

Groundhog Day?

Parallel Authorities and the Political Roller Coaster in Libya

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This policy outlook examines the latest political crisis in Libya, analysing how the collapse of the electoral process led to a legitimacy crisis which has been the main feature of Libyan politics and the transitional process since Libya's long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi was toppled in 2011.

Elections scheduled for last December were postponed; consequently, political manoeuvring has increased among rival parties and leaders across Libya's fragmented political sphere. As a result, political uncertainty once again has become the norm even though many Libyans hoped that the planned elections could end the deadlock and reunify the Libyan people to bring stability and prosperity. As a result, Libya entered another period of profound political crisis.

Introduction

Libya's long-awaited presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for December 2021 were postponed indefinitely amid rising tensions. The oil-rich North African nation has been troubled by division and violence in the decade since the country's long-time dictator Muammar Gaddafi was toppled and killed in a revolution.

The postponement of these planned elections pushes Libya further into a political conundrum. For instance, without having the necessary quorum and with [false votes](#), the Tobruk-based House of Representatives (HoR) announced on February 10th, 2022, its decision to replace Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah with Fathi Bashagha.

The appointment was directly supported by the HoR's Speaker, Aguila Saleh, and Khalifa Haftar, even though they fought against Bashagha during the war that gripped the capital in 2019-20 when Haftar launched a 14-month military offensive on Tripoli. Therefore, [some Libyans](#) in the west of the country seem to regard Bashagha as a traitor. Many have expressed their anger about Bashagha's alignment with Haftar, who waged a bloody campaign against Tripoli, destroying thousands of homes and displacing hundreds of thousands of people.

On March 1st, the HoR gave its vote of confidence to the Government of National Stability (GNS). Two days later, Fathi Bashagha was sworn in as Prime Minister in Tobruk. Consequently, the re-emergence of a Haftar-backed cabinet challenging the UN-backed Government of National Unity (GNU) has led to renewed polarisation and sabre-rattling. In response to the HoR's decision, [Abdul Hamid Dbeibah](#), the UN-backed prime minister, has [said](#) he will hand over power only after an election.

The HoR has argued that Dbeibah's mandate ended after he failed to hold elections in December 2021, after which the disagreement over the legitimacy of the GNU intensified. Divisions arose between a camp thinking that the government's authority ends with the termination of the polls deadline set by the Political Dialogue Forum (PDF) roadmap and another contending that the legitimacy of the Dbeibah government continues until authority is transferred to an elected government.

The appointing of a new government by the HoR has produced two parallel administrations and increased the risk of an armed confrontation. As a result, [clashes broke out in Tripoli](#) between armed groups loyal to Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah and rival leader Fathi Bashagha. Since Libya's eastern parliament-appointed Fathi Bashagha as the new prime minister, Bashagha has tried to install himself in Tripoli twice, however, on both occasions' militias loyal to Dbeibah were able to push him out. After failing to establish his government in the capital, Bashagha [set up](#) his unrecognised pseudo-government in the city of Sirte.



Vehicles of forces loyal to Libya's Tripoli-based Prime Minister Abdulhamid Dbeibeh are parked after forces of the rival Tobruk-based government withdrew after clashes break out between armed groups loyal to Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh and rival leader Fathi Bashagha, who was recently appointed as premier by the Tobruk-based parliament, in the capital Tripoli on May 17, 2022. (Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)

The failure to hold the polls significantly damaged international efforts to end the political crisis in Libya. It opened a new chapter in Libya's long-running political stalemate, with rival governments once again claiming legitimacy.

The Protracted Political Crisis

Since Libya's long-time ruler Muammar Gaddafi was ousted in 2011, Libya has experienced a prolonged and complex inter-linkage of economic, political, and security dilemmas that have weakened state institutions and damaged the economy. Eleven years after Muammar Gaddafi's overthrow, the country's situation remains highly unstable.

Elections scheduled for last December were postponed; consequently, political manoeuvring has increased among rival parties and leaders across Libya's fragmented political sphere. As a result, political uncertainty once again has become the norm even though many Libyans hoped that planned elections could end the deadlock and reunify the Libyan people to bring stability and prosperity. As a result, Libya has entered another period of profound political crisis.

By delaying the polls, the dispute over the legitimacy of the Dbeibah government increased. Speaker of the HoR, Aguila Saleh, claimed that Dbeibah's mandate ended when the interim government failed to hold elections. Consequently, the HoR chose Fathi Bashagha as the new prime minister, and he has also received support from Khalifa Haftar. Fathi Bashagha [installed his government in Sirte](#), which has led to a political divide between the two rival administrations.

While Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah has rejected calls to step down, well-organised forces [allied with Dbeibah](#), including the powerful Brigade 444 in western Libya, deeply oppose Haftar. They believe the legitimacy of Dbeibah's government continues until authority is handed over to an elected government. Dbeibah [reportedly](#) also enjoys



Fathi Bashagha, Prime Minister-designate by the eastern-based Libyan House of Representatives in Tobruk, makes a statement during a press conference in Sirte, Libya on May 17, 2022, regarding the clashes between the supporters of the Government of National Unity and the armed groups that supported him after his arrival in Tripoli. (Abdullah Marei - Anadolu Agency)

the support of most of the elders, decision-makers and elites of western Libya, especially from Misrata. Libya's latest legitimacy crisis, in some ways, resembles the situation between 2014 and 2021, when it had two competing governments based in the east and west, respectively.

Anas El Gomati, General Director of the Sadeq Institute, a Libyan think tank, [commented](#), "The latest event was a political disaster for Bashagha, and he is under pressure to prove his value to Haftar. Neither of them is able to seize the capital. He launched this attempt in the knowledge it could spark a conflict but also result in Bashagha being able to remain in the capital and contest Dbeibah. But it has ended with Bashagha being escorted out."

It is imperative to note that The GNU was established in March 2021 after years of divisions and fighting. The GNU was selected through a United Nations-supported process and crucially approved by the HoR. With this approval, the GNU became Libya's first unified government since 2014. In light of this reality, some lawmakers in the eastern-based Parliament and members of Libya's High Council of State Council still support the GNU. They have argued for continuing with the GNU until a government is formally elected, claiming that there was no reason to call for a new government as long as the goal of the GNU was holding legitimate elections.

Speaking to TRT World Research Centre, Umberto Profazio, Associate Fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), commented that:

"The resumption of armed violence in Libya has been a real possibility for quite some time, especially after the establishment of the new Government of National Salvation (GNS) by the House of Representatives (HoR) earlier this year. The political bifurcation has definitely put an end

to a trend that had started immediately after the ceasefire in 2020 and was driving Libya toward the reunification of national institutions, which was a real possibility, especially after the establishment of the Government of National Unity (GNU). Nevertheless, structural challenges, including the reunification of the military and the inability to find a solution to a fair redistribution of oil revenues, have derailed the peace process, which also suffered from the lack of leadership of a divided UN, especially in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. At the same time, it is important to highlight that the recent clashes in Tripoli continue to confirm that the real power in Libya rests in the hands of the militias. The different armed groups continue to use political institutions as a facade, a screen behind which they continue to manoeuvre to take advantage of the riches of a rentier state and to stage their power struggle".

Most recently, the HoR [approved](#) a 90 billion dinars (\$18.6 billion) budget for Bashagha's government. However, the Central Bank of Libya (CBL) did not acquiesce and continued business as usual with the Dbeibah's government. It has made no public indication that it will hand over the money. This situation occurred while Bashagha [said](#) he was confident that CBL governor Sadiq al-Kabir would provide the funds.

It is essential to highlight that over the past few years, the political [battle over controlling](#) Libya's leading economic institutions has been vital for whoever wishes to claim authority over the country. There are two economic actors of paramount importance: Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC), which deals with oil and gas production and exports, and the CBL, which gathers revenues from hydrocarbon sales. The unification of critical institutions, including the CBL, and forming of a single exchange rate across Libya have been significant goals of the U.N.-led process

to deal with the economic issues that prohibited any political resolution. Within this context, in January 2022, Libya's rival central bank branches [decided](#) to take a significant step toward [reunifying](#) as part of a U.N.-backed peace process between rival factions in the East and West.

Some [reports claim that](#) if the CBL refuses to fund Bashagha's budget, the HoR may ask the head of its eastern branch to do so, effectively ending the CBL reunification process.

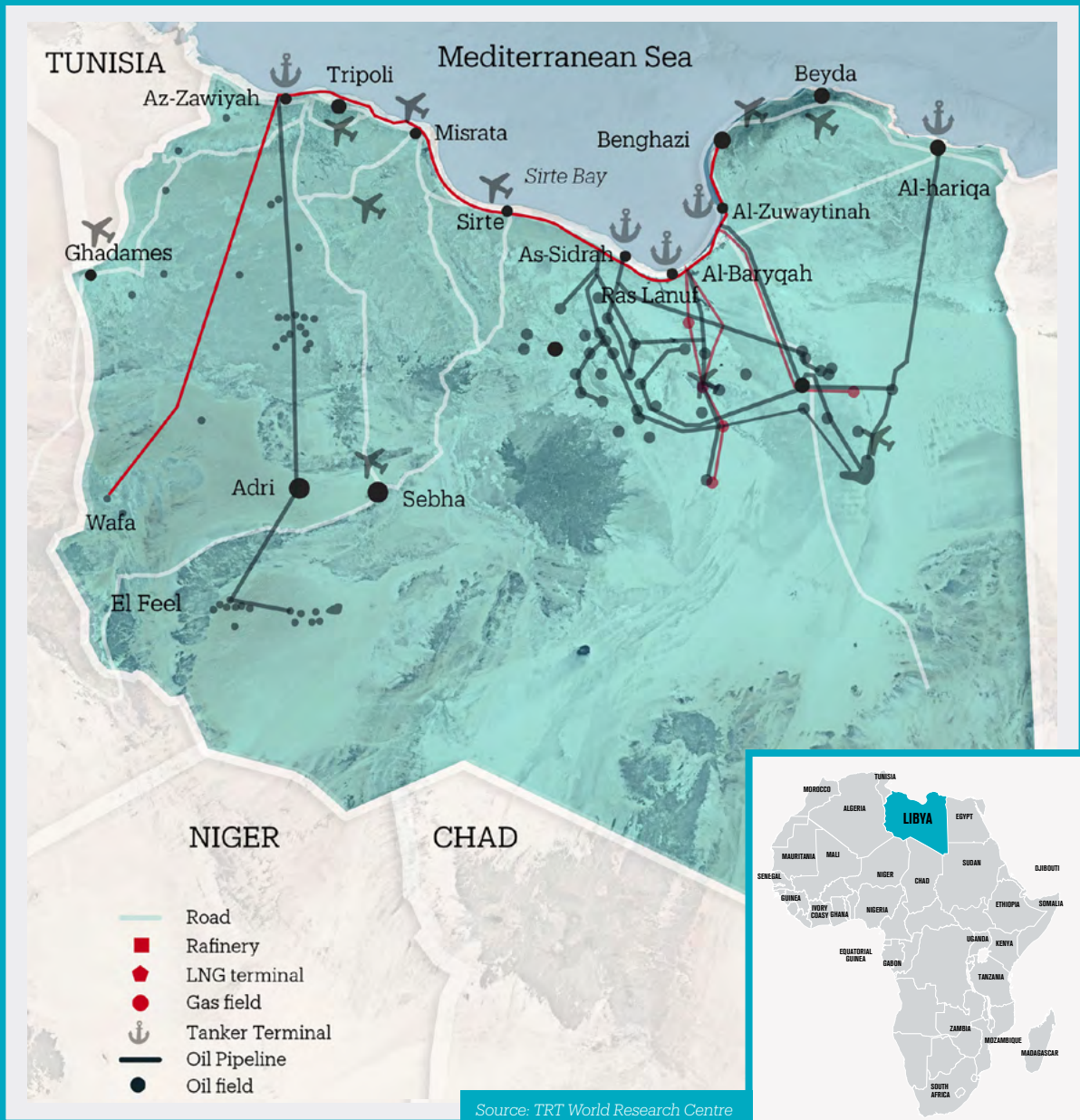
Wolfgang Puzstai, Security & Policy Analyst Director, Perim Associate, told TRT World Research Centre that "The Central Bank of Libya is the institution providing funding for the government. As long as its Chair Al Sadeq Al Kabir is

loyal to Dbeibha, there is also no way that Bashagha can establish a serious government in Sirte. While Dbeibha hosts talks with mayors, hospital managers and others from the East, making clear that he is the one with the money, it seems to be that the significance of Bashagha is slowly fading away. Altogether, this is no good news for Libya".

The Weaponisation of Libya's Oil

Oil is once again at the centre of Libya's political impasse. The country's resources are being used as a tool in the power struggle. In April, Libya's National Oil Corporation [announced](#) the suspension of production at a major oil field

Map of oil and gas fields and infrastructure



in the country's south, declaring a "force majeure" due to a protest at the site. The eastern tribes and militias [closed down](#) vital oil facilities, including the country's largest oil field in the south controlled by militias loyal to Haftar, who currently manoeuvre to support Bashagha. Reportedly, these militias are linked with Haftar and want power given to Bashagha. Otherwise, they have threatened to continue to disturb oil facilities in the country. Mohamed Oun, Libya's oil and gas minister in the GNU, recently [said](#) the blockades would not have happened without the cooperation of the Petroleum Facilities Guard, which is under the control of Khalifa Haftar.

[Reportedly](#), Libyan oil revenue has decreased by at least 35% in the month-long stand-off between Bashagha and Dbeibah, which forced several production facilities across the country to close in mid-April. Bashagha and Saleh have [said](#) the facilities would be reopened on condition that oil revenues be temporarily frozen until rival factions agree on a mechanism to distribute revenue.

Hydrocarbon resources have been used as political blackmail by Aguila Saleh and Haftar, particularly looking at the partial restriction on major Libyan oil facilities in recent weeks. With the present growth in oil and gas prices, such blockades represent a severe setback to the country's fragile economy, given that the oil industry is the lifeblood of its economy. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), oil accounts for over 90% of national fiscal revenue. Non-oil exports of goods and services represent less than 3% of overall GDP.

International Responses

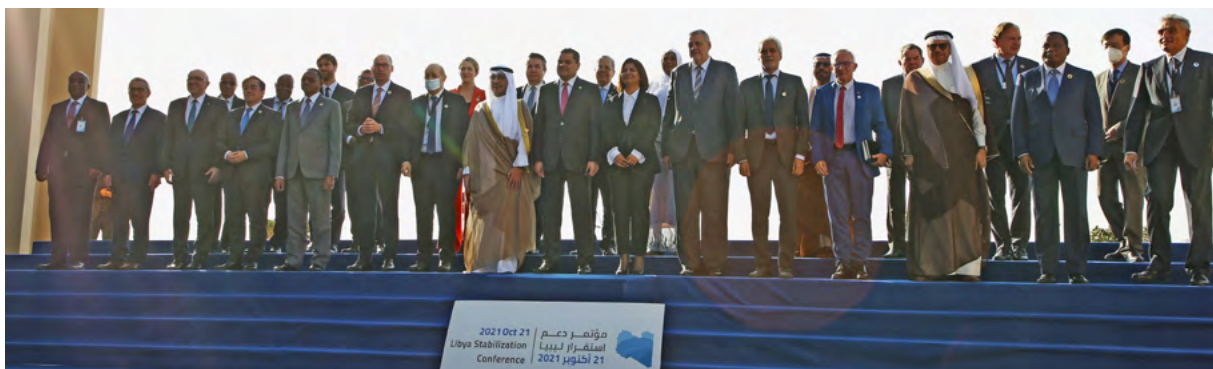
Over the past few years, the interference of some international powers and regional actors has been an important factor in Libya's deepening political fragmentation and polarisation. The motivations behind these regional and international actors' involvement in the Libyan conflict are manifold and include geopolitical ambitions and economic interest.

Although foreign interference had begun well before the civil wars, in 2014, after the disputed election led to renewed rounds of fighting, foreign powers became more involved, supporting either the east or the west as per their respective agendas. Consequently, it has created the alignments of local militias and their foreign backers; Egypt, the UAE, France, and Russia supported Haftar and Aguila Saleh, whereas Turkey, Qatar, and Italy supported the Tripoli government.

It seems there is a lack of international support for Bashagha's government. After the selection of Bashagha, the spokesperson for the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Stéphane Dujarric, [announced](#) that the UN still recognises the Dbeibah government. Since then, the international position has not changed. The UN Secretary General's Special Adviser Stephanie Williams [stated](#) that "the solution to the Libyan crisis is not in the formation of competing administrations and permanent transitional stages." In contrast, some countries such as Egypt and Russia seem to support the Bashagha government, as Bashagha, who comes from Misrata and is politically affiliated with the western region, recently defected to Haftar and Saleh's camp. Such defection has, in fact, enhanced Cairo and Moscow's chances to further their interests in the western part of the country.

On the other hand, Dbeibah still seems comfortable with his government's international backing. Several countries, including Türkiye, Algeria, Qatar, Italy, and the UAE, seem to favour the GNU. Such a situation is mainly because they doubt that Bashagha will manage to get wide international recognition or be able to establish his government in Tripoli. This perception has been reinforced since Bashagha faced difficulties entering the capital when he declared himself unilaterally the new prime minister in March.

It is imperative to note that the UAE no longer provides significant support for Haftar, which used to be his main backer against the previous UN-backed GNA. Over the last few months, its support for Haftar's LNA has reduced, if not stopped altogether. Improving relations between Ankara and Abu Dhabi, who backed opposite sides during Libya's



Participants pose for a photo at the end of the International Conference to Support Libya's Stability in Tripoli, Libya on October 21, 2021. Representatives of 27 countries, 4 regional and international organizations took part in conference in capital Tripoli. (Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)

2019-2020 civil war, is also a significant shift in regional dynamics impacting the stability of Libya. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's February 14th [visit](#) to the UAE, during which the two countries made thirteen agreements on defence, trade, technology and agriculture, shows that reconciliation is successfully underway. Strategic and commercial aspects are behind this change, and many benefits can come from this settlement, including setting aside their differences in Libya.

Changing global, regional, and domestic realities have led to the rapprochement between the UAE and Turkey, and these warming relations have been reflected in Libya. For instance, both countries support Dbeibah's government and [reportedly](#), the UAE has removed some of its associated forces in Libya and cut its financial and military support to Haftar's militias.

In addition, Dbeibah has a good relationship with Emirate, even dating back to the Gaddafi regime when he was a high government official.

Most recently, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [had a meeting in Ankara](#) Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Both countries vowed to collaborate and work towards the stability of Libya, where both sides back rival parties. Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Cavusoglu [stated](#), "Everyone must contribute to the full stabilisation of Libya." He added, "We no longer want competition between countries as in the past. He also reiterated, "We have always been on the side of legitimacy".

Hafed Al-Ghwell, a senior fellow with the Foreign Policy Institute at the John Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, [argued that](#) "Fortunately, despite the fact that both sides are aligned with heavily-armed loyalists and enjoy broad support from far-off powers with extraterritorial interests in Libya, there is very little appetite for a return to conflict merely over political squabbles. In addition, most external actors are averse to underwriting new skirmishes and so are resorting to soft-power tactics and manned fortifications rather than the pursuit of maximalist ambitions through the illiberal use of firepower".

Speaking to TRT World Research Centre, Giuseppe Dentice, head of the MENA Desk at the Center for International Studies and teaching assistant at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, said:

"At this time, external actors are more engaged in a frantic search for balance and de-escalation. Nobody wants a return to the worst possible scenario, which is a new war. In fact, the zero-sum game of recent years has transformed, leaving room for an uncertain future plan in which the will of the double operational plan (internal-external) has led to a renewed status quo formula. A choice that is only apparently senseless, but justified by the fact that none of the actors involved is strong enough to be able to impose their

will on others. At the same time, this scenario would fuel an extreme struggle for power in which local actors with disputed legitimacy would continue to weigh on the future structure of the country, exacerbating political instability but retaining important levers of influence on economic resources and national strategic assets (such as the Central Bank of Libya and the National Oil Company)".

For Umberto:

"I believe that there has been a moment of great confusion, which coincided approximately with the establishment of the GNS when external support to local proxies suffered from a short circuit in which it was not clear which party was supporting whom anymore. Turkey, for example, maintained an ambivalent stance, having good relations with both GNU Prime Minister Abdel Hamid Dbeibah and his counterpart Fathi Bashagha and that has created some confusion and expectations that however gradually dissipated as the real nature of the GNS, which has tried at least twice to take control of Tripoli, started to emerge. Considering Egypt and Russia's swift support for Bashagha, I believe that the rival regional fronts that were engaged in the battle for Tripoli in 2019-2020 are starting to regroup, especially in the aftermath of the recent clashes in the capital. However, the regional context is radically different from the one that characterised and partially drove the latest round of fighting in 2019-2020 and the regional rapprochement would basically prevent those regional powers from engaging in a new power struggle for Libya, for the time being".

According to Wolfgang Pusztai:

"Foreign policy is usually driven by longer-term national interests. While this is the case for the role of outside powers, including Egypt, the UAE, France, Russia, Turkey, Qatar, and Italy, who all have been involved in the Libyan conflict. The landscape in Libya has changed, which has implications for the policy of these nations in pursuing their interests. Khalifa Haftar was not supported by Egypt, the UAE, France, and Russia because of himself as a person, but because he was the right tool for them to pursue their interests. For Egypt this includes the stability of eastern Libya, for Egypt and the UAE containment of political Islam, for France the stability of the central Sahara region, and for Russia, which has always to a certain extent dealt with both sides, strategic influence in the region. While the significance of Haftar has decreased after his defeat at the gates of Tripoli, political Islam is currently also in Libya in a period of weakness. As said, for Egypt stability on its western border, in the Cyrenaica is of vital national interest. Cairo has recognised Bashagha's GNS early on because it has realised that he would be probably able to keep the country together and avoid a new major military east-west confrontation. For the same reason, Turkey is also hesitant in its support for Dbeibah since the nomination of Bashagha by the HoR. As the UAE currently does not consider politi-

cal Islam in Libya a major threat and in the light of the rapprochement between the Emirates and Turkey, relations with Libya are currently more driven by the businesses of the Dbeibah clan with the UAE.”

Prospects for elections

In October 2020, rival Libyan parties signed an agreement after Türkiye's successful military intervention in the Libyan War, which was critical to allowing GNA forces to end Haftar's offensive in the capital. The ceasefire agreement provided a basis for the political negotiations, which started on October 26th, 2020, designed to set up a new interim government with the main task of preparing the country for elections scheduled for December 24th, 2021.

After a decade of armed conflict and division, on March 15th, 2021, Libya's Government of National Unity (GNU), led by Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh, was [sworn](#) in with representatives from both the eastern and western parts of the country. The GNU replaced two rival cabinets that had dominated the country's west and east, each with different foreign backers, since 2014. The GNU stemmed from talks initiated in November 2020 at the UN-sponsored Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF). The GNU was responsible for restarting reconstruction efforts, including economy, infrastructures, and administration, and preparing the country for parliamentary and presidential elections.

Amal Bourhrous, Researcher with the SIPRI Middle East and North Africa Programme, [commented](#), “Unlike the GNA, which was mainly supported by institutions in Tripoli, the GNU received the support of the House of Representatives in Tobruk. This allowed the country to turn the page on rival governments in the East and the West and enabled Libyans to begin contemplating the prospect of a way out of conflict. Hopes were raised for the unification of Libyan institutions and the rebuilding of the Libyan state”.

However, despite some progress, it did not go as planned, and eventually, the elections were postponed indefinitely. A lack of preparation and disagreements between different political forces regarding the legal basis of the polls led to the indefinite postponement of parliamentary and presidential elections, representing another failure in the UN's efforts to resolve the political chaos in the country.

Recently, under the auspices of the UN, Libya's two rival governments [began talks](#) in Egypt, seeking an agreement on the constitutional basis for fair, credible and transparent elections in the coming months.

The UN Secretary General's Special Adviser Stephanie Williams [stated](#) that “the Libyan public believes that the ultimate solution to the issues that continue to plague Libya is through elections, held on a solid constitutional basis and electoral framework that provides the guardrails for an electoral process”.



Local NGO activists gather for a demonstration to protest against any possible postponement of elections scheduled for Dec. 24., in Tripoli, Libya on December 15, 2021. (Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)

Recently, Egypt [hosted](#) three rounds of UN-mediated Libya talks; the first meeting was held in April, the second was in May, and the [third was held](#) in late June. The talks have brought together the Libyan Constitutional Track Committee, comprising lawmakers from Libya's east-based Parliament and the High Council of State. The UN formed the committee in March 2022 to move forward with a constitutional and legislative framework for holding the long-awaited presidential and parliamentary elections.

The dispute over the constitutional framework of the election was among the significant challenges that caused planned national elections to be postponed in December 2021. During Cairo talks, both sides have made relative progress in reaching a consensus on some articles of the constitutional draft. However, several disputed legislative and judicial authority articles still have not been resolved. As a result, the last talk ended with [no agreement](#) on immediate political transition or elections.

Recently, the Chairman of the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), Imad Al-Sayeh, has [said that](#) "the commission will set the date of the election day in December 2022, if it receives the electoral legislation approved by the constitutional basis next July."

In Wolfgang's opinion:

"Dbeibha has already proposed to hold parliamentary elections by the end of June, which was entirely unrealistic. Now he talks about such elections at the end of this year. However, the HoR's October 2021 election law for parliamentary elections is being rejected by Dbeibha, as it is also the case with the law for presidential elections. He also does not accept the amended Constitutional Declaration as a foundation for elections and urges a referendum on the - controversial - 2017 Draft Constitution. On the other side, the High National Election Commission (HNEC) has frequently stated that it will only work according to the laws issued by the HoR. Furthermore, it must be kept in mind that Dbeibha has only real influence on the ground in Tripolitania. It is doubtful that orders to organise elections under his conditions would be accepted in Fezzan, let alone in Cyrenaica."

According to Umberto Profazio:

"There is a clear paradox with respect to the organisation of elections in Libya. First of all, when we speak about elections, we need to make a distinction between presidential and parliamentary elections. The former are really divisive, especially in the absence of a clear constitutional basis or framework that would limit the powers of the president, a system of checks and balances without with there a clear risk for a return to the authoritarian rule that Libya has been accustomed to during the years of the regime of Muammar Gaddafi. Without those limits or 'guardrails', according to the terms now in use in the UNSMIL-led ne-

gotiations, presidential elections would transform into another power struggle between political heavyweights or dinosaurs. The precedent of the December elections, indefinitely postponed, are certainly not encouraging and could plunge Libya into another round of fighting. At the same time, there is a need for a turnover in the political elite to turn the page after years of divisive politics. General elections can be a solution, but the MPs in the HoR and the HCS would likely take time to avoid losing their seats using all the possible means. These methods include the issue of the constitution, which, albeit crucial, is certainly used as a smokescreen to delay elections indefinitely".

Moving Forward

The absence of a constitution remains at the core of Libya's problems concerning elections. Therefore, the key challenge is still getting the different factions to agree on a constitutional framework that would pave the way for elections.

According to Wolfgang Puszta, "Altogether the prospects for ending the violence and divisions and installing sustainable democratic and political institutions in Libya are dire. A drifting away of the east from Tripoli could spark a new war over control of the Oil Crescent. In about ten years, Libya will be either a federalist state or broken up after a bloody civil war".

While the recent UN-backed talks in Egypt may have drawn some optimism from some quarters about a restart of the process of political negotiations, there was little confidence that these talks lead to a breakthrough. There is a long way before ironing out the core issues, including reaching a commonly agreed constitution for the polls. As expected, the talks failed. Most recently, the head of the UN Support Mission in Libya, Stephanie Williams, [said that](#) differences remained regarding the measures regulating the transitional phase leading to elections.

Recently, Italian news agency Nova [reported](#) that Rome is working behind the scenes on an international agreement to find a solution to the political crisis in Libya. [Reportedly](#), Italy plans to convene a technical table with France, the UK and the U.S., Germany, Türkiye and Egypt. The meeting will reportedly be held in the coming days as on June 22nd, the LPDF, which gave an authorised mandate to the GNU, [expired](#).

Based on UN Security-Council resolution 2510 (2020), the UNSMIL crafted a new body, the LPDF. On May 4th, 2021, former UN Special Envoy Ján Kubiš submitted to the participants of the LPDF the proposal elaborated by the LPDF's Legal Committee to serve as a possible constitutional basis for the elections, aiming to bring an end to the months-long deadlock on this matter.



Hundreds of people stage a protest to demand elections in the country to be held right away and ending the transitional period in Tripoli, Libya on March 5, 2022. (Hazem Ahmed Turkia - Anadolu Agency)

The LPDF's legal committee was expected to prepare a constitutional ground for presidential and parliamentary elections. However, the process did not go as planned in 2021 because the HoR adopted its own election laws, disregarding due process and negotiations calling for dialogue and consensus. These laws were not only problematic in terms of the procedure but also in terms of content. Issues, such as the eligibility criteria for presidential candidates, led to widespread controversy.

Resolving the constitutional and legal basis for the elections is vital. Over the past few months, rival parties have shown a slight interest in working together to overcome these challenges. As a result, the whole process has been undermined.

For Dentice, "Among the most realistic scenarios would be the postponement of the vote to 2023, in order to complete the electoral process. Even if a credible vote can be organised, some factions may not accept the results and take up arms again. In any case, the revival of a widespread conflict would be unlikely, while new opportunities for localised hostility and violence would arise. Therefore, in such a context, everyone could benefit and maintain their own share of power/influence, thus guaranteeing a new balance, albeit artificial and short-term, capable of favouring a permanent stalemate".

According to Umberto:

"The first step to end violence in Libya and revert once again the fragmentation process in the politics and social fabric is to transform the security sector reforms (SSRs) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes from rhetoric slogans and hollow formulas into a substantive process to end the rule of militias. The recent clashes in Tripoli just confirmed that Libya still is, to quote a recent study, the kingdom of militias, which have shown an unprecedented ability to transform, change and adapt to the very fluid situation in the political landscape. Behind the new names used by militias to re-dub themselves, there are still the same leaders who act as king-makers behind the scenes like Khalifa Haftar or profit from having access to political and financial institutions, like the militia cartel in Tripoli. I think that solving this issue would take incredible strength by Libyan stakeholders and the international community can help, especially considering the expertise in this field by international organisations such as NATO. Together with a solid constitutional framework, solving the problem of militias could certainly move the peace process forward and stabilise the uncertain situation in Libya".

Conclusion

As things currently stand, the Libyan political crisis is far from over. Rebuilding the trust between rival parties will be difficult. However, a dispute settlement mechanism could lead to a promising negotiating framework. The latter would help resolve the existing issues, including reaching a widely accepted constitution for the election, reunifying institutions, and enabling economic and security sector reform. Otherwise, current political crises could further cripple Libya and the longer this political schism between the East and West of the country remains unresolved, which could potentially risk a very high likelihood of pushing the country back into turmoil.

Bashagha's attempt to enter the capital last month underscored the fragility of Libya's relative peace. This episode has again demonstrated how profound political differences in the country will continue to hamper the creation of a harmonious political community. Therefore, Libya's competing sides will likely continue to challenge each other in several ways, including armed provocations and oil blockades.

The latest clashes might have damaged Bashagha's reputation as a powerful military commander and strongman in western Libya. However, he will likely continue to challenge Dbeibeh's authority with the strong support of Haftar and Aguila Saleh. On the other hand, Dbeibeh will probably not give up the political fight in these uncertain circumstances. Given that, his government continues to enjoy international recognition and support.

It is vital to emphasise peace talks and support UN negotiation efforts in the country. As the international community struggles to reposition itself against these political challenges, it is essential to note that the LPDF expired in June 22nd. Thus, Libya's legitimacy crisis is likely to aggravate and create more risks of escalation and military mobilisation. Even though UN's special envoy William has tried to pursue to settle the differences between rival parties in Cairo. However, any breakthrough in the immediate future is unlikely without joint action between local actors and the international community.

Therefore, it might be wise to consider having a new, practical, applicable, and long-term strategy for breaking the cycle of the political impasse and facilitating conditions to hold elections. Therefore, breaking the political deadlock seems to depend on reaching a consensus to have a new constitution. A new constitution should establish how Libya's governance will be formed, including central authority and presidential, parliamentary, and electoral rules.

In addition, many Libyans believe that the country is unlikely to be stabilised without making substantial progress on several key issues, including the reunification of institutions, economic reform, security sector reform, and political and military settlements. Still, there may be a window of opportunity to succeed in bringing rival parties to agree on the constitution. Thus, the international community and some international actors, including the US, can play a decisive mediation role in encouraging competing sides to stick to the UN's roadmap.



Libyans gather to commemorate for the second day, the 11th anniversary of the revolution at the Martyrs' Square in Libya's capital Tripoli on February 18, 2022, (Hazem Turkia - Anadolu Agency)