protracted Divisions and U.S. Policy

In January 2025, Hanna Tetteh of Ghana was named as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General

(SRSG) for Libya and head of UNSMIL. In April, Tetteh told the Security Council that “protracted institutional and political divisions, coupled with harmful unilateral actions and the struggle for control of resources by a privileged few, hold the aspirations and needs of the Libyan people captive. Overspending of Libya’s vast resources in the absence of an agreed national budget could lead to an economic collapse.” In May, militia violence erupted in Tripoli, spurring protests and calls for political change. An UNSMIL-appointed Advisory Committee has released its recommendations for resolving Libya’s impasses.

Libya holds the largest proven oil reserves in Africa. Libya’s ~1 million barrel per day output influences global markets and provides nearly all of the state’s revenue. After an impasse over leadership and management of the Central Bank led eastern actors to halt oil production in 2024, UN mediators helped negotiate a settlement, and Libya’s interim institutions approved the appointment of new Central Bank leadership and restarted oil operations. Billions in Qadhafi-era state assets remain frozen abroad pursuant to UN sanctions, and Libyan rivals have pressed foreign parties for access to these funds.

U.S. officials have reengaged actors on all sides of Libya’s internal divides. This includes controversial figures alleged to be involved in corruption and human rights violations or whose past attempts to control Libya militarily and whose cooperation with Russia have prompted past proposals from some in Congress for the use of sanctions. The United States has backed UN mediation with the stated goals of providing for the reunification of Libyan institutions and an end to serial interim governing arrangements. In 2024, U.S. officials encouraged dialogue among Libyans and stated that elections were required to resolve Libyans’ disputes over legitimacy. The Trump Administration has hosted GNU and LNA envoys in 2025. The USS *Mount Whitney* visited western and eastern Libya in April. After news reports in May said the Administration was considering Libya as a possible destination for third country nationals, a U.S. court intervened, and Libya’s rival governments said they rejected the possibility of accepting U.S. deportees.

Egypt, Turkey (Türkiye), the UAE, Russia, France, and Italy all pursue discrete interests in Libya, influencing the actions and positions of Libyan groups and, at times, contributing to competition and stalemates. U.S. influence relative to these third parties may be limited and shaped by other U.S. priorities with each country.

Former U.S. Special Envoy for Libya Ambassador Richard Norland led U.S. diplomatic engagement from 2019 until May 2025. U.S. officials have operated from a Libya External Office (LEO) at the U.S. Embassy in Tunisia. In March 2024, the Biden Administration notified Congress of its intent to resume embassy operations in Libya by mid-2025, and requested funds for a planned Diplomatic Travel and Support Operations Facility in Tripoli. The Trump Administration has not commented on those plans.

Terrorism and Foreign Military Forces

UN and U.S. reports describe transnational terrorist threats in Libya as much reduced since peaking circa 2015-2016. Successive U.S. Administrations have sought to foster the departure from Libya of foreign military forces and mercenaries. AFRICOM has expressed concern about

Russian personnel and military equipment in Libya, since 2018. Libya reportedly remains a logistical hub for Russian operations in sub-Saharan Africa. An enduring Russian military presence in Libya would create complications for U.S. and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) military planners. In 2024, U.S. officials drew international attention to reports of shipments of Russian weaponry and reported transfers of Russian “Africa Corps” personnel to LNA-controlled eastern and southern Libya, including shipments following the fall of the Asad regime in Syria. Turkish military advisers train and assist western Libyan forces, and Turkey has extended its military presence to 2026. The LNA and its opponents reportedly have recruited fighters from Syria, Chad, and Sudan.

UN Bodies and UN and U.S. Sanctions

The UN Security Council has authorized UNSMIL through October 2025. The 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. In July 2023, the House did not pass H.J.Res. 70, which would have rescinded the national emergency related to Libya cited in Executive Orders 13566 and 13726 that provide for U.S. sanctions.

Migration

Libya remains a transit point for irregular migration to Europe, and migrants remain vulnerable to extortion, detention, sexual violence, and other abuses. UN officials in April condemned a “surge in xenophobic and racist hate speech” associated with Libyan domestic campaigns against migrant resettlement. As of March 2025, UN agencies had identified more than 824,000 foreign migrants, more than 32,000 internally displaced persons, and nearly 86,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Libya, including new arrivals since 2023 from Sudan. The State Department reported in 2024 that “endemic corruption and militias’ influence over government ministries contributed to the GNU’s inability to effectively address 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. The FY2024 foreign operations appropriations act provided “not less than \$32,000,000 under titles III and IV of the Act for stabilization assistance for Libya, including support for a UN-facilitated political process and border security.” Recent changes to U.S. aid programs appear to have terminated some efforts undertaken pursuant to a March 2023 10-year GFA plan for Libya. Congress has appropriated funds that could provide for Worldwide Security Protection (WSP) and Overseas Program (OP) initiatives to support the resumption of diplomatic operations in Libya as outlined in FY2024 and FY2025 budget requests. Congress may seek to ascertain and shape the Administration’s Libya policy, including with regard to aid, engagement with Libyan factions, frozen Libyan assets, and the possible return of U.S. diplomats.

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