

# Libya as a Theatre of Global and Regional Power Competition

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## Abstract

The paper examines Libya's transformation into a major arena of regional and global power competition since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The collapse of his four-decade regime created a power vacuum that fuelled internal fragmentation, the rise of militias, and repeated civil wars. Libya's instability has been exacerbated by the interference of external actors, turning the conflict into a proxy war. Countries such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Russia, France, and Türkiye have supported rival factions to pursue their strategic, political, and economic interests. The analysis highlights how foreign involvement particularly Russia's use of mercenaries and financial backing for Khalifa Haftar, and Türkiye's military and diplomatic support for the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) has reshaped the balance of power. While Russia seeks to expand its Mediterranean and Sahel influence, Türkiye's role is framed as more constructive, focusing on political dialogue, state-building, and protecting its interests in the Eastern Mediterranean. The paper also considers the positions of Libya's neighbours Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Sudan whose security and economic stability are directly affected by Libya's turmoil. Ultimately, the paper argues that sustainable peace requires inclusive political processes, credible elections, institutional rebuilding, and coordinated international mediation. Without consensus on governance and a reduction in foreign interference, Libya risks remaining fragmented and unstable. The conclusion stresses that Libya's future depends on transforming its status as a battlefield of external rivalries into a sovereign state built on reconciliation, stability, and resource-driven economic recovery.

**Keywords:** Libya, Foreign Intervention, Civil War, Proxy War, Geopolitics.

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# Libya: Küresel ve Bölgesel Güç Rekabetinin Sahnesi

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## Özet

Bu makale 2011 yılında Muammer Kaddafi'nin devrilmesinin ardından Libya'nın bölgesel ve küresel güç rekabetinin başlıca sahnesine dönüşümünü incelemektedir. Kaddafi'nin yaklaşık kırk yıl süren otoriter yönetiminin çöküşü, ülkede derin bir iktidar boşluğu yaratmış; bu durum, siyasal parçalanmayı, milis grupların yükselişini ve tekrarlayan iç savaşları beraberinde getirmiştir. Libya'daki istikrarsızlık, dış aktörlerin artan müdahaleleriyle daha da derinleşmiş ve ülkeyi vekâlet savaşlarının merkezine taşımıştır. Mısır, Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri, Rusya, Fransa ve Türkiye gibi bölgesel ve küresel aktörler, kendi stratejik, siyasi ve ekonomik çıkarlarını ilerletmek amacıyla farklı grupları desteklemiştir. Analiz, özellikle Rusya'nın paralı askerler ve mali destek aracılığıyla Halife Hafter'e verdiği desteğin, buna karşılık Türkiye'nin Birleşmiş Milletler tarafından tanınan Ulusal Mutabakat Hükûmetine (UMH) sağladığı askerî ve diplomatik yardımların, sahadaki güç dengelerini nasıl dönüştürdüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Rusya, Akdeniz ve Sahel bölgelerinde nüfuzunu genişletmeyi hedeflerken Türkiye'nin yaklaşımı, siyasi diyalogun teşviki, devlet kurumlarının yeniden inşası ve Doğu Akdeniz'deki ulusal çıkarlarının korunması bağlamında daha yapıcı bir çerçevede değerlendirilmektedir. Makale ayrıca Libya'nın komşuları olan Mısır, Tunus, Cezayir ve Sudan'ın pozisyonlarını ele almakta; bu ülkelerin güvenlik ve ekonomik istikrarlarının Libya'daki kaostan doğrudan etkilendiğini göstermektedir. Sonuç bölümünde yazar, kalıcı barışın sağlanabilmesi için kapsayıcı siyasî süreçlerin işletilmesi, güvenilir seçimlerin yapılması, kurumsal yeniden yapılanmanın desteklenmesi ve uluslararası arabuluculuğun koordineli biçimde yürütülmesi gerektiğini savunmaktadır. Yönetim konusunda uzlaşa sağlanmadığı ve dış müdahaleler sınırlandırılmadığı sürece Libya'nın parçalı ve istikrarsız yapısını sürdürme riski devam edecektir. Libya'nın geleceği, dış rekabetlerin savaş alanı olmaktan çıkarılarak, uzlaşa, yeniden yapılanma ve ekonomik toparlanma üzerine inşa edilmiş egemen bir devlete dönüşmesine bağlıdır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Libya, Dış Müdahale, İç Savaş, Vekâlet Savaşı, Jeopolitik.

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# ليبيا: ساحة لتنافس القوى العالمية والإقليمية

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## ملخص

يتناول هذا المقال تحوّل ليبيا إلى ساحة رئيسية لتنافس القوى الإقليمية والعالمية بعد الإطاحة بمعمر القذافي عام 1102. حيث أدى انهيار الحكم الاستبدادي للقذافي الذي استمر لنحو أربعين عاما إلى فراغ كبير في السلطة في البلاد، وأدى هذا الوضع إلى انقسامات سياسية وصعود للميليشيات وتجدّد الحروب الأهلية. كما تفاقمت حالة عدم الاستقرار في ليبيا جراء التدخلات المتزايدة للجهات الخارجية، ما جعل البلاد مركزا للحروب بالوكالة. حيث دعمت جهات إقليمية وعالمية مثل مصر والإمارات العربية المتحدة وروسيا وفرنسا وتركيا جماعات مختلفة في إطار تحقيق مصالحها الاستراتيجية والسياسية والاقتصادية. ويكشف هذا التحليل كيفية مساهمة دعم روسيا لخليفة حفتر من خلال المرتزقة والدعم المالي، ومقابل ذلك المساعدات العسكرية والدبلوماسية المقدمة من تركيا لحكومة الوفاق الوطني المعترف بها من الأمم المتحدة، في تغيير موازين القوى على الأرض. وفي الوقت الذي تسعى فيه روسيا إلى توسيع نفوذها في منطقتي البحر الأبيض المتوسط والساحل، تتبع تركيا نهجا أكثر إيجابية يركز على تعزيز الحوار السياسي وإعادة بناء مؤسسات الدولة وحماية مصالحها الوطنية في شرق البحر الأبيض المتوسط. كما يتناول المقال أيضا مواقف جيران ليبيا، مصر وتونس والجزائر والسودان، ويظهر أن الاستقرار الأمني والاستقرار الاقتصادي لهذه الدول يتأثران بشكل مباشر بالفوضى في ليبيا. ويرى الكاتب في قسم النتيجة، أن تحقيق السلام الدائم يتطلب اتباع نهج سياسي شامل، وإجراء انتخابات ذات مصداقية، ودعم إعادة بناء المؤسسات، والاستفادة من الوساطة الدولية بشكل منسق وفق المصلحة الوطنية. ويمكن القول إن خطر بقاء ليبيا في حالة انقسام وعدم استقرار سيبقى قائما طالما لم يتم التوصل إلى توافق بشأن الحكم والحد من التدخلات الخارجية. ويعتمد مستقبل ليبيا على تحوّلها من ساحة صراع للتنافسات الخارجية إلى دولة ذات سيادة مبنية على المصالحة وإعادة الإعمار والانتعاش الاقتصادي.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** ليبيا، التدخل الخارجي، الحرب الأهلية، الحرب بالوكالة، جيوسياسي.

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## Introduction

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has become emblematic of the complex challenges facing post-revolutionary states in the Middle East and North Africa. What began as a hopeful uprising inspired by the Arab Spring quickly devolved into a protracted and multifaceted conflict, marked by deep internal divisions and persistent external intervention. Libya was the first Arab Spring country where the uprisings escalated into a militarized conflict, ultimately resulting in a United Nations-authorized NATO intervention in the country.<sup>1</sup>

Libya has experienced ongoing instability since the fall of longtime ruler Gaddafi in 2011. When Libyans revolted against the Gaddafi regime, they hoped that their nonviolent protests would follow the successful path of similar uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, and expected a smoother transition. But rather than capitulate, as Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali and Hosni Mubarak had, Gaddafi launched a brutal crackdown.<sup>2</sup> Libya was the first Arab Spring country where the uprisings escalated into a militarized conflict, ultimately resulting in a UN-authorized NATO intervention in the country.<sup>3</sup>

The initial optimism that accompanied the toppling of a decades-long authoritarian regime was soon replaced by a harsh reality: Libya's transition to stable governance and national reconciliation has been persistently undermined by a combination of weak state institutions, rival political factions, and the competing interests of regional and global powers. The Libyan conflict is not merely a civil war; it is a theatre of global and regional power competition. The country's vast natural resources, strategic Mediterranean location, and relatively small population have made it a magnet for foreign intervention.

More than ten years following the 2011 uprising that toppled Gaddafi regime, Libya continues to struggle with a complex and turbulent political transition. The country faces significant challenges that impede its path to stability, including a fundamental lack of robust state institutions capable of effectively managing the national transition process. Repeated violent confrontations between various tribal groups and militia factions undermine national unity and peace efforts, while deep regional divisions further complicate governance and reconciliation. These persistent issues highlight the profound difficulties

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- 1 Tarek Megerisi, "How Libya Became a Battleground for Foreign Powers," *New Lines Magazine*, October 11, 2020. <https://newlinesmag.com/argument/how-libya-became-a-battleground-for-foreign-powers/>.
  - 2 Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Stavridis, "NATO's Victory in Libya," *Foreign Affairs*, February 2, 2012. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/2012-02-02/natos-victory-libya>.
  - 3 Megerisi, "How Libya Became."

Libya faces in establishing a cohesive, functioning democratic state in the aftermath of its revolutionary uprising.<sup>4</sup>

The removal of Gaddafi resulted in a power vacuum, leading to the emergence of multiple armed groups and rival factions vying for control, turning the crisis into a complex and protracted international conflict. External actors have also become involved in the conflict, further exacerbating the situation in Libya.<sup>5</sup> This conflict has involved several countries supplying weapons, finances, and foreign fighters to the opposing groups, resulting in instability in North Africa and the Sahel region. It has also become a significant area of geostrategic rivalry.<sup>6</sup>

The failure to establish a widely accepted constitutional framework and the repeated postponement of national elections have perpetuated the legitimacy crisis and hindered the development of effective state institutions. The persistent instability in Libya has had profound implications not only for its own citizens but also for the broader region. Neighbouring countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria have faced significant security and economic challenges as a result of the conflict, including cross-border smuggling, the spread of extremist networks, and the disruption of vital economic ties.<sup>7</sup>

The international community has repeatedly attempted to mediate the crisis, most notably through UN-led initiatives and the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement. Yet, these efforts have often been stymied by the divergent interests of both internal and external actors, as well as by the lack of a coordinated and comprehensive approach.

This study seeks to address a central and pressing question: Why has Libya failed to achieve stable governance and national reconciliation in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution? More specifically, the research investigates how the interplay between internal divisions and external interventions has impeded the formation of robust state institutions and prolonged the conflict.

## Research Questions

How have internal political, social, and regional divisions contributed to Libya's ongoing instability?

4 Youssef Mohammad Sawani, "Justice, Reconciliation, and State-Building in Post-Gaddafi Libya," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 15, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1525/caa.2022.15.2.3>.

5 Sadeeqe Abba et al., "Libya in the Post Ghadaffi Era," *The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention* 2, no. 2 (2014).

6 Megerisi, "How Libya Became."

7 Ferhat Polat, *Mercenaries in Libya and the Threat to Regional Peace* (TRT World Research Centre, 2021), <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Mercenaries-in-Libya-and-threat-to-the-region-.pdf>.

In what ways have external interventions by regional and global powers influenced the trajectory and duration of the Libyan conflict?

1. What are the primary obstacles to effective state-building and national reconciliation in post-Gaddafi Libya?
2. Hypotheses Based on the existing literature and preliminary analysis, the study advances the following hypotheses:
  - H1: The involvement of multiple external actors with competing interests has significantly prolonged the Libyan conflict and deepened political fragmentation.
  - H2: The absence of a unified, legitimate political framework has prevented the emergence of effective state institutions, thereby perpetuating instability.

This research is grounded in interrelated theoretical perspectives. First, it draws on theories of civil war and state failure, I also concentrated on the theory of state institutions. Developing state institutions is fundamental to a state's capacity expansion. This involves the creation of constitutions, the formation of government ministries, the formulation of policies, and the establishment of political institutions to help governments effectively administer their states.<sup>8</sup> By integrating these perspectives, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Libyan conflict and to identify pathways toward national reconciliation and effective governance.

This study is primarily interpretivist; the main research methods are qualitative, particularly content analysis. This paper gives a detailed and nuanced analysis of the investigated topic by drawing from a wide variety of secondary sources, including academic journals, books, policy papers, reports, and newspaper stories.

### **Libya's Transition Process from 2011 to 2021**

The Libyan transition process began in 2011 with the overthrow of Gaddafi's regime during the Arab Spring. This led to a period of political instability and armed conflict, with various factions vying for power and control over the country. Despite several attempts at peace negotiations and the establishment of a unity government, Libya continues to face challenges in achieving

<sup>8</sup> Morten Skumsrud Andersen, "Legitimacy in State-Building: A Review of the IR Literature1," *International Political Sociology* 6, no. 2 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1749-5687.2012.00159.x>.

stability and establishing effective governance. The current crisis in Libya has arisen due to various factors, encompassing internal divisions among diverse factions, regional dynamics, and external intervention. The governments undergoing transitional processes since 2011 have encountered challenges in achieving enduring security and establishing effective state institutions.<sup>9</sup>

The downfall of the Gaddafi regime had profound implications for the stability of Libya. The prolonged duration of his authoritarian regime spanning four decades, resulted in a subsequent power vacuum upon his demise, characterized by the absence of established mechanisms to facilitate the reconstruction of governance structures.<sup>10</sup> Following the fall of Gaddafi, it was observed that many of the newly formed political parties displayed authoritarian tendencies.<sup>11</sup> These groups could not gain legitimacy or establish a significant presence in a divided nation. As a result, the absence of a unified political structure hindered the establishment of effective governance and further exacerbated social divisions.

After the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, a coalition of influential figures emerged, spearheaded by Mustafa Abd al-Jalil, a former minister of justice, and Fathi Tarbil, a prominent human rights activist. This coalition, known as the National Transitional Council (NTC), swiftly positioned itself as a potential transitional government, actively pursuing the objectives of facilitating democratic elections and garnering international backing.<sup>12</sup> On July 7, 2012, a significant milestone was reached in modern Libyan history with the inaugural democratic elections for the General National Congress, marking the first time a representative body was established in the country.<sup>13</sup>

The GNC was assigned the responsibility of drafting a new constitution and overseeing the transition to a more stable government. After successfully conducting and tallying the results of legislative elections and receiving praise from numerous international regulatory bodies, the GNC has faced several challenges. Political infighting and insecurity marred the authority of the

9 Mediel Hove, "Post-Gaddafi Libya and the African Union: Challenges and the Road to Sustainable Peace," *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 52, no. 3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909615583366>.

10 Jacob Mundy, "Libya: Lost in Transition," *Middle East Law and Governance* 13, no. 1 (2021): 1-3, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-13010005>.

11 Francesco Cavatorta, *Political Parties in the Arab World: Continuity and Change* (Edinburgh UP, 2018).

12 Mustafa A Abulgasem Kashiem, "The Dynamic of Libyan Legislative Process in the Post-Gaddafi Era: The Case of the NGC and the NTC," *Net Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 2 (2017).

13 Ewa Szczepankiewicz-Rudzka, "Patterns of Libya's Instability in the Aftermath of the Collapse of Gaddafi's Regime," *Politeja* 13, no. 42 (2016).

GNC, resulting in a deeply divided country.<sup>14</sup> These challenges have hindered the GNC's ability to effectively draft a new constitution and create a stable government. Additionally, the lack of consensus among different political factions has further exacerbated the divisions within the country, making it difficult for the GNC to regain its authority and restore stability.<sup>15</sup>

In 2014, a competing governmental entity, the House of Representatives (HoR), operated from Tobruk, emerged. This establishment received backing from the Libyan National Army (LNA), led by General Haftar. Establishing the HoR and its support from the LNA led to a significant political divide in Libya. This division further intensified the ongoing conflict in the country as different factions fought for control and legitimacy.<sup>16</sup>

Afterwards, the nation has been effectively divided into two rival administrations, each having its legislature, armed forces, and alliances. The complexity increased even more as different armed factions, including foreign mercenaries, became involved. Over the past fourteen years, Libya has experienced two additional internal conflicts. The first conflict occurred from May 2014 to December 2015, while the second happened from April 2019 to October 2020.<sup>17</sup>

Libya's security situation drastically worsened in 2014 due to increased clashes between rival militias, dividing the nation and exacerbating its fragmentation. Amid the turmoil, Haftar, a former military officer under Gaddafi, became a key player, creating the self-styled LNA. Haftar was born in 1943 and he had been involved in the 1969 coup that brought Gaddafi to power and later served in his armed forces. However, he broke ties with Gaddafi after being sent to fight in Chad during a failed military campaign in the 1980s, where he was captured and held as a prisoner of war for seven months. Rather than securing his release, Gaddafi distanced himself from Haftar, denying any association with him.<sup>18</sup> Haftar was eventually released following a deal with the U.S. government, in which he allegedly became a CIA asset and later a U.S. citizen. In the late 1980s eighties, someone like Haftar was of great value to

14 Wolfram Lacher, "Was Libya's Collapse Predictable?," *Survival* 59, no. 2 (2017): 139-52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2017.1302194>.

15 Ferhat Polat, "Libya's Civil War: Is the End in Sight?," TRT World Research Centre, 19 March 2019, <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/discussion-papers/libyas-civil-war-is-the-end-in-sight/>.

16 Hove, "Post-Gaddafi Libya."

17 Ferhat Polat, "Mercenaries in Libya and the Threat to Regional Peace," TRT World Research Centre, June 28, 2021, <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/featured/mercenaries-in-libya-and-the-threat-to-regional-peace/>.

18 Ferhat Polat, "10 Years After the Arab Spring: Is a Long-Lasting Political Solution Within Reach in Libya?," in *The Arab Spring: Past, Present, and Future*, ed. Şener Aktürk and Tarek Cherkaoui (TRT World Research Centre, 2024), <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Arab-Spring-Book.pdf>.

the U.S. because Libya topped the list of state supporters of terrorism, and the U.S. would benefit from access to intelligence from Gaddafi's inner circle.<sup>19</sup>

Haftar returned to Libya from the U.S. just after the uprising began in 2011. Haftar is backed by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, and UAE. It is a widely held view that the UAE, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia's counterrevolutionary orientation in the region has driven the approach in the region and in Libya in particular.<sup>20</sup> Haftar presented himself as Libya's new strongman, capable of saving the country by commanding a real army. In fact, his LNA is an umbrella for former army units, militias, and radical groups, even mercenaries from Chad and Sudan.

Libya elected a new parliament in June 2014 as part of the post-Gaddafi transition agreed by the main players in the previous assembly. As a result, the HoR based in Tobruk, took office following the June 2014 elections and replaced the GNC. However, voting took place but some of the polling stations were not opened, such as in Derna and some southern towns, due to fighting. And, the voter turnout was too low, 41 percent of 1.5 million registered voters took part, much lower than in the 2012 vote, when 60 percent of 2.8 million registered voters went to the ballot box.<sup>21</sup> The Supreme Constitutional Court ruled that the elections were unconstitutional and the HoR should be dissolved. Following a few disputes, the GNC did not recognize HoR's authority and established a rival parliament in Tripoli, called the new GNC.<sup>22</sup>

In August 2014, former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Spanish diplomat Bernardino León as his Special Representative to help mediate the Libyan crisis.<sup>23</sup> On 14 January 2015, the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) initiated talks between the HoR, the GNC, and other key actors. These efforts culminated in the 2015 Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), which aimed to overcome the political rift following the outbreak of the conflict in mid-2014. The LPA established a Presidential Council, an advisory State Council, and a unity government the GNA pending HoR approval. However, the HoR, led by Aqilah Saleh and based in Tobruk, rejected the GNA and operated as a rival authority. Backed by the HoR, General Haftar opposed the UN agreement

19 Sasha Toperich and Cagan Debra, "Congress Should Sanction Libyan Warlord and U.S. Citizen Khalifa Haftar," *The National Interest*, September 16, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/congress-should-sanction-libyan-warlord-and-us-citizen-khalifa-haftar-193883>.

20 Polat, "10 Years After the Arab."

21 Ulf Laessing, *Understanding Libya since Gaddafi* (Hurst & Company, 2020).

22 "Militias in the Libyan Capital Tripoli - Who's Who?," BBC Monitoring, April 5, 2019, <https://monitoring.bbc.co.uk/product/c200qbw7>.

23 "Spanish Diplomat Named to Top UN Post in Libya," AP News, August 14, 2014, <https://apnews.com/general-news-0a9f0d5a28da41469eb54f13ef152a5c>.

and launched military campaigns, further deepening political divisions and obstructing a unified settlement.

The political resolution was systematically undermined by multiple challenges, including the outright refusal of the House of Representatives, led by Aqilah Saleh, to recognize the GNA. A parallel government emerged in eastern Libya, while General Haftar conducted military operations that further complicated the political landscape.<sup>24</sup> International interference from regional actors such as the UAE, Egypt, France, and Russia exacerbated the existing tensions, creating a complex web of competing interests.

The latest phase of the war began in April 2019, when Haftar and his LNA launched a surprise offensive to seize the capital, Tripoli, in an attempt to overthrow the UN-backed GNA. However, Haftar failed to capture the city, largely due to substantial support provided by Türkiye.<sup>25</sup> After Haftar launched a 14-month military offensive on Tripoli<sup>26</sup>, which failed to seize control of the country from the internationally recognized government the warring parties signed a ceasefire deal in October 2020.<sup>27</sup> Since then, Libya has seen no major armed conflicts, ushering in a period of relative calm.

After a decade of conflict and instability, Libya had an opportunity to form a unified government for the first time in seven years a crucial step toward national reconciliation. This development was particularly significant given the immense challenges and hardships endured by the Libyan people since the 2011 uprising.<sup>28</sup> On March 15 2021, Libya's GNU was sworn in with representatives from both the eastern and western parts of the country. This new united cabinet is intended to lead the country towards the elections scheduled for December 2021.<sup>29</sup>

24 Polat, 'Libya's Civil War'.

25 Wolfram Lacher, "Social Cleavages and Armed Group Consolidation: The Case of Khalifa Haftar's Libyan Arab Armed Forces," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 47, no. 9 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2021.2013757>.

26 Jason Pack Sinkez Matthew, "Khalifa Haftar's Miscalculated Attack on Tripoli Will Cost Him Dearly," *Foreign Policy*, April 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/10/khalifa-haftars-miscalculated-attack-on-tripoli-will-cost-him-and-libya-dearly-un-benghazi-gna-lna/>.

27 "Libya's Warring Sides Reach Permanent Cease-Fire. U.N. Calls It 'Historic'," *The Washington Post*, October 23, 2020, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle\\_east/libya-ceasefire-un-tripoli-war/2020/10/23/86c04b88-151f-11eb-a258-614acf2b906d\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/libya-ceasefire-un-tripoli-war/2020/10/23/86c04b88-151f-11eb-a258-614acf2b906d_story.html).

28 Ferhat Polat, *Libya's Government of National Unity: Priorities and Challenges* (TRT World Research Centre, 2021), <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Libya-Government-National-Unity.pdf>.

29 "Libya's Government of National Unity Sworn in at Tobruk-Based HoR," *The Libya Observer*, March 15, 2021, <https://libyaobserver.ly/news/libyas-government-national-unity-sworn-tobruk-based-hor>.

The elections in Libya, initially scheduled for December 2021, have been delayed indefinitely, due to disagreements about the electoral law and who should be allowed to stand in the polls.

By delaying the elections, the dispute over the legitimacy of the current Prime Minister, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, has heightened. The Tobruk-based HoR speaker, Saleh, argued that Dbeibah's mandate expired when the interim government failed to hold elections.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, Libya once again fell into a deep political crisis. The appointment of Fathi Bashagha as prime minister by the HoR, with support from Haftar, has led to further turmoil in the country.<sup>31</sup> The persistent failure to create a stable political environment continued to plague Libya's transition. The obstacles to resolution were multifaceted, involving complex regional power interventions, a lack of coordinated international approach, ongoing military confrontations, and deep political fragmentation. Each attempted diplomatic solution seemed to further entrench the existing divisions rather than bridge them. Ultimately, the Libyan political crisis demonstrated the challenges of international mediation in a deeply fractured post-conflict environment. The UN-backed efforts highlighted the critical need for a comprehensive, inclusive approach that addresses the fundamental political, military, and regional dynamics driving the conflict. Successful resolution would require unprecedented levels of diplomatic coordination, genuine commitment from internal and external stakeholders, and a willingness to prioritize national reconciliation over individual or factional interests.

## The Outbreak of Civil War and the Role of External Actors

As defined by Kalyvas, a civil war refers to an armed conflict that transpires within the territorial boundaries of a recognized sovereign entity. The situation at hand encompasses parties once under a shared authority but have become adversaries and are actively involved in armed conflict.<sup>32</sup> Civil wars often arise from deep-rooted political, social, or ethnic divisions within a country. These conflicts can be incredibly destructive, leading to significant loss of life and widespread displacement of populations.<sup>33</sup>

30 "The Legitimacy Crisis in Libya's Political Institutions," Reuters, July 3, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/legitimacy-crisis-libyas-political-institutions-2022-07-03/>.

31 Ferhat Polat, "What Hope Is There for Libya's Long-Awaited Elections?" *The New Arab*, March 21, 2024, <https://www.newarab.com/opinion/what-hope-there-libyas-long-awaited-elections>.

32 Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge UP, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818462>.

33 Caroline A. Hartzell and Matthew Hoddie, *Crafting Peace: Power-Sharing Institutions and the Negotiated Settlement of Civil Wars* (Penn State Press, 2015).

Understanding the outbreak and persistence of Libya's civil war requires situating it within broader theoretical frameworks on civil conflict and state failure. Theories of civil war generally focus on three interrelated dimensions: grievances, greed, and governance capacity.<sup>34</sup> These approaches offer valuable insights into how and why Libya descended into violent fragmentation following the fall of Gaddafi.

The greed framework, most notably advanced by Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, emphasizes the role of economic opportunity structures in sustaining conflict. Libya's vast oil wealth became a central driver of competition among armed groups and political elites. Control over oil terminals, state institutions, and foreign currency reserves provided both material incentives and strategic leverage. The struggle for economic dominance thus intertwined with claims of political legitimacy, transforming the conflict into a battle for both power and resources.<sup>35</sup>

As Robert Rotberg and others highlight, state failure occurs when a government loses its monopoly over the legitimate use of force and its ability to deliver basic public goods.<sup>36</sup> Libya exemplifies this dynamic: the post-2011 state lacked cohesive security institutions, a unified military, and effective governance structures. The proliferation of militias filled this vacuum, each claiming to represent revolutionary legitimacy or regional interests, while in practice fragmenting authority even further.

The state-building theory argues that the state is a necessary institution for ensuring stability, providing security, and fostering progress. But, the process of constructing a functional state is complex and challenging, requiring careful planning, institutional capability, and political will.<sup>37</sup> The goal of this state-building phase was to establish legitimate states that could function and govern their people independently.<sup>38</sup> Efforts to build a state should be deliberate, consistent, and aimed at strengthening the connection between the government and its citizens. Achieving this goal necessitates a comprehensive understanding of the reasons behind fragility and its different forms

34 Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," *Oxford Economic Papers* 56, no. 4 (2004), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpf064>.

35 Collier and Hoefler, "Greed and Grievance."

36 Robert I. Rotberg, ed., *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences* (Princeton UP, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt7scrg>.

37 Aidan Hehir and Neil Robinson, eds, *State-Building: Theory and Practice* (Routledge, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203964712>.

38 David Lake, "The Practice and Theory of US Statebuilding," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 4, no. 3 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2010.498933>.

and an awareness of how this knowledge should influence the policies and actions taken in the state-building process.<sup>39</sup>

Since the removal of Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has been engulfed in a state of turmoil. The attempt to overthrow Gaddafi's regime failed in establishing stable political structures. Libya has become embroiled in a complex civil war consisting of multiple phases. Since 2014, the country has experienced a division between rival administrations, resulting in the emergence of numerous militias and a state of lawlessness.<sup>40</sup> The country gradually descended into conflict due to internal contradictions fueling the rivalry between political-military forces.

By 2014, Libya was effectively split between rival administrations one based in Tripoli in the west and another in Tobruk in the east each relying on alliances with diverse militias and external patrons. The internal contradictions between political and military factions were further intensified by the involvement of external actors, whose competing geopolitical interests deepened Libya's divisions and prolonged the conflict.

This section therefore explores not only the domestic roots of Libya's civil war but also the crucial role played by foreign interventions in shaping its trajectory. The analysis that follows will examine how the interplay between internal fragmentation and external involvement has perpetuated instability, undermined peace efforts, and hindered the emergence of a unified Libyan state.

### Foreign Interference

The interference of some international powers and regional actors has been a significant factor in deepening political fragmentation and polarization. Libya is endowed with a population of only 6.5 million, vast natural resources, an enviable location, and a littoral with immense potential. This external involvement has not only exacerbated the conflict but has also complicated efforts to establish a unified and functional state. As former UN Special Envoy Ghassan Salamé observed, the Libyan crisis is far from simple, involving the interests and interventions of at least six to ten countries, each pursuing its own agenda. Internally, Libya's political landscape is characterized by fragmentation and rivalry.<sup>41</sup>

39 OECD, "Concepts and Dilemmas of State Building in Fragile Situation: From fragility to resilience," *OECD Journal on Development* 9, no. 3 (2009).

40 Laessing, *Understanding Libya since Gaddafi*.

41 Annie Schmidt, "UN Libya Envoy: 'This Conflict, Left to Itself, Can Only Deteriorate and Expand,'" *International Peace Institute*, May 22, 2019, <https://www.ipinst.org/2019/05/a-conversation-with-srsg-ghassan-salame-head-of-unsmil>.

Foreign intervention plays a substantial role in precipitating political transitions. The primary impetus behind foreign intervention is rooted in economic interests, while additional considerations of geo-strategic interests also exert a significant influence. Despite these reasons, economic interests are prevalent in most cases.<sup>42</sup> Foreign intervention's role in the duration of the civil wars is essential to be researched, according to Patrick M. Regan, who presents a correlation between prolonged conflicts and foreign interventions. Regan argues that foreign intervention can have a significant impact on the duration of civil wars. He suggests that understanding the extent and nature of foreign involvement is crucial in comprehending why some conflicts last longer than others.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Regan's research highlights the need to examine how different types of interventions, such as military support or diplomatic mediation, can influence the dynamics and outcomes of civil wars.

Foreign intervention has the potential to worsen the conflict and prolong the civil war. Additionally, increasing the number of countries involved in the conflicts could further exacerbate the situation. Interventions carried out by individual states facilitate the expeditious resolution of conflicts, whereas interventions involving multiple states tend to prolong civil wars. As the number of participating states increases, the attainment of a mutually acceptable agreement becomes increasingly challenging.<sup>44</sup> The involvement of various regional powers in the conflict of Libya's civil war can be attributed to their aspirations to enhance their influence in a country currently facing a power vacuum. The Libyan conflict has witnessed the involvement of numerous states as the warring factions continue to engage in ongoing battles, driven by the consistent influx of resources and financial support from various nations.

Libyan civil war originated from the 2011 uprising and evolved into a conflict that involved various external actors. These external players provided different support, such as weapons, funds, mercenaries, and diplomatic assistance, to the opposing sides. Achieving peace and stability appears to be a challenging task, as political polarization is rampant and the involvement of foreign countries continues to be a prominent topic of discussion.

42 Toke S. Aidt and Facundo Albornoz, "Political Regimes and Foreign Intervention," *Journal of Development Economics* 94, no. 2 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1016>

43 Patrick M. Regan, "Third-Party Interventions and the Duration of Intrastate Conflicts," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (2002).

44 Fred H. Lawson, "Foreign Military Intervention and the Duration of Civil Wars Revisited," *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations* 23, no. 2 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973598419851366>.

## The Positions of Russia and Türkiye

Since 2019, Russia and Türkiye have emerged as decisive actors in Libya's conflict, with their military involvement creating a balance of power that froze frontlines after Haftar's LNA failed to capture Tripoli in June 2020.<sup>45</sup> Haftar's April 2019 offensive not only derailed Libya's political process but forced critical strategic decisions particularly for Türkiye, which ultimately intervened militarily to support the internationally recognized GNA. Ankara deployed troops and supplied arms, both to counter Haftar's advance and safeguard its regional interests, significantly deepening its engagement.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, Russia expanded its footprint through Wagner Group mercenaries, now known as the Africa Corps, who continue to provide Haftar with security support against western Libyan rivals while suppressing domestic dissent.<sup>47</sup> This dual intervention transformed Libya into an arena for competitive proxy engagement, with both external powers consolidating their military presence during the conflict as Western powers remained passive.<sup>48</sup>

### Russia's Role

Russia's policy toward Libya is shaped by a mix of strategic, economic, political, and military interests, with a key focus on asserting its presence in the Mediterranean region and expanding its influence in the Sahel by using Libya as a hub for operations across the region. Moscow's policy is primarily driven by its broader geopolitical ambitions and economic interests, particularly in the energy sector. Following its resurgence in the Middle East, Russia identified North Africa especially Libya as a region of opportunity, capitalizing on the limited engagement of Western countries, including the U.S. and the UK, as well as divisions among European states, particularly between France and Italy. This created space for Russia to expand its footprint through investments, arms deals, and military support for its partners.<sup>49</sup>

45 Lacher, "Social Cleavages and Armed."

46 Şaban Kardaş, "Turkey's Libya Policy: Militarization of Regional Policies and Escalation Dominance," *China International Strategy Review* 2, no. 2 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-020-00060-w>.

47 Matteo Maillard, "Africa Corps: How Russia Is Conquering the Sahel, Base by Base," *The Africa Report*, February 12, 2025, <https://www.theafricareport.com/376583/africa-corps-how-russia-is-conquering-the-sahel-base-by-base/>.

48 "Russia Withdraws Air-Defense Systems, Other Advanced Weaponry from Syria to Libya," *The WSJ*, December 18, 2024, <https://www.wsj.com/world/russia-air-defense-bases-syria-libya-25810db0>.

49 Ferhat Polat, "Russia's Policy in Libya from 2011 Onwards," *TRT World Research Centre*, January 1, 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/43643677/Russias\\_Policy\\_in\\_Libya\\_from\\_2011\\_Onwards](https://www.academia.edu/43643677/Russias_Policy_in_Libya_from_2011_Onwards).

By exploiting Libya's instability, Moscow has sought to expand its sway over Europe's southern periphery and gain access to Libyan natural resources. It has effectively capitalized on NATO's retreat, advancing its agenda with little regard for the broader implications for peace and stability. Unlike in Syria, where its strategy is more entrenched, Russia's involvement in Libya is opportunistic, aimed at gaining leverage rather than supporting a specific political order.

### ***Moscow's ties with Khalifa Haftar***

Moscow has sought to increase its influence in Libya through its backing of Haftar's war against the Tripoli-based GNA. Russia's rapprochement with Haftar can be traced back to 2015 when Moscow engaged in the Libyan civil war.<sup>50</sup> Since 2015, Russia's diplomatic engagement with Haftar has intensified. Haftar has met with Russian ministers on several occasions. It was claimed that Russia and the LNA signed a \$2 billion arms deal in exchange for allowing Russia to establish a military facility in eastern Libya.<sup>51</sup>

Russia has reportedly played a direct role in supporting Haftar's financial operations, including the production and supply of Libyan dinars to eastern Libya. For example, in September 2019 five months into Haftar's Tripoli offensive Malta intercepted a shipment of Russian-printed currency destined for his LNA. Additionally, nearly 4.5 billion dinars were delivered from Russia to Tobruk during the first half of 2019, coinciding with the launch of Haftar's military campaign.<sup>52</sup>

This financial support strengthened his war efforts while undermining Libya's monetary stability. In 2024, Libya's internationally recognized government accused Russia of circulating counterfeit currency in the country an extension of Moscow's previous efforts to supply fake money to Haftar's LNA. In response, the Central Bank of Libya acted in April by withdrawing the first and second series of 50-dinar notes (worth approximately \$10) from circulation after detecting forged bills.<sup>53</sup>

50 Polat, "Russia's Policy in Libya."

51 Grzegorz Kuczyński, "Civil War in Libya: Russian Goals and Policy," *Warsaw Institute*, April 30, 2019, <https://warsawinstitute.org/civil-war-libya-russian-goals-policy/>.

52 M.Winer Jonathan, "Seized Russian-Printed Dinars Highlight an Opportunity to Reform Libya's Civil War Economy," *Middle East Institute*, November 9, 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/seized-russian-printed-dinars-highlight-opportunity-reform-libyas-civil-war-economy>.

53 "Atlantic Council: Billions of Russia-Printed Dinars Have Flooded Libyan Market," *The Libya Observer*, May 1, 2024, <https://libyaobserver.ly/news/atlantic-council-billions-russia-printed-dinars-have-flooded-libyan-market>.

A 14 month-siege of Libya's capital ended in failure, and Wagner fighters re-deployed to an array of oil facilities and nearby military bases in both central Libya and the southwest. Although Haftar's LNA failed to capture the capital, Tripoli, Wagner now known as the African Corps proved crucial in helping Haftar maintain his dominance over eastern and southern Libya. This territorial control allows Haftar to command key oil infrastructure, providing him with both strategic leverage in political negotiations and a vital source of funding for his forces.<sup>54</sup> The Africa Corps project is more ambitious than its predecessor. To solidify its presence on the continent, the Kremlin plans to build a multipolar logistics infrastructure linking the Sahel to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, crossing the Sahara. In this strategy, Libya plays a crucial role in enabling Russia to achieve its geostrategic objectives.<sup>55</sup>

### **Türkiye's Role**

Türkiye has long-standing historical, political, and economic connections with Libya, rooted in the country's past under Ottoman rule. After Libya gained independence in 1951, relations between the two nations remained positive, and economic cooperation expanded significantly during the oil boom. Turkish companies, particularly in the construction and infrastructure sectors, were highly active in Libya up until the 2011 uprising that ended Gaddafi's regime. However, in the aftermath of his fall, Türkiye's engagement with Libya was complicated by the ensuing political turmoil and conflict.

In the aftermath of the 2011 uprising, Libya transformed into a battle-ground of regional and international competition. As a result, Libya's hoped-for democratic transition has faced significant obstacles originating both from inside and outside the country. Ankara has been following an approach based on diplomacy and an increase in economic and trade activities. Türkiye has various interests in Libya, however, the main reasons for Türkiye's involvement include preserving its economic and geostrategic interests in the country and the Eastern Mediterranean. The Turkish government has concerns that the Libyan civil war could have a spill-over effect, leading to protracted instability, and providing anti-Türkiye forces with more leverage in the region.

54 Ferhat Polat, "How Wagner's Revolt Could Impact Russia's Influence in Libya," *The New Arab*, July 6, 2023, <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/how-wagners-revolt-could-impact-russias-influence-libya>.

55 Maillard, "Africa Corps."

### **Economic Interests**

Libya possesses the largest proven oil reserves in Africa, establishing it as the continent's foremost oil economy. The country's significant oil reserves relative to its population contribute to its status as one of the world's wealthiest economies.<sup>56</sup> Libya possessed significant financial reserves and global investments.<sup>57</sup> The nation's geographical location is a valuable resource. The geographical proximity of Libyan oil to the European market, particularly southern European ports, provides a notable advantage compared to oil producers in the Middle East. Proximity to ports results in reduced transportation expenses.<sup>58</sup>

Türkiye and Libya have a long-standing economic relationship. The financial relationship between Libya and Türkiye was strengthened in 1974 when Libya supported Turkish military intervention.<sup>59</sup> Since then, the economic ties between the two nations have progressed. The construction sector is significant in the trade relations between Türkiye and Libya. In the 1970s, when Turkish construction companies first started to establish their presence overseas, one of the first countries in which they did so was Libya. Türkiye established a strong presence in the Libyan construction industry in the 1970s.<sup>60</sup> The trade agreements in the late 1970s laid the foundation for this development. In the early 2000s, Türkiye secured a significant portion of the profitable construction contracts in Libya.<sup>61</sup>

In 2010, the two countries agreed to increase investments in energy, small and medium-sized enterprises, technology, education, banking, transportation, and agriculture. By 2011, around 25,000 Turkish citizens were employed and conducting business in Libya. Turkish investors invested billions in Libya's construction sector, with Turkish business firms participating in over 300 contracts.<sup>62</sup> As of early 2011, Turkish companies had accumulated over \$20

56 J. A. Allan, *Libya: The Experience of Oil* (Taylor & Francis, 2022).

57 "Libyan Oil - Prospects for Stability and Growth," APICORP, November 2018, <https://www.apicorp.org/search/Libya+/>.

58 Ferhat Polat, "Of Energy and Unity: Oil and Challenges to Libya's Political and Economic Future," *TRT World Research Centre*, January 8, 2021, <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/policy-outlooks/of-energy-and-unity-oil-and-challenges-to-libyas-political-and-economic-future/>.

59 Tufan Türenç, "Bir Kaddafi anısı', News, Bir Kaddafi Anısı," *Hürriyet*, February 25, 2011, <https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/bir-kaddafi-anisi-17115996>.

60 Orhan Koloğlu, *500 Years in Turkish-Libyan Relations* (Center for Strategic Research, 2007).

61 Ferhat Polat, "Turkey's Strategy in Libya: Rationale and Challenges," *TRT World Research Centre*, November, 24, 2020, <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/policy-outlooks/turkeys-strategy-in-libya-rationale-and-challenges/>.

62 Şerife Akıncı and Recep Yorulmaz, "Kaddafi Döneminden Günümüze Türkiye-Libya Ekonomik İlişkileri," *ORSAM*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/kaddafi-doneminden-gunumuze-turkiye-libya-ekonomik-iliskileri/>.

billion worth of ongoing projects in various sectors such as construction, engineering, and energy.<sup>63</sup>

However, the outbreak of conflict in 2011 and the fall of Gaddafi disrupted these activities, stalling many of Türkiye's investments. Since the ceasefire agreement between Libya's rival factions in October 2020, some of these halted projects have gradually resumed.<sup>64</sup> Turkish Airlines has even restarted flights to cities including Benghazi developments seen as promising signs of normalization.<sup>65</sup>

In parallel, Türkiye has actively sought to engage with Libya's eastern factions. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's meetings with Aguila Saleh the Tobruk-based parliament speaker and a key supporter of Haftar in August 2022 and December 2023,<sup>66</sup> along with the reopening of Türkiye's consulate in Benghazi in 2024, underscore Ankara's intent to re-establish ties across the country. These efforts build on a 2010 bilateral agreement to boost investment in sectors such as energy, small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs), technology, education, banking, transportation, and agriculture.

### ***Türkiye's Libyan Engagement in the Mediterranean Context***

Türkiye's other important driver in Libya relates to territorial waters in the eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye has been involved in a dispute with neighboring countries over the delimitation of maritime boundaries and the exploration of natural resources in the region. This has led to increased tensions and a desire for Türkiye to secure its interests in Libya, as it sees the country as a strategic gateway to assert its influence and protect its claims in the Eastern Mediterranean. The search for natural resources in the East Mediterranean Sea is of great strategic importance to Türkiye, attracting the interest of both regional and national stakeholders. The discovery of significant natural gas reserves in the region has sparked a race among countries to secure their energy needs and assert their influence. This has led to heightened tensions and competing claims over maritime boundaries, making the Eastern Medi-

63 Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey and the Arab Spring: Leadership in the Middle East* (Bozorg Press, 2014).

64 "HoR Calls on Turkish Companies to Resume Their Projects in Libya," *The Libya Observer*, July 31, 2022, <https://libyaobserver.ly/news/hor-calls-turkish-companies-resume-their-projects-libya>.

65 "Turkish Airlines Resumes Flights from Istanbul to Benghazi, Libya after 10 Years," *Anadolu Agency*, January 14, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/turkiye/turkish-airlines-resumes-flights-from-istanbul-to-benghazi-libya-after-10-years/3449903>.

66 "Turkish President Meets Speaker of Libyan House of Representatives," *Anadolu Agency*, December 13, 2023, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/turkish-president-meets-speaker-of-libyan-house-of-representatives/3081489>.

terranean a hotspot for geopolitical rivalries.<sup>67</sup> The gas resources in the East Mediterranean have become the main subject of contention in regional politics since the discovery of gas reserves in Israel in 1999 and 2000.<sup>68</sup>

In 2019, the UN-backed GNA requested military assistance from Türkiye to counter Haftar's offensive on Tripoli. Ankara responded positively, providing comprehensive support including drones and technical assistance which significantly altered the dynamics on the ground. As a result, Haftar's forces failed to capture the capital, largely due to Türkiye's backing. This military success enabled Ankara to negotiate an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) agreement with the GNA that, from Türkiye's perspective, redefined maritime boundaries and directly challenged the competing claims of Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and Israel. The agreement was not merely an economic initiative; it was a strategic maneuver aimed at confronting Türkiye's Mediterranean rivals over territorial waters and energy resources.

Greece, Egypt, and Greek Cypriot administration have acted against Türkiye due to the dispute in the usage of offshore waters within the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>69</sup> In January 2020, a significant development occurred in the geopolitical landscape of the Eastern Mediterranean region, as Greece, the Greek Cypriot administration, and Israel came together to formalize their commitment to the East Med pipeline project.<sup>70</sup> The primary objective of this project is to establish a linkage between the energy sources in the East Mediterranean region and Europe but excluding Türkiye and Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), to secure their offshore pipeline.<sup>71</sup>

In response to its perceived strategic isolation in the Eastern Mediterranean, Ankara has strategically chosen to pursue a breakout strategy. This approach involves the formation of an official alliance with the internationally recognized GNA.<sup>72</sup> In November 2019, Türkiye and the GNA signed two memorandums of understanding (MoUs). One focused on military cooperation, while the other

67 Taehwan Kim and Sang Yoon Shin, "Competition or Cooperation? The Geopolitics of Gas Discovery in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea," *Energy Research & Social Science* 74 (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2021.101983>.

68 Walid Khadduri, "East Mediterranean Gas: Opportunities and Challenges," *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629395.2012.655049>.

69 Mehmet Bardakçı, "Turkey and the Major Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean Crisis from the 2010s to the 2020s," *Comparative Southeast European Studies* 70, no. 3 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2021-0071>.

70 "Cyprus, Greece, Israel to Sign Pipeline Deal on Jan. 2," AP News, December 23, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/b1d346b8e360f9ab85e08e460c8bb089>.

71 "Greece, Israel, Cyprus Sign EastMed Gas Pipeline Deal," Reuters, January 2, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-greece-cyprus-israel-pipeline-idUSKBN1Z10R5>.

72 Michaël Tanchum, "Libya, Energy, and the Mediterranean's New 'Great Game'," *Elcano Royal Institute*, September 23, 2020, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/libya-energy-and-the-mediterraneans-new-great-game/>.

dealt with maritime boundaries in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>73</sup> Türkiye's achievement in preventing Haftar's coup against the GNA would significantly advance its efforts to safeguard its interests in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>74</sup> Thus, Türkiye's alliance has vital implications, such as asserting its presence in the East Mediterranean and preventing EU member states from accessing what it considers its maritime waters. As a net energy importer and transit state, Türkiye also aims to avoid giving Egypt and Israel, energy exporters, any advantage over itself.<sup>75</sup>

### **Roles of Neighboring and Regional Actors**

Libya's neighbors have suffered a great deal in the aftermath of Gaddafi's overthrow. Therefore, Egypt Tunisia and Algeria are crucial for a political solution to the Libyan ongoing instability.

#### **Egypt**

Egypt's stance on Libya is influenced by multiple drivers, particularly security risks and economic priorities.<sup>76</sup> The ongoing conflict in Libya has posed direct threat to Egypt's national security and internal stability. One of the most pressing concerns is the 1,150-kilometer-long shared border, which has witnessed a sharp increase in violence since the fall of Gaddafi.<sup>77</sup> Due to the instability in Libya and the vast stretch of the border, Egyptian authorities consider securing it entirely to be unfeasible. The area remains a key corridor for the smuggling of weapons, drugs, and people including extremists and militants into Egypt.

Cairo has historically depended on Libya to help mitigate its high unemployment rates. Before the 2011 revolution, nearly two million Egyptians worked in Libya, mainly in oil and gas, construction, and other sectors. Before Gaddafi was toppled in 2011, Libya was vital to Egypt's economy not only did Egyptian migrant workers send back around \$33 million in remittances, but Libya also provided Egypt with cheap oil. Furthermore, Libyan investments

73 "Libya, Turkey Sign Deals on Security and Maritime Jurisdictions," Al Jazeera, November 28, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/11/28/libya-turkey-sign-deals-on-security-and-maritime-jurisdictions>.

74 Polat, "Turkey's Strategy in Libya."

75 "Turkey-Libya Maritime Deal Rattles East Mediterranean," Reuters, December 25, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-libya-eastmed-tensions-explain-idUSKBN1YT0JK>.

76 Ferhat Polat, *Egypt's Role in Libya* (TRT World Research Centre, 2020), <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Egypt's-Role-in-Libya.pdf>.

77 Kay Westenberger, "Egypt's Security Paradox in Libya," *E-International Relations*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/78395>.

in Egypt's economy exceeded \$10 billion across multiple sectors mainly in construction sector.<sup>78</sup>

The October 2020 ceasefire agreement between Haftar's LNA and the GNA helped ease tensions between Egypt and Libya's Tripoli-based administration. This ceasefire paved the way for renewed diplomatic engagement. Since then, representatives of the Tripoli-based government have held several rounds of talks with the Egyptian government in both Cairo and Tripoli. Although Egypt provided significant support to Haftar's LNA, Cairo has also been reaching out to other Libyan political leaders and groups as part of a strategy to hedge its bets.

### **Tunisia**

Tunisia has borne significant economic and security costs because of the ongoing conflict in Libya. The economic fallout has been substantial. According to the World Bank, Tunisia loses an estimated \$800 million annually due to decreased investment and diminished demand from Libya. Bilateral trade has plummeted, with Tunisia's Ministry of Commerce reporting a 75 percent decline in trade volume between the two countries. The Governor of the Central Bank of Tunisia, has identified the Libyan conflict as a key driver behind Tunisia's economic slowdown in recent years.<sup>79</sup>

Prior to 2011, Libya represented a vital economic partner for Tunisia, providing both energy and tourism revenues. Libya supplied over 25 percent of Tunisia's fuel needs at preferential prices. However, the collapse of Libya's oil industry in the aftermath of Gaddafi's fall severely disrupted this energy relationship. Although there have been efforts to revive Libyan oil production, full recovery remains distant.<sup>80</sup>

Tourism also suffered significantly. Before the Libyan uprising, approximately 1.8 million Libyan tourists visited Tunisia annually. This figure dropped by 30 percent in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, further straining Tunisia's economy. Moreover, the return of over 60,000 Tunisian migrant workers since 2011 has increased pressure on Tunisia's already fragile labor market. In 2011, remittances from Tunisians working in Libya amounted to \$276

78 Miller Elissa, "Why Libya's Stability Matters to the Region," *Atlantic Council*, January 25, 2017, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/menasource/why-libya-s-stability-matters-to-the-region/>.

79 Elissa, "Why Libya's Stability

80 Elissa, "Why Libya's Stability

million approximately 0.6 percent of Tunisia's GDP. Their abrupt return has exacerbated unemployment.<sup>81</sup> In addition to economic repercussions, the Libyan conflict has posed a persistent security threat to Tunisia. Militancy and extremist networks in Libya have frequently spilled over the border. Tunisian authorities linked the perpetrators of the 2015 Bardo Museum attack in March and the Sousse beach massacre in June to training camps in Libya.<sup>82</sup>

The danger became even more apparent in 2016, when radical militants launched a cross-border assault on security forces in the border town of Ben Guerdane.<sup>83</sup> The attack underscored the direct risks that Libya's security vacuum poses to its western neighbor.

### **Algeria**

Like other neighboring countries, Algeria has been significantly impacted by the aftermath of Gaddafi's overthrow. Its vast desert border with Libya home to communities with long-standing smuggling networks presents a major security challenge not only for Algeria but also for the wider region. Since the 2011 conflict, the spread of weapons and ammunition, along with the increased mobility and operational freedom of armed non-state groups, has intensified security risks across the area.<sup>84</sup> Algeria remains highly concerned about the absence of effective state authority in Libya and the rise of terrorism and smuggling networks, fearing these developments could spill over and threaten its own stability. In response, Algeria has committed to a long-term strategy aimed at promoting stability in Libya by advocating for dialogue and diplomacy to end the civil war and resume the process of state-building. As part of this approach, Algiers engages with a broad range of Libyan actors to support national reconciliation. It has endorsed inclusive, UN-backed efforts to resolve the conflict.

81 Omer Karasapan, "The Impact of Libyan Middle-Class Refugees in Tunisia," *Brookings*, March 17, 2015, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-impact-of-libyan-middle-class-refugees-in-tunisia/>.

82 "Tunis Museum Attack: 20 People Killed after Hostage Drama at Tourist Site," *The Guardian*, March 18, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/mar/18/eight-people-killed-in-attack-on-tunisia-bardo-museum>.

83 "Year after Attacks, Daesh Threat Receding in Tunisia," *Anadolu Agency*, March 11, 2017, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/middle-east/year-after-attacks-daesh-threat-receding-in-tunisia/768985>.

84 Ferhat Polat, "Algeria's Role in Libya," *TRT World Research Centre*, April 24, 2020, <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/policy-outlooks/algerias-role-in-libya/>.

## Sudan

The deteriorating security situation in Sudan poses significant spill over risks for neighboring countries, particularly Libya. The porous border between the two nations facilitates the movement of fighters, raising concerns about cross-border instability. In 2021, the United Nations estimated that around 11,000 Sudanese mercenaries were operating in Libya, primarily fighting alongside Haftar's LNA. Many of these fighters are believed to have the capacity to move freely between Libya and Sudan, with the potential to use Libyan territory as a staging ground for incursions into Sudan, thereby further fueling the civil conflict there.<sup>85</sup>

A key dimension of this dynamic is the reported alliance between Haftar's LNA and Sudan's Rapid Support Forces (RSF), led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, commonly known as Hemedti. The RSF roots to the Janjaweed militias and have reportedly received backing from the United Arab Emirates. Haftar and Hemedti have capitalized on their military strength to assert themselves as dominant actors in their respective countries, often sidelining civilian authorities. Their militarized approaches and parallel power structures have not only undermined efforts toward democratic governance but also deepened institutional fragmentation and instability in both Libya and Sudan.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

This research paper set out to examine the persistent instability in Libya following the 2011 revolution, focusing on the interplay between internal divisions and external interventions that have impeded the formation of robust state institutions and prolonged the conflict. The study's central question why Libya has failed to achieve stable governance and national reconciliation in the aftermath of the Gaddafi regime has been addressed through a qualitative analysis of secondary sources, theoretical frameworks on civil war and state failure, and a detailed review of the country's post-revolutionary trajectory.

The findings of this research underscore the complexity of the Libyan conflict, which is not merely a civil war but a multifaceted geopolitical struggle. The initial optimism that followed the fall of Gaddafi quickly gave way to a harsh

85 "Unrest in Sudan Carries Spillover Threats for Libya," Economist Intelligence Unit, May 9, 2023, <https://www.eiu.com/n/unrest-in-sudan-carries-spillover-threats-for-libya/>.

86 Ferhat Polat, *Gold, Guns, and Geopolitics: The Sudan Conflict and Its Regional Implications* (TRT World Research Centre, 2025), <https://researchcentre.trtworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Gold-Guns-and-Geopolitics-Sudan-.pdf>.

reality marked by weak state institutions, rival political factions, and the competing interests of regional and global powers. The absence of a unified, legitimate political framework has prevented the emergence of effective governance structures, perpetuated instability and deepening political fragmentation. Internally, Libya's transition has been persistently undermined by a lack of consensus among political factions, the proliferation of militias, and deep regional and tribal divisions.

The power vacuum created by the collapse of the Gaddafi regime led to the emergence of multiple rival administrations, each with its own armed forces and external patrons. The failure to establish a widely accepted constitutional framework and the repeated postponement of national elections have further entrenched the legitimacy crisis. Externally, the involvement of numerous regional and global actors has transformed Libya into a theatre of proxy competition. Countries such as Russia, Egypt, the UAE, and France have supported different factions, often prioritizing their strategic and economic interests over Libya's stability. The influx of foreign weapons, finances, and fighters has not only prolonged the conflict but also complicated efforts to achieve a comprehensive and lasting settlement.

Türkiye's role in Libya stands out as particularly constructive and multifaceted. While its engagement is undoubtedly informed by national interests, Türkiye has consistently aligned itself with UN-backed peace initiatives and has played a pivotal role in facilitating political dialogue. Unlike other external actors who have often prioritized narrow strategic objectives, Türkiye has supported internationally recognized governments and contributed to the stabilization of Libya by providing essential training to its armed forces, helping to lay the groundwork for a unified and professional standing army. Furthermore, Türkiye has actively assisted Libya's government in revitalizing its vital oil sector, offering resources such as seismic survey vessels, and entering into memoranda of understanding to boost production and economic recovery. Notably, Türkiye's approach has also included outreach to the Haftar-led faction, demonstrating a willingness to put aside differences and work toward consensus. By encouraging dialogue and supporting efforts to hold elections, Türkiye has shown a genuine commitment to fostering national reconciliation and bringing lasting stability to the country.

The Libyan case illustrates the profound challenges of post-revolutionary state-building in a context marked by deep internal divisions and intense external interference. The persistent fragmentation of political authority and the proliferation of armed groups have undermined efforts to establish

a cohesive national identity and effective governance. The involvement of multiple external actors with divergent agendas has further complicated the landscape, making it difficult to achieve the diplomatic coordination necessary for a sustainable resolution. The ongoing instability in Libya has had significant repercussions beyond its borders, affecting the security and economic interests of neighboring countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, and Algeria. The spread of extremist networks, cross-border smuggling, and the disruption of vital economic ties have contributed to regional insecurity and economic hardship.

To move toward national reconciliation and effective governance, Libya requires a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses both internal and external dimensions of the conflict. This involves promoting inclusive political dialogue by bringing all major factions and stakeholders into a genuine conversation aimed at forging a new social contract and constitutional framework. At the same time, it is essential to strengthen state institutions, with international support focused on building the capacity of Libyan bodies in areas such as security, justice, and public administration, thereby restoring the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force and its ability to deliver essential public goods. Coordinating international efforts is also crucial; external actors must prioritize Libya's stability over narrow strategic interests by aligning their actions with UN-led initiatives and refraining from unilateral interventions that exacerbate divisions. Finally, addressing economic grievances through the equitable management of Libya's natural resources and the transparent distribution of revenues is vital to reducing competition among factions and fostering national unity.

Libya's ongoing crisis is a stark reminder of the difficulties inherent in post-conflict reconstruction and the dangers of fragmented authority and external interference. Achieving lasting peace and stability will require unprecedented levels of diplomatic coordination, genuine commitment from both internal and external stakeholders, and a willingness to prioritize the national interest over individual or factional gains.

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