

LIBYA

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ISSUES

- Since Moammar Gadhafi was overthrown in 2011, Libya has been unable to achieve political stability. By 2014, Libya faced a mini-civil war between a Tripoli-based government backed by Turkey and Qatar and a Tobruk-based government in the east backed by Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. A December 2015 U.N.-brokered political agreement for a Tripoli-based Government of National Accord (GNA) was supposed to provide a transition to a new constitution and elections. Instead, it led to a continued east-west split, efforts by Libyan strongman Khalifa Hifter to impose one-person military rule throughout the country, and a resumption of a renewed and continuing proxy war.
- The recent civil war was ignited by Hifter on April 4, 2019, when he decided, with the military support of Egypt, Russia, and the UAE, to besiege Tripoli in an effort to conquer Libya's capital and its western region by force. This effort prompted the introduction of Turkish-backed military forces and mercenaries on the side of the internationally recognized GNA, which resulted in the defeat of Hifter's forces 14 months later, and their withdrawal south to Jufra and east to Sirte. In addition to its civil war, Libya still faces some risk of proxy war, due to the continued presence in Libya of the foreign military forces supporting each side.
- Since January 2020, Hifter's forces and a range of other extortionists have recurrently prevented the export of Libya's oil. Libya's economy is entirely dependent on its oil revenues, which are sufficient in principle to take care of the basic needs of all 6.5 million Libyans. Ending oil extortionism and creating an equitable sharing of those revenues remains a central element of any further political deal that would allow Libya to move forward.
- The unresolved conflict has led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people by the war and continuing casualties from placements of explosive ordnance. It also

continues to impede progress in countering the use of Libya to smuggle migrants into Europe. Finally, it is creating renewed opportunities for terrorists, including for ISIS to reconquer Libyan territory it lost to joint U.S.-Libyan counter-terrorism efforts in 2016.

US INTERESTS

- Prevent Libya from becoming a terrorist safe haven. Renewed terrorist control of territory would threaten the stability and safety of Libya, the Maghreb as a whole, the Sahel, and Europe.
- Prevent Libya from fragmenting into multiple states. The risk of eastern secession, aided and abetted by Egypt, Russia, and the UAE, is real. Efforts to divide the country risk creating long-term political, security, economic, and humanitarian catastrophes.
- Maintain Libyan oil production. As a producer of up to 1.6 million bpd, Libya plays an important role in international oil markets, and a collapse in its production could have a negative impact on global oil prices, in addition to putting Libyans at risk.
- Counter smuggling and criminality. The spread of criminal activity risks destabilizing Libya, its African neighbors, and its European ones, especially from migrant smuggling. Promoting rule of law and justice in addition to policing will be important for building support for the Libyan government on the part of the Libyan people.
- Promote Libyan political stability as a critical step to creating an environment for broadened economic activity and cooperation throughout North Africa.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Actively support the U.N.-sponsored Libyan Political Dialogue Forum and its plan for a transition to elections scheduled

for December 24, 2021, the 70th anniversary of Libyan independence. Active U.S. support for this process is especially important now, with the appointment of former Slovakian Foreign Minister Jan Kubis as the new head of the U.N. Support Mission in Libya on Jan. 15, amid continuing efforts by domestic and foreign spoilers to circumvent or undermine it.

- Press foreign intervenors to remove their military forces and mercenaries, with concrete consequences if they do not.
- Support Libya's development of a unified security system in which a civilian-led national institution maintains a monopoly on the use of force, supplemented by local police. Taking on militias will be hard. Libya will need help from the U.S. and other benign actors to get it done.
- Send a Treasury team to help Libya float its currency, phase out subsidies, and reform its economy, and as needed to provide other U.S. technical assistance on public financial administration to counter corruption.
- Promote rule of law and anti-corruption initiatives to encourage accountability and discourage human rights violations.
- Reopen the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, closed since July 2014. Seeing the U.S. flag flying again in Libya would signal renewed American commitment to the Libyan people and let other countries know the U.S. is again a force to be reckoned with for Libya's future.