

Research Briefing

1 October 2024

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Libya: Political developments since 2011



Summary

- 1 Political developments since the fall of Gaddafi, 2011 to 2023
- 2 Developments in 2024
- 3 UK policy on Libya
- 4 Role and influence of foreign actors
- 5 Migration

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Summary

Libya remains divided geographically and politically with rival administrations governing the eastern and western parts of the country.

The evolution of rival administrations

In 2011 the long-time dictator of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, was overthrown with the help of UK and western forces. In a [2016 report](#), the Foreign Affairs Committee held David Cameron, Prime Minister at the time of the 2011 intervention, responsible for failing to develop a coherent strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi Libya. The country has been marked by division and conflict ever since.

Libya divided into eastern and western controlled governments in 2015.

After a general election in mid-2014, violence in Libya quickly increased and the [country divided geographically and institutionally](#) into two, with the eastern and western halves each having rival governments backed by foreign powers and armed groups.

State institutions, hollowed out during the Gaddafi dictatorship, crumbled or were [divided between the two rival power centres](#): the eastern authorities based on the House of Representatives (HoR) and the forces of General Haftar, and the western authorities based on the UN-backed Government of National Accord (GNA). The former is supported by [General Haftar](#), the powerful head of the Libyan National Army. The former UN special representative on Libya, Abdoulaye Bathily, has described Haftar as “indisputably the decision-making authority on political, military and security matters in eastern and southern Libya”.

Efforts to form a unity interim government and to organise elections for a permanent government have faltered.

The formation of an interim Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2021, alongside plans to hold elections by the end of the year for a permanent government, brought a measure of [optimism to the political process](#).

However, the postponement of the elections and disagreements between the key stakeholders prompted the eastern based House of Representatives to form a rival Government of National Stability, now led by Osama Hamada.

The Government of National Unity, led by Prime Minister AbdulHamid Dabaiba (also spelt Dheibeh or Dheibah), is recognised internationally and by the UN.

The political situation in 2024

The situation is now at a “stalemate”.

Head of UN mission,

August 2024

The situation is at a political impasse, with key players [divided over what should come first](#): elections which lead to a permanent government, or an interim government to organise elections. During 2023 there was some progress in resolving some of the issues concerning electoral laws.

However, the head of the UN mission in Libya, Stephanie Koury, has [described the situation](#) now as at a “stalemate”. Briefing the Security Council in August 2024, Ms Koury said unilateral actions by Libyan political, military and security actors have “increased tension... [and] complicated efforts for a negotiated solution”. She said that the status quo is not sustainable. Her predecessor described a lack of “political will” by Libya’s main actors to move on from the status quo. A [row over the governor](#) of the Central Bank in August 2024 resulted in temporary restrictions on oil production and decreased revenues.

Libya remains divided geographically and institutionally between the Tripoli-based GNU, and the Tobruk-based GNS and House of Representatives.

UK policy

The [previous UK Government](#) said it “fully backs a Libyan-led, UN-facilitated political process” which, it says, “offers the best route to peace and stability”. In April 2024, the government [described the political impasse](#) in Libya as “unstainable” and continued to express its support for the UN’s efforts to broker a Libyan-owned and led political settlement.

The UK’s approach has so far remained the same under the new Labour government. At a UN Security Council meeting on Libya in August 2024, the UK’s Ambassador James Kariuki [noted unilateral political initiatives](#) by Libya’s main actors (discussed in section 5.2), reminded them of the central role of the UN in facilitating political dialogue, and called on Libyan stakeholders to protect Libyans’ rights.

Migration and climate issues

Libya is a key route for migrants and asylum seekers travelling through Africa towards Europe via the Mediterranean sea. The [European Court of Auditors has criticised](#) a €5 billion emergency trust fund for Africa, set up in 2015 as the EU’s “main tool for actions to support migration related issues in Libya”. The Guardian newspaper [described the report](#) as a “quietly devastating critique of one of the EU’s flagship policies”.

Tens of thousands of Sudanese refugees have arrived in Libya since the start of the [Sudanese civil war](#) in April 2023.

In September 2023 Storm Daniel [caused major flooding](#) in the coastal town of Derna, killing thousands of people and causing considerable destruction. The flooding was exacerbated by poorly maintained nearby dams, which ruptured during the heavy rains.

The devastation in Derna “exposed not only vulnerability to climate change but also the consequences of poor governance and mismanagement by two rival administrations” [according to a report](#) by SIPRI, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, and NUPI, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs published in August 2024.

Rival administrations

Libya is divided geographically between rival institutions governing the western and eastern halves of the country. Both administrations claim legitimacy.

Western-based administration: based in the capital, Tripoli

The internationally-recognised **Government of National Unity** (GNU) was formed in early 2021 through a UN backed process. It is led by interim Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibah. The same process also approved an interim three-member **Presidency Council**, led by Mohamed al-Menfi. The Presidency Council is the supreme commander of the Libyan armed forces.

The GNU replaced the Government of National Accord, created by the 2015 Libyan political agreement and recognised internationally, along with other bodies that continue to exist, notably the **High Council of State**. The is an advisory body drawing on members of the previous Tripoli-based General National Congress that was elected in 2012 and is led by Mohammed Takala, who replaced Khaled al-Mishri in August 2023.¹

Eastern-based administration: based in Tobruk and Benghazi

The **House of Representatives** considers itself the only legitimate legislative body and is based in Tobruk. The speaker of the house is Agila Saleh. In early 2022 the house appointed Prime Minister, Fathi Bashagha, to lead a new **Government of National Stability** (GNS), based in Sirte. Bashagha has since been replaced by Osma Hamada.

[Khalifa Haftar](#) leads the **Libyan National Army**, a rebel force which controls much of the east and parts of the south. He led the campaign to remove Islamist militants from Benghazi and eastern Libya during the previous decade. Russia and Egypt support the eastern forces of the Libyan National Army and House of Representatives.²

Much of Libya's oil-producing areas lie in the east. The UK Government has said the National Oil Corporation is "vulnerable to malign state actors seeking to benefit from Libya's instability".³

¹ [Libya's High State Council elects new leader as political gridlock deepens](#), Al Jazeera, 6 August 2023

² [Africa file special edition: Russian diplomatic blitz highlights the Kremlin's strategic aims in Africa](#), Institute for the Study of War, 6 June 2024

³ PQ23447 [[Libya: Oil](#)], 2 May 2024

1

Political developments since the fall of Gaddafi, 2011 to 2023

In 2011 the long-time dictator of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, was overthrown with the help of the armed forces of the UK, France and US.⁴ In a 2016 report, the Foreign Affairs Committee held David Cameron, Prime Minister at the time of the 2011 intervention, responsible for failing to develop a coherent strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi Libya.⁵ The country has been marked by division and conflict ever since.

This section identifies some of the key political developments during this period, drawn from contemporary Commons Library briefings.

Role of the UN mission UNSMIL

UNSMIL, the [UN support mission in Libya](#), was established in September 2011 by the UN to support the then transitional authorities to move towards a democratic country. Its mandate has been extended repeatedly since then by the Security Council, most recently until 30 October 2023. Resolution 2702 (2023), which extended UNSMIL's mandate, [tasked the mission](#), among other things, to:

- Facilitate an inclusive Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process and hold national and parliamentary elections as soon as possible
- Work with Libyan institutions and authorities to ensure full, equal, effective and meaningful participation of women at all levels
- Help consolidate the governance, security and economic arrangements
- Support key Libyan institutions

In August 2023, the Security Council reaffirmed their strong commitment to an “inclusive, Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process” facilitated by the United Nations.⁶

Links to [key resolutions and reports](#) by UNSMIL and the Security Council are collated by the website Security Council Report.

⁴ See Commons Library briefing, [Military operations in Libya](#), 24 October 2011

⁵ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options](#) [PDF], HC 119 2016-17, 14 September 2016

⁶ UN, [Security Council press statement on Libya](#), SC/15394, 23 August 2023

1.1 2011: Gaddafi removed from power

In 2011, as part of wave of uprisings across North Africa and the Middle East (later termed the Arab Spring), in anti-government protests Libyans called for Gaddafi to step down.⁷ The uprising was predominantly concentrated in the east of the country, around Benghazi.

During the ensuing escalation of violence, Gaddafi lost control of the east of the country and opponents formed a transitional national council in Benghazi in eastern Libya.

International condemnation of Gaddafi's actions in quashing the protests and use of the military against civilians continued, culminating in the UN Security Council voting in March 2011 to authorise military action, including the imposition of a no-fly zone, to protect civilians ([resolution 1973](#)). Commons Library briefing [The Security Council's "no-fly zone" resolution on Libya](#) sets out the political discussions leading up to the adoption of the resolution.

The UK, France and the US began military action against Gaddafi's forces over the weekend of 19 to 20 March 2011. NATO assumed command of operations shortly after. Gaddafi was captured by rebel forces and killed in October and a Libyan transitional government declared liberation on 23 October 2011. NATO ended its military operation that month.⁸

Commons Library briefings:

- [Military operations in Libya](#), October 2011
- [UK relations with Libya](#), March 2011

1.2 2012 to 2019: Elections and division

2012-2014: elections, but a divided country

In July 2012, Libya held its first democratic election since 1964. International observers reported the election was conducted relatively peacefully. William Hague, then Foreign Secretary, during a visit to Libya applauded the "fortitude of the Libyan people and the efforts of the Libyan authorities" in holding the elections.⁹

⁷ Britannica, [Libya revolt of 2011](#), 4 September 2024 (accessed 26 September 2024); Commons Library briefing [In brief: Arab uprisings 2011](#), 15 June 2011

⁸ Commons Library briefing, [military operations in Libya](#), 24 October 2011

⁹ Foreign and Commonwealth Office, [Foreign Secretary visits Libya](#), 16 July 2012

However, post-election progress was slow; the newly elected General National Congress (GNC) assembly was supposed to produce an interim government to replace the National Transitional Council, which had been formed in Benghazi to pave the way for elections.

The death of Colonel Gaddafi and the collapse of his system left Libya without a functioning state. His regime had fostered disputes between tribes and regions as a way to keep order. With Gaddafi's removal, pre-existing tribal, ethnic and regional divisions came to the fore. The civil war also saw the emergence of dozens of locally-based militias in a country described as "awash with arms".¹⁰ Control of smuggling routes in the south remains a driver of conflict.

The security situation worsened during this period; the US Ambassador, Christopher Stevens, was killed in an attack on the US diplomatic post in Benghazi in September 2012. In another incident, 31 protestors were killed in Benghazi in June 2013.

Following a fresh election in June 2014, violence in Libya rapidly increased. Islamist parties, defeated in the polls, took control of Tripoli (western diplomatic staff were evacuated in July 2014). General Haftar, a former chief of staff of the armed forces under Colonel Gaddafi who spent two decades in the US after falling out with the colonel, emerged as the leader of a military campaign against Islamist militias. He remains a significant presence in the east as leader of the Libyan National Army.

By 2014 the country was divided politically. The General National Council and the House of Representatives, based respectively in Tripoli in the west and Tobruk in the east, emerged as rival parliaments from the victors in the two sets of elections. The resulting legitimacy vacuum continues to overshadow Libya's political developments.

During this period, the UK began training Libyan security forces in the UK. However, the programme was halted after repeated allegations of disciplinary issues and serious sexual assaults by Libyan personnel based at Basingbourn barracks, near Cambridge, against civilians. Five Libyan soldiers were subsequently found guilty of rape and sexual assaults.¹¹

Commons Library briefings:

- [Libya's General Assembly election 2012](#), July 2012
- [Political progress in Libya?](#), June 2013
- [Libya: deepening conflict](#), November 2014

¹⁰ Commons Library briefing, [Political progress in Libya?](#), 10 June 2013

¹¹ See Commons Library briefing, [British soldiers to Libya?](#), 22 April 2016

2015: Libyan Political Agreement

UN sponsored negotiations between the House of Representatives and the General National Congress resulted in the signing in Morocco of the [Libyan Political Agreement](#) in December 2015. The agreement was welcomed by the UN Security Council (resolution 2259).¹²

The agreement established a Presidency Council to form a new Government of National Accord (GNA) to be the sole legitimate government of Libya. This would be based in Tripoli. An advisory High State Council was also established consisting of ex-General National Congress members. The House of Representatives would continue as the only parliament and would approve the unity government.

However, the negotiations did not involve the military factions and had only partial support from the House of Representatives and the General National Congress. Each camp also fractured into supporters and opponents of the deal. The Tobruk-based House of Representatives subsequently refused to recognise the UN-backed government and the rivalry between the administrations intensified.¹³

2016 to 2019: divisions continue

Libya remained divided between two main groups of institutions in the west and east centred on the new, internationally recognised Government of National Accord in Tripoli and the House of Representatives based in Tobruk.

Libya remained mired in armed conflict, with neither administration able to gain control of the whole country, and a myriad of militias backing different factions.

In 2016, the UK Foreign Secretary actively ruled out sending combat troops to Libya to fight against Islamic State (then Daesh) or any other armed groups.¹⁴ The UK, in line with the UN and other countries, supported the GNA.

Haftar advances on Tripoli

In 2019 the forces of General Haftar's Libyan National Army, which had taken control of much of Libya's territory in the previous two years, pushed westwards, with support from the United Arab Emirates, Russia and Egypt.

¹² UN, [Unanimously adopting resolution 2259 \(2015\), Security Council welcomes signing of Libyan political agreement on new government for strife-worn country](#), 23 December 2015

¹³ See Commons Library briefing [Libya November 2016 update](#), 1 December 2016; Crisis Group, [The Libyan Political Agreement: Time for a reset](#), 4 November 2016

¹⁴ [HC Deb 19 April 2016 c781](#)

They reached the outskirts of Tripoli, threatening the western Government of National Accord.¹⁵

The 2019 offensive by Haftar “triggered the largest mobilisation of fighters in western Libya” since 2011, according to analysis for Small Arms Survey by Wolfram Lacher, and united opposition to him.¹⁶ With Turkish help, the GNA pushed General Haftar’s forces back eastwards.¹⁷

Commons Library briefings:

- [British soldiers to Libya?](#), April 2016
- [Libya November 2016 update](#), December 2016
- [Libya’s civil war: Haftar the strongman](#), March 2017
- [Libya: the consequences of a failed state](#), May 2018

Libya’s armed groups

There are a large number of armed groups in Libya. Tim Eaton, a Libya specialist at Chatham House, has suggested there could be as many as 400,000 armed men in the country. Questioned about the potential terrorist threat emanating from Libya, Tim Eaton told the Foreign Affairs Committee that all the major groups that control territory have Libya-specific goals, and they are not primarily driven by Islamist or wider ideological agendas.¹⁸

The head of UNSMIL has recently voiced concern about “growing transnational organised crime and extremist organisations interconnections in Libya”.¹⁹

Further reading

- Brookings Institute, [Déjà vu: The trajectory of Libyan armed groups in 2024](#), 16 January 2024
- SWP, [Libya’s militias have become the state](#), 31 July 2023
- Wilson Centre, [A network of insecurity and violence – the issue of militias operating in Libya](#), 13 July 2023

¹⁵ Commons Library paper, [Libya: Upsurge of violence amid the pandemic](#), CBP-8900, 21 April 2020; [The battle for Tripoli explained in 600 words](#), Al Jazeera, 5 June 2020

¹⁶ Wolfram Lacher, [Who’s fighting whom in Tripoli: How the 2019 civil war is transforming Libya’s military landscape](#), Small Arms Survey, August 2019

¹⁷ Commons Library paper, [Libya: Upsurge of violence amid the pandemic](#), CBP-8900, 21 April 2020

¹⁸ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence: The UK’s engagement with the Middle East and North Africa](#), 30 January 2024, HC 300 2023-24, q196

¹⁹ UNSMIL, [DSRSG Koury’s remarks to the UN Security Council](#) (PDF), 20 August 2024

1.3

2020 to 2022: ceasefire, political negotiations and a (brief) unity government

Berlin process

The German government hosted several meetings to bring together countries engaged in the conflict, culminating in [a conference in Berlin](#) in January 2020.²⁰ The participants committed to refrain from interfering in the armed conflict or in Libya's internal affairs and to recognise the "central role of the United Nations" in facilitating a reconciliation process, based on the 2015 political agreement.²¹

October 2020: Ceasefire

On 23 October 2020 the warring sides agreed to a ceasefire.

The agreement came about through the UN-mediated Joint Military Commission 5+5 group, so-called because it included five senior military officers from Haftar's Libyan National Army and five from the GNA.²² The agreement also called for the departure of all foreign fighters from Libya.²³

November 2020: Libya Political Dialogue Forum agrees roadmap

In November 2020 the UN facilitated the [Libya Political Dialogue Forum](#) (LPDF), which brought together 75 Libyans, women as well as men, who the UN said represented the full social and political spectrum of Libyan society.²⁴

The forum agreed on a Roadmap to create an interim government and hold national elections on 24 December 2021. That date was chosen as it marked 70 years since Libya's declaration of independence in 1951.²⁵

UK and international support for the Roadmap

On 21 January 2021, the governments of France, Germany, Italy, the UK and the US issued a joint statement welcoming the roadmap.²⁶ The statement

²⁰ Conciliation Resources, [From the outside in: The Berlin International Conference on Libya](#), Accord magazine, February 2024

²¹ UNSMIL, [Berlin Conference conclusions](#) [PDF], 19 January 2020

²² UN, [UN salutes new Libya ceasefire agreement that points to 'a better, safer, and more peaceful future'](#), 23 October 2020

²³ Crisis Group, [Fleshing out the Libya ceasefire agreement](#), 4 November 2023

²⁴ UNSMIL, [Libyan Political Dialogue Forum](#), accessed 5 October 2023;

²⁵ UNSMIL, [Libyan Political Dialogue Forum](#), accessed 5 October 2023; [Roadmap for the preparatory phase of a comprehensive solution](#) [PDF]

²⁶ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [UK joint statement on progress made by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum](#), 21 January 2021

underlined the importance of commitments made by international partners at the Berlin Conference:

In particular, we must continue to support a ceasefire, restore full respect for the UN arms embargo, and end the toxic foreign interference that undermines the aspirations of all Libyans to re-establish their sovereignty and choose their future peacefully through national elections.

The UN Security Council endorsed the ceasefire and the Roadmap in UN in April 2021 in [resolution 2570](#) (2021).

2021: Interim Government of National Unity

In March 2021, as a result of the UN-brokered agreement, Libya's first unity government in years was sworn in. Symbolically, this took place in the eastern city of Tobruk, although the Government of National Unity is based in Tripoli.

The Government of National Unity (GNU) is led by Prime Minister AbdulHamid Dabaiba (also spelt Dheibeh). When it was formed, its main purpose was to prepare for elections at the end of the year.²⁷

Commons Library briefings:

- [Libya: Upsurge of violence amid the pandemic](#), April 2020
- [Libya: Towards a political settlement?](#), March 2021

2022: No elections, rival administrations

However, the planned elections for December 2021 never went ahead.

Failure to agree on the rules overseeing the election, the powers of the new president and parliament, voter eligibility and candidate selection were some of the factors behind the postponement.²⁸ Omar Hammady, a former political and constitutional affairs advisor to UNSMIL, said the failure was a “predictable outcome of a process riddled with built-in self-defeating factors.” Writing in early 2022, he warned that the collapse of the process “is likely to trigger political disintegration, including the emergence of rival governments and a credible risk of military escalation.”²⁹

In early 2022, the eastern-based parliament, arguing that Dabaiba's mandate had ended in December 2021, withdrew its recognition of Dabaiba, appointed a new Prime Minister, Fathi Bashagha, to lead a rival administration, the Government of National Stability (GNS), based in Sirte.

²⁷ Crisis Group, [Libya turns the page](#), 21 May 2021

²⁸ [Why Libya's election got postponed: A quick guide](#), Al Jazeera, 23 December 2021

²⁹ Omar Hammady, [What went wrong with Libya's failed elections](#), Foreign Policy, 18 February 2022. Further analysis is available from Amal Bourhous, [Libya's electoral limbo: The crisis of legitimacy](#), SIPRI, 29 April 2022

Dabaiba responded by saying he would only relinquish power to an elected government.³⁰

Amal Bourhrous a researcher with SIPRI, a Swedish research group, said elections are the only way for Libya to reconcile its political differences:

The Libyan transition is stuck in a vicious cycle of rival governments, fragmented authority and political divisions, and the only way to break the cycle is by electing new institutions that embody popular legitimacy.³¹

Freedom House, which tracks democracy and electoral freedoms worldwide, describe Libya as ‘not free’ and [provides detailed analysis](#) of the state of political and electoral systems and civil liberties in Libya.

1.4 2023: Signs of progress?

There were signs of progress on the political track in 2023. In the summer, a committee drawn from the rival legislative bodies, known as the 6+6 committee (or the House of Representatives and High State Council joint committee) agreed on a plan to appoint an interim government to unify the two administrations ahead of elections.³² New parliamentary and presidential election laws were drafted.³³

However, the plan faced “significant obstacles” almost immediately, according to Claudia Gazzini of the Crisis Group.³⁴

Which comes first: An interim unified government or elections?

A key issue, Claudia Gazzini explained, is which should come first: elections or a unified government. The election-first approach is favoured by the UN, western governments and some Libyans. However, the 6+6 committee concluded an interim unity government is required first. Their plans required the approval of draft election laws by the rival assemblies.³⁵

This agreement meant the two competing governments were in “rare accord” with each other about the future timetable, but whose plan was opposed by the UN and international community, according to Peter Fabricius, of the South African-based Institute for Security Studies:

³⁰ [Libya has two prime ministers as political divisions deepen](#), The Guardian, 10 February 2022

³¹ Amal Bourhrous, [Libya’s electoral limbo: The crisis of legitimacy](#), SIPRI, 29 April 2022

³² Crisis Group, [Forming a unity government may be Libya’s best bet for healing rift](#), 7 August 2023

³³ Presidential Election Law no. 28/2023 and Parliamentary Election Law no. 27/2023

³⁴ Crisis Group, [Forming a unity government may be Libya’s best bet for healing rift](#), 7 August 2023

³⁵ Crisis Group, [Forming a unity government may be Libya’s best bet for healing rift](#), 7 August 2023

The UN, Western governments and some Libyans, fear that stitching together a unity government would diminish stakeholders' incentives to follow through on their electoral commitments, reinforcing the status quo. Proponents of the plan warned that the turbulence of elections could upset the fragile peace that has prevailed for over a year.³⁶

Gazzini noted that there are also "persistent divergences over who should lead reunification efforts". She also noted ongoing disagreements about the finer details of the electoral laws, including the eligibility criteria for presidential candidates and the sequencing of presidential and legislative elections.

These finer details are reflected in comments by UNSMIL, which while commending the efforts of the 6+6 committee in drafting the electoral laws, identified a number of contentious issues that remained unresolved. This includes the forming of a unified government, a mandatory second round for presidential elections, linking the presidential and parliamentary elections, and the need for the full inclusion of all Libyans. UNSMIL said these issues "constitute a further manifestation of the lack of trust among Libyan political, military and security actors".³⁷

The UK Government issued a statement jointly with France, Germany, Italy and the US, which emphasised the election first approach:

The focus of Libya's leaders must be on action to respond to the Libyan people's continuous demands for national presidential and parliamentary elections as soon as possible.³⁸

Section 5 discusses progress on the political track during 2024.

House of Representatives changes Prime Minister

In May 2023 the House of Representatives removed Fathi Bashagha and replaced him with his finance minister, Osama Hamada, who remains in place.³⁹

The Derna floods

In September 2023 Storm Daniel caused major flooding in the coastal town of Derna, killing thousands of people and causing considerable destruction. The flooding was exacerbated by poorly maintained nearby dams, which ruptured during the heavy rains. More than 5,900 people died and over 2,000 are reported missing in the city with a population of about 90,000.⁴⁰

³⁶ Peter Fabricius, [Libya's rival governments propose a merge to hold elections](#), ISS, 13 October 2023

³⁷ UNSMIL, [UNSMIL completes technical review of Libyan electoral laws, commends the 6+6 for their effort and calls for a political settlement on remaining contentious issues](#), 12 October 2023

³⁸ UK embassy (@UKinLibya), [X \(Twitter\)](#), 27 July 2023 (accessed 24 September 2024)

³⁹ Al Jazeera, [Libya parliament suspends rival eastern-based PM Bashagha](#), 16 May 2023

⁴⁰ [Only my body is alive – Libyans in Limbo a year after the flood](#), BBC News, 11 September 2024

12 individuals responsible for managing the dam, facility and the city were sentenced to prison and ordered to pay compensation in a trial held in July 2024 by the Derna criminal court.⁴¹

In June 2024 the UN closed the fully funded flash appeal launched after the floods. The UN Secretary-General has said that the UN continues to address residual humanitarian needs.⁴²

The reconstruction of the city is controversial. The news channel France 24 reports that the reconstruction fund created by the eastern administration's House of Representatives is headed by one of the sons of General Haftar. Libyan analyst Anas El Gomati is quoted as saying "it's a blank cheque with zero oversight".⁴³

Climate hazards and risks

The devastation in Derna "exposed not only vulnerability to climate change but also the consequences of poor governance and mismanagement by two rival administrations" according to a report on climate, peace and security by SIPRI, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, and NUPI, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, published in August 2024.⁴⁴

The report said Libya is one of the driest and most water-stressed countries in the world, but efforts to address climate-related risks are affected by the current lack of security and political unity: "Climate stressors are... aggravated by political turmoil, a divided government, protracted conflict and the presence of a plethora of armed groups."⁴⁵

⁴¹ UN, [UN Support Mission in Libya: Report of the Secretary-General](#), 8 August 2024, S/2024/598

⁴² UN, [UN Support Mission in Libya: Report of the Secretary-General](#), 8 August 2024, S/2024/598

⁴³ [A year on, politics plague rebuilding efforts in Libya's flood ravaged Derna](#), France 24, 9 September 2024

⁴⁴ NUPI and SIPRI, [Climate, peace and security factsheet: Libya](#), August 2024

⁴⁵ NUPI and SIPRI, [Climate, peace and security factsheet: Libya](#), August 2024

Summary of key agreements

2015 Libyan Political Agreement/Accord

UN sponsored negotiations between the House of Representatives and the General National Congress resulted in the signing in Morocco of the [Libyan Political Agreement](#) in December 2015. The agreement was welcomed by the UN Security Council (resolution 2259).⁴⁶ The agreement resulted in the formation of a Prime Minister-led Government of National Accord. The House of Representatives would continue as the legislative authority during the transitional period and approve the new Prime Minister.

Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF)

The LPDF is a UN-facilitated forum of 75 Libyans “representing the full social and political spectrum of the Libyan society”. Held for the first time in November 2020, the forum agreed on a roadmap to national elections to be held in December 2021.⁴⁷ The UK, among others, welcomed the roadmap, which was endorsed by the UN Security Council in [resolution 2570](#) (2021).⁴⁸

Berlin conference

Germany [hosted a conference](#) in January 2020 bringing together a number of countries to discuss Libya, during which the participants undertook to refrain from interfering in the armed conflict or in Libya’s internal affairs, and recognised the “central role of the United Nations” in facilitating a reconciliation process, based on the 2015 political agreement.⁴⁹ A [second conference](#), in June 2021, welcomed the resumption of an “inclusive, Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political dialogue”.⁵⁰

The 6+6 committee

The 6+6 committee was established by the House of Representatives and the High State Council to finalise the electoral laws.

The 5+5 joint military commission

The UN-mandated 5+5 Joint Military Commission consists of five senior military officers from Haftar’s Libyan National Army and five from the GNA.

⁴⁶ UN, [Unanimously adopting resolution 2259 \(2015\), Security Council welcomes signing of Libyan political agreement on new government for strife-worn country](#), 23 December 2015

⁴⁷ UNSMIL, [Libyan Political Dialogue Forum](#), accessed 5 October 2023; [Roadmap for the preparatory phase of a comprehensive solution](#) [PDF]

⁴⁸ Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [UK joint statement on progress made by the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum](#), 21 January 2021

⁴⁹ UNSMIL, [Berlin Conference conclusions](#) [PDF], 19 January 2020

⁵⁰ UNSMIL, [The second Berlin conference on Libya](#) [PDF], 23 June 2021

2

Developments in 2024

Libya remains divided between the two rival administrations. The successive heads of UNSMIL have described a lack of “political will” by Libyan leaders and criticised what they have described as unilateral acts which have increased tensions. A row over the governor of the Central Bank in August 2024 resulted in temporary restrictions on oil production and decreased revenues.

2.1 UN Special Representative resigns over lack of progress

“The selfish resolve of current leaders to maintain the status quo through delaying tactics and manoeuvres...must stop”.

Abdoulaye Bathily,
April 2024

In April 2024, Abdoulaye Bathily, the UN’s Special Representative on Libya and head of UNSMIL, resigned. He condemned a “lack of political will and good faith” by Libyan leaders, adding “under these circumstances, there is no way the UN can operate successfully”. He concluded “there is no room for a solution in the future”.⁵¹

Addressing to the UN Security Council, Bathily explained how he had pursued a political process involving the five main stakeholders⁵², but his efforts have been met with “stubborn resistance, unreasonable expectations and indifference to the interests of the Libyan people”, adding that “their entrenched positions are incentivized by a divided regional and global landscape that perpetuates the status quo”.⁵³ He set out the key demands of the main actors:

Mr. Mohammed Takala and Prime Minister Al Dabiba nominated their representatives for the proposed dialogue, but both set preconditions that require the reopening of the electoral laws obtained by consensus after eight months of negotiations by the 6+6 joint committee of the House of Representatives and High State Council and published in the official gazette by the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Mr. Takala and Mr. Al Dabiba also require the adoption of a new constitution as a prerequisite for the electoral process.

Mr. Agila Saleh continues to set the formation of a new Government by the House of Representatives as his priority, arguing that it is the main legislative

⁵¹ [UN’s Libya envoy Bathily resigns citing stalled political progress](#), France 24, 17 April 2024

⁵² These are: GNU Prime Minister Abdulhamid al-Dheibeh, High State Council Chair Mohamed Takala, House of Representatives Speaker Agila Saleh, Presidency Council Chair Mohamed al-Menfi and Libyan Arab Armed Forces Commander Khalifa Haftar.

⁵³ [UN Security Council meeting](#), 16 April 2024, S/P.9605

body that enjoys the greatest legitimacy by comparison to other Libyan institutions. Other Libyans, however, point out that the House of Representatives was elected in 2014, 10 years ago, and its term of office has therefore elapsed, as have those of other current interim institutions.

General Haftar has made his participation conditional on the House of Representatives-backed Government led by Osama Hammad being invited or on Mr. Al Dabiba being disinvited — that is to say, the exclusion of either Government.⁵⁴

Bathily also stated that the Libyan National Army, led by General Haftar, is “indisputably the decision-making authority on political, military and security matters in eastern and southern Libya” and the Hammad government is its “executive wing”.⁵⁵

The Government of National Unity “remains the internationally recognised Government of Libya in the current interim phase”, but Bathily noted that the extension of its role beyond the promised delivery of elections in 2021 “has exposed its limits and prompted its opponents to question its legitimacy”.⁵⁶

Bathily also criticised the role and influence of foreign actors:

[Libya] has become a playground for fierce rivalry among regional and international actors motivated by geopolitical, political and economic interests as well as competition extending beyond Libya and related to its neighbourhood. The renewed scramble among internal and external players for Libya and its position and immense resources is rendering a solution ever more elusive.⁵⁷

2.2

A deteriorating situation

“Over the past two months, the situation in Libya has deteriorated quite rapidly”.

Stephanie Koury,
August 2024

In March 2024 the UN Secretary-General appointed Stephanie Koury Deputy Special Representative for Political Affairs in the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) on 1 March 2024. She replaced Abdoulaye Bathily following his resignation.

Briefing the Security Council in August 2024, Ms Koury said the situation in Libya had deteriorated “quite rapidly” over the previous two months:

Unilateral acts by Libyan political military and security actors have increased tension, further entrenched institutional and political divisions and complicated efforts for a negotiated solution.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ [UN Security Council meeting](#), 16 April 2024, S/P.9605

⁵⁵ [UN Security Council meeting](#), 16 April 2024, S/P.9605

⁵⁶ [UN Security Council meeting](#), 16 April 2024, S/P.9605

⁵⁷ [UN Security Council meeting](#), 16 April 2024, S/P.9605

⁵⁸ UNSMIL, [DSRSG Koury's remarks to the UN Security Council - 20 August 2024](#), 20 August 2024

Ms Khoury cited several unilateral incidents which contributed to the deterioration of Libya's political, economic and security stability:

- The unilateral movement of the Libyan National Army towards southwestern parts of Libya in August generated tensions with western forces and Libya's western neighbour, Algeria.
- Attempts to unseat the Central Bank Governor and reports in mid-August that armed movements were seeking to take control of the Central Bank.
- The stalemate in the High Council of State over the results of the vote for the president and suspension of seats for vice presidents and rapporteur.
- The ongoing opposition from members of the House of Representatives to the Government of National Unity.
- Efforts to develop a unified budget with the participation of representatives from the east, west and south remain unresolved.

Ms Khoury has urged Libyan leaders and stakeholders to "refrain from unilateral actions". She said measures which would improve the situation include: restoring confidence in the Central Bank, and coordinating moves by military and security actors to reduce counter-mobilisation and fears from others.⁵⁹

There has been positive movement in relation to local elections, which are due to be held in October 2024. Stephanie Khoury noted voter registration efforts, the distribution of voter cards and registration of candidates. However, she expressed concern about female turnout and the low participation of women as candidates.

The interconnections between extremist organisations and transnational organised crime in the south are "particularly concerning", Ms Khoury told the Security Council, with weapons continuing to flow into the country in violation of the arms embargo.⁶⁰

Ms Khouri concluded that the status quo is not sustainable:

In the absence of renewed political talks leading to a unified government and elections – you see where this is heading - greater political financial and security instability, entrenched political and territorial divisions, and greater domestic and regional instability.⁶¹

⁵⁹ UNSMIL, [DSRSG Koury's remarks to the UN Security Council - 20 August 2024](#), 20 August 2024

⁶⁰ UNSMIL, [DSRSG Koury's remarks to the UN Security Council - 20 August 2024](#), 20 August 2024

⁶¹ UNSMIL, [DSRSG Koury's remarks to the UN Security Council - 20 August 2024](#), 20 August 2024

Discord at the Central Bank

The Central Bank acts on behalf of both administrations and is authorised by UN Security Council resolutions to control and disburse oil revenues generated by the National Oil Corporation to the two administrations. Oil revenues accounted for an estimated 98% of Libya's total government revenues in 2021.⁶² The 2015 Libyan Political Agreement requires both the House of Representatives and the High Council of State to appoint jointly the governor.

In a move hailed at the time as a sign of progress, in August 2023 the eastern and western branches of the Central Bank of Libya reformed into a unified sovereign institution. The central bank had previously indicated its intention to reunify in January 2020 as part of the peace process.⁶³ The UN mission said at the time that it hoped the Bank's reunification "will help create momentum" towards unifying all of Libya's state institutions.⁶⁴

However, in August 2024 the Central Bank became mired in controversy over reported attempts to unseat the governor, Sadiq al-Kabir. News reports said worsening relations between Al-Kabir and Dabaiba came to a head when representatives from the Tripoli government took over the premises of the central bank, and armed groups reportedly began threatening staff, who left. The eastern-based administration responded by temporarily closing down some oil production in areas under its control.⁶⁵ The House of Representatives has rejected a decision by the Presidency Council to have a new governor and form a Board of Directors.⁶⁶

The Economist has warned that if Libya "drops out of the global financial system" it will struggle to buy basics, including imported food, and will be unable to pay salaries.⁶⁷

On 26 September, the UN announced that the House of Representatives and the High Council of State had "reached a compromise on appointing new leadership" for the Central Bank.⁶⁸ The new interim governor has been named as Naji Mohamed Issa Belqasem, the bank's director of banking and monetary control.⁶⁹

⁶² US Energy Information Administration, [Libya](#), 9 May 2022

⁶³ [Libya's central bank reunifies after almost a decade](#), Reuters, 20 August 2023

⁶⁴ UNSMIL, [UNSMIL welcomes the announcement of the reunification of the Central Bank of Libya](#), 20 August 2023

⁶⁵ Bloomberg, [Libyan Central Bank standoff deepens as governor won't back down](#), 25 August 2024; Financial Times, [Libya central bank governor flees divided country over fear for his life](#), 30 August 2024; SP Global, [Libya's eastern government vows total oil shutdown](#), 26 August 2024

⁶⁶ UNSMIL, [DSRSG Koury's remarks to the UN Security Council - 20 August 2024](#), 20 August 2024

⁶⁷ The Economist, [The Fall of Libya's central banker triggers a new struggle](#), 5 September 2024

⁶⁸ [Briefing: Libyan outlets scrutinise UN-brokered 'compromise' on central bank chief](#), BBC Monitoring, 26 September 2024

⁶⁹ Reuters, [Libya's rival factions agree to end central bank crisis](#), 26 September 2024

2.3 Libya's economy

Libya is highly dependent on oil and gas, which according to the African Development Bank constitutes 97% of exports, more than 90% of fiscal revenues, and 68% of GDP.⁷⁰ The industrial sector dominates: over 2004–2022, the industrial sector (led by oil and gas) contributed an estimated 61.7% to GDP, while manufacturing contributed just 4.0% and agriculture just 2.8%

The bank said the continued division of Libya into two administrations, and a resulting lack of a unified stated budget, means that public salaries, operating expenses, and subsidies are prioritised at the expense of public investment. GDP per capita declined by 50% between 2011 and 2020, according to the World Bank, which estimates it would have increased by 68% if the economy had followed its pre-conflict trend.⁷¹

The African Development Bank provided the following outlook for the immediate future:

The economy is projected to grow at 7.9% in 2024 and 6.2% in 2025, under the assumption that oil and gas prices and production remain stable. Inflation is forecast to remain subdued, at around 2.8% in 2024 and 2.6% in 2025, reflecting expected stability in global food prices. The fiscal surplus is projected to improve to 4.2% of GDP in 2024 and to 8.7% in 2025, while the current account surplus is expected to remain at double digits in 2024 and 2025 due to projected increases in oil and gas exports.⁷²

However, the African Development Bank's assumptions were written before the crisis at Libya's Central Bank over the governorship and subsequent slowing of oil production in August 2024. An IMF assessment in May 2024 had welcomed the reunification of the central bank which it said had led to "welcome improvements in banking supervision and monetary policy coordination".⁷³

The IMF estimated GDP will grow close to 8% in 2024 in its outlook (written in May):

The outlook is dominated by the dynamics of hydrocarbon production, which is projected to reach 1.5 million barrels per day by 2026. GDP is estimated to grow by close to 8 percent in 2024 and continue to expand at lower rates in the outer years. The baseline projection is for declining fiscal and external balances over the coming years in line with a projected decline in global oil prices.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ African Development Bank, [Libya Economic Outlook 2024](#), May 2024, accessed 26 September 2024

⁷¹ World Bank, [The World Bank in Libya](#), 12 October 2023

⁷² African Development Bank, [Libya Economic Outlook 2024](#), May 2024, accessed 26 September 2024

⁷³ IMF, [Libya: Staff concluding statement of the 2024 Article IV mission](#), 13 May 2024

⁷⁴ IMF, [Libya: Staff concluding statement of the 2024 Article IV mission](#), 13 May 2024

2.4

Commentary on Libya's future

“Political authority remains fragmented, combative and ineffective”

Hafed Al-Ghwell

The role of the UN

Moin Kikhia, the chairman of the Libyan Democratic Institute, said that the current system of divided governance “is too riddled with conflict and competing interests to survive for long”.⁷⁵ Writing in March 2024, Kikhia criticised the UN for wanting to impose “a solution concocted in its own corridors” rather than a Libyan solution. Kikhia said the UN needs to recognise the “strong sense of separate identities that shape Libya’s different regions”. He argued the UN should concentrate on its role as a facilitator, to enable the two governments to find a way forward, which he said will likely be based on a federal structure that respects regional autonomy.

Following Bathily’s resignation in April 2024, Tim Eaton, a senior research fellow at the London-based think tank Chatham House, said Bathily had allowed the five leading actors to monopolise the process, when they had already calculated the status quo was preferable.⁷⁶ Eaton criticised Bathily for neglecting to directly address economic issues and the security sector. Writing after Bathily’s resignation, he called on the UN to pursue a “bold process that risks failure [rather] than simply replicate the same elite-centred approach”, warning that continuing on the same path as before will “inevitably continue Libya’s decline into the hands of its increasingly powerful kleptocrats”.

Addison Emig, of the US-based Wilson Centre, similarly called on the UN and the international community to rethink its approach to Libya. She described how the international consensus on Libya has “dissolved” with foreign governments such as Russia, Italy, Turkey and the US operating independently and with their own agendas.⁷⁷ She suggested that rather than pursue the same, unsuccessful approach, the UN could pursue a number of options: it could “put more power behind UN-facilitated negotiations”, consider a more hands-on approach of directly organising and implementing elections or adopt a hands-off approach. Each option carries risks and would likely face internal and external opposition.⁷⁸

Current tensions and embedding of the status quo

The struggle to control Libya’s oil resources and revenues has embroiled Libya in an ongoing “state of political fragility”, according to Hafed Al-Ghwell,

⁷⁵ Moin Kikhia, [A Libyan solution to a Libyan challenge](#), The Washington Institute, 14 March 2024

⁷⁶ Tim Eaton, [As yet another UN Libya envoy quits, his successor must be bolder](#), Chatham House, 25 April 2024

⁷⁷ Addison Emig, [Signs of Stagnation: Special Representative to the Secretary General Abdoulaye Bathily’s resignation](#), 30 April 2024

⁷⁸ Addison Emig, [Signs of Stagnation: Special Representative to the Secretary General Abdoulaye Bathily’s resignation](#), 30 April 2024

a senior fellow and executive director of the North Africa Initiative at the Foreign Policy Institute of the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington.⁷⁹ He says political elites and militia factions are conspiring to undermine each other, compromising Libya's ability to effectively manage its oil revenues and could have far-reaching effects:

The failure to foster a robust environment to establish a stable and unified government is now not only jeopardizing Libya's future, it is threatening to destabilize the region.⁸⁰

Karim Mezran, a Libyan-Italian senior fellow with the Rafik Hariri Center & Middle East programs at the Atlantic Council, has suggested that one of the main reasons for the current tension is Dabaiba's refusal to resign.⁸¹ This, he argued, has contributed to the decline in approval for the GNU, which is now viewed as seeking to remain in power solely to "appropriate national resources for its enrichment".⁸² The east is under the control of General Haftar, according to Mezran: "Haftar holds all military power and Libyan Parliament Speaker Aguila Saleh exercises political power only with approval from Haftar".⁸³

Tarek Megerisi, a senior fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), said the "clumsy attempt" to replace the central bank governor should be a "blaring alarm in the central Mediterranean". He warned the row could create a socio-economic crisis that could "quickly turn violent" given pre-existing rivalries. Megerisi warned further that if the crisis turns Libya to war it would be far messier than the last: "Libya's fragmenting fault lines suggest this would be a constellation of simultaneous conflicts rather than a single-front, two-party war".⁸⁴

The Central Bank crisis could result in the centre of power shifting from Tripoli to Benghazi, the Economist newspaper suggested in early September 2024.⁸⁵ The Economist suggested General Haftar looks better placed to benefit from the crisis if he can gain control of expenditure as well as revenue (the latter from the vast oil fields under his control). The Economist observed a shift among the international community towards Haftar: "Western diplomats and Turkish companies who once spurned General Haftar are heading to Benghazi to chat him up".⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Hafid Al-Ghwell, [Divided Libya faces new threat](#), Arab News, 27 August 2024

⁸⁰ Hafid Al-Ghwell, [Divided Libya faces new threat](#), Arab News, 27 August 2024

⁸¹ Karim Mezran, [The end of Libya's false stability period](#), Atlantic Council, 20 September 2024

⁸² Karim Mezran, [The end of Libya's false stability period](#), Atlantic Council, 20 September 2024

⁸³ Karim Mezran, [The end of Libya's false stability period](#), Atlantic Council, 20 September 2024

⁸⁴ Tarek Megerisi, [Libya's central bank chaos must serve as a wake-up call for the West](#), Euronews, 12 September 2024

⁸⁵ The Economist, [The Fall of Libya's central banker triggers a new struggle](#), 5 September 2024

⁸⁶ The Economist, [The Fall of Libya's central banker triggers a new struggle](#), 5 September 2024

The international community

Complicating factors are the number of armed groups and influence of foreign actors (discussed in section 6). Writing in September 2024, Mezran concludes that “even if all internal and foreign players align, the level of anarchy and fragmentation reached in Libya will still make resolution a difficult endeavour”.⁸⁷

Writing in August 2024 about the battle over control of the Central Bank, Hafd Al-Ghwell said that “self-interested middle powers are as emboldened as ever to preserve the quagmire as a means of asserting their own extraterritorial designs”.⁸⁸

Foreign regional powers remain crucial to developments in Libya, according to Karim Mezran.⁸⁹ Hafd Al-Ghwell concurs, saying that “self-interested middle powers are as emboldened as ever to preserve the quagmire as a means of asserting their own extraterritorial designs”.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Karim Mezran, [The end of Libya’s false stability period](#), Atlantic Council, 20 September 2024

⁸⁸ Hafd Al-Ghwell, [Divided Libya faces new threat](#), Arab News, 27 August 2024

⁸⁹ Karim Mezran, [The end of Libya’s false stability period](#), Atlantic Council, 20 September 2024

⁹⁰ Hafd Al-Ghwell, [Divided Libya faces new threat](#), Arab News, 27 August 2024

3 UK policy on Libya

3.1 Historical relations

The UK's relations with Libya are long and complex. The UK broke off diplomatic relations following the killing of police officer Yvonne Fletcher outside the Libyan embassy in 1984. The downing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988, and subsequent claims for compensation and prosecution of those responsible, as well as Libya's suspected support for the IRA in the 1980s, also soured relations for long periods of time.

However, relations improved in the late 1990s as Libya distanced itself from its sponsorship of terrorism and handed over the suspects of the Lockerbie bombing to Scottish authorities. In 2003 Libya made a statement renouncing its support for terrorism, its weapons of mass destruction and its ballistic missiles programme. In 2004, Prime Minister Tony Blair became the first British leader to visit Libya since Colonel Gaddafi took power in 1969.⁹¹

Further information on the UK relationship with Libya during this period can be found in a 2011 Commons Library briefing [UK relations with Libya](#).

UK military action in 2011

In 2011 the long-time dictator of Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, was overthrown with the help of the armed forces of the UK, France and US.⁹² In a 2016 report, the Foreign Affairs Committee held David Cameron, Prime Minister at the time of the 2011 intervention, responsible for failing to develop a coherent strategy to support and shape post-Gaddafi Libya.⁹³ The country has been marked by division and conflict ever since.

⁹¹ [Blair meets Gaddafi](#), the Guardian, 25 March 2004

⁹² See Commons Library briefing, [Military operations in Libya](#), 24 October 2011

⁹³ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Libya: Examination of intervention and collapse and the UK's future policy options](#) [PDF], HC 119 2016-17, 14 September 2016

3.2 Recent policy approach

The UK reopened the British embassy in Tripoli in 2022.⁹⁴

David Rutley, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the FCDO (the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office), set out the government's approach in response to a debate on Libya in October 2023 stating that the UK "fully backs a Libyan-led, UN-facilitated political process" and that this "offers the best route to peace and stability".⁹⁵ the Minister said elections remained a clear goal, the status quo is not delivering for Libyan people, and the political impasse is threatening stability in Libya and the broader region. He said the onus is on Libya's leaders to "fulfil their responsibilities, to uphold peace and security, and to find a lasting inclusive political settlement".⁹⁶

The Minister also referred to efforts to "counteract" the work other countries are doing to "exploit the instability in Libya" to further their own objectives, explicitly citing Russian contractor Wagner Group operations in the country.⁹⁷

In April 2024, David Rutley described the political impasse in Libya as "unstainable" and continued to support the UN's efforts to broker a Libyan-owned and led political settlement.⁹⁸

The UK's approach has so far remained the same under the new Labour government. At a UN Security Council meeting on Libya in August 2024, the UK's Ambassador James Kariuki, noted unilateral political initiatives by Libyan stakeholders (discussed in section 5.2) and called on them to recognise the central role of UNSMIL. The Ambassador also expressed concern about the increasing violations and abuses of human rights, and lack of protection of women; and the "ineffectiveness" of the arms embargo and the provision of military support by members of the Security Council.⁹⁹

3.3 Penholder for Libya at the UN Security Council

The UK is the penholder on Libya in the United Nations (UN) Security Council, which means it takes the lead in drafting resolutions and communications.

⁹⁴ FCDO, [The reopening of the British Embassy in Tripoli](#), 5 June 2022

⁹⁵ [HC Deb 18 October 2023 c79WH](#)

⁹⁶ [HC Deb 18 October 2023 c80WH](#)

⁹⁷ [HC Deb 18 October 2023 c81WH](#)

⁹⁸ PQ22475 [[Libya: Elections](#)], 26 April 2024

⁹⁹ FCDO, [Libya's leaders must protect their people's rights: UK statement at the UN Security Council](#), 20 August 2024

The Conservative government set out how it performs at the Security Council as penholder for Libya in response to questions from the Foreign Affairs Committee in November 2023:

Our role as penholder on Libya in the UNSC is focused on building international consensus and support for the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) to further the political process in Libya, including the delivery of parliamentary and presidential elections. We work closely with the SRSG to ensure the Security Council's work reflects his priorities and is representative of the situation in Libya. We work with Security Council members and regional stakeholders to deliver consensus on policy, issued through resolutions, press and presidential statements.

We work to ensure the Libyan sanctions regime – set out in UNSCR 1970 (2011) – is fit for purpose; and to this end we work closely with the 1970 Committee, UNSC, and Panel of Experts. The UK continues to ensure the wider political process and broader UN objectives – including human rights, the protection of civic space, and the representation of women and minority groups – are highlighted through the Security Council.

The government also discussed reconstruction efforts in Derna following the floods in September 2023:

We believe a unified east-west approach is required to support reconstruction efforts with technical assistance and oversight from reputed international bodies.

Transparency and oversight is key to prevent corruption of the reconstruction process. The devastating floods have underscored the need for a unified Libyan Government and the unsustainability of the political status quo. If Libyan authorities can come together to support reconstruction, there is an opportunity to build on this momentum to advance the political process.¹⁰⁰

3.4 Sanctions

On 19 October 2023, the UN Security Council “extended the authorization of measures to stop the illicit export of petroleum products from Libya.”¹⁰¹

The Security Council also reiterated that individuals and entities determined by the United Nations Sanctions Committee to have violated the provisions of resolution 1970 (2011), including the arms embargo, or assisted others in doing so, may be designated for targeted sanctions, and called on Libya's Government to improve implementation of the embargo. The 1970 Committee (named after the resolution) oversees the relevant sanctions measures, including an arms embargo, asset freeze, travel ban and the illicit

¹⁰⁰ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Written evidence submitted by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office](#), November 2023

¹⁰¹ UN, [Security Council Extends Measures against Illicit Petroleum Exports from Libya, Panel of Experts' Mandate, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2701 \(2023\)](#), 19 October 2023, SC/15456

export of crude oil. The resolution also extended the mandate of the panel of experts, who support the 1970 committee, to 1 February 2025.

Denisse Rudich, a senior illicit finance policy adviser to the Sentry, a not-for-profit organisation that focuses on tackling conflict financing, told the Foreign Affairs Committee that the UK has done a “great job” in upholding sanctions targeting the entities owned by the Libyan state, such as the Libyan Investment Authority.¹⁰²

However, Ms Rudich said sanctions applied against individuals, specifically targeting human rights violations to try to prevent human trafficking and smuggling of migrants, have not been quite as effective. She explained that one of the challenges “has been the inconsistent application of sanctions and the avoidance of targeting key players”, such as the lack of sanctions on General Haftar. Peter Millett, a former British ambassador to Libya (2015 to 2018), agreed that sanctions have not been applied to those who have blocked political progress; this is partly because, he said, of a lack of agreement in the Security Council.¹⁰³

Sanctions regulations

The [Libya \(Sanctions\) \(EU Exit\) Regulations 2020](#) (S.I. 2020/1665) were made under the Sanctions and Anti-Money Laundering Act 2018 (the Sanctions Act). They provide for the freezing of funds and economic resources of certain persons, entities or bodies involved in:

- the commission of a serious human rights violation or abuse in Libya;
- the commission of a serious breach of international humanitarian law in Libya;
- activities undermining Libya’s transition to a democratic, peaceful and independent country or any other activity that threatens the peace, stability and security of Libya.

The sanctions regime puts into effect the UK’s obligations under UN Security Council resolutions, including resolution 1970 (2011). Full information on sanctions measures imposed by the UN can be found on the UN page on [sanctions on Libya](#).

Information about designated persons and relevant regulations relating to UK applied financial sanctions can be found on gov.uk: [Financial sanctions, Libya](#).

¹⁰² Foreign Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence: The UK’s engagement with the Middle East and North Africa](#), 30 January 2024, HC 300 2023-24, q193

¹⁰³ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Oral evidence: The UK’s engagement with the Middle East and North Africa](#), 30 January 2024, HC 300 2023-24, q194

Arms embargo

The UK applies the [arms embargo applied by the UN](#) in 2011. However, the head of UNSMIL has expressed concern about the influx of weapons into Libya.¹⁰⁴

There have also been reports of a resurgence of weapons being trafficked from Libya into the Sahel, where there have been a number of coups and a significant presence of non-state actors.¹⁰⁵ Hassane Koné, a regional specialist with the Institute for Security Studies, has tracked the trafficking of arms into Niger, on Libya's southern border, and onwards into Niger's neighbours, including Mali (there have been a number of coups across the Sahel since 2020, including in Niger and Mali).¹⁰⁶

3.5 UK trade with Libya

Total trade in goods and services between the UK and Libya was £2.2 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q1 2024.¹⁰⁷ Total UK exports to Libya were £459 million and UK imports were £1.7 billion during this period. Almost all (97.8%) of imports to the UK were crude oil. Libya is the UK's 65th largest trading partner.

3.6 Human rights

Libya is one of 32 countries designated priority countries by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). The FCDO's human rights and democracy report for 2022, published in July 2023, described severe human rights abuses and violations.¹⁰⁸ A subsequent ministerial statement for the first half of 2023 highlighted concerns about the reduction in civic space, the targeting and arbitrary detention of civil society and free media by security actors; the abuse of migrants transiting Libya; and gender-based violence.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ UNSMIL, [DSRSG Koury's remarks to the UN Security Council](#) (PDF), 20 August 2024

¹⁰⁵ See Commons Library briefing [Coups and political stability in West Africa](#), 18 September 2023

¹⁰⁶ Hassane Koné, [Arms trafficking from Libya to Niger is back in business](#), Institute for Security Studies, 28 July 2022; Further information on insecurity in the Sahel can be found in Commons Library briefing [Coups and political in West Africa](#), 18 September 2023

¹⁰⁷ Department for Business and Trade, [Trade and investment factsheets: Libya \(PDF\)](#), 20 September 2024

¹⁰⁸ FCDO, [Human rights and democracy: the 2022 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office report](#), 13 July 2023

¹⁰⁹ FCDO, [Human rights priority countries: ministerial statement, January to June 2023](#), 20 March 2024

A UK statement at the UN Human Rights Council in August 2024 highlighted serious human rights violations which “continue unabated” across Libya.¹¹⁰ The UK expressed its deep concern at reports of shrinking civil space and the importance of civil society involvement in transitional justice and reconciliation. The government welcomed a draft law aimed at protecting women from violence and encouraging greater female participation in politics and public life. The government also said, given reports of continued “gross and widespread human rights violations”, that Libya must remain on the Human Rights Council’s agenda.¹¹¹

International NGOs have also chronicled human rights abuses by the authorities and armed groups. [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty International](#) have said these abuses include long-term arbitrary detention, unlawful killings, torture and forced disappearances.

3.7 UK aid spending

Spending from 2010 to 2022

From 2010 to 2023, the UK spent around £175 million in bilateral aid to Libya (that is, aid provided for a specific programme or purpose).¹¹² The UK also provides contributions to the core budgets of multilateral institutions such as UN agencies or the World Bank.

UK bilateral aid to Libya peaked in 2014 at £28.7 million. It fell every year from 2019 to 2022, from £16.4 million to £5.2 million, before increasing to £8.2 million in 2023.¹¹³

Plans from 2023 and Labour government announcements

In its July 2023 annual report, the FCDO said it planned to commit £0.8 million in bilateral aid to Libya in 2022/23 and none in 2023/24 and 2024/25. Funding may come from other departments or regional funds, however. The plans are subject to change.¹¹⁴

The UK announced up to £17 million in aid in response to the 2023 floods.¹¹⁵ Speaking in October 2023, FCDO Minister, David Rutley, said UK aid:

provided emergency shelter to 14,000 people, 800 portable solar lanterns, and water filters and hygiene kits for 10,000 people. We have also supported

¹¹⁰ FCDO, [UN Human Rights Council 56: UK Statement on Libya](#), 28 August 2024

¹¹¹ FCDO, [UN Human Rights Council 56: UK Statement on Libya](#), 28 August 2024

¹¹² FCDO, [Statistics on international development: final UK aid spend 2023](#), September 2024, additional tables, table 4a (Africa)

¹¹³ FCDO, [Statistics on international development: final UK aid spend 2023](#), September 2024, additional tables, table 4a (Africa)

¹¹⁴ FCDO, [FCDO annual report and accounts 2022 to 2023](#), July 2023, p268

¹¹⁵ FCDO, [UK ramps up vital life-saving support for Libya](#), 16 September 2023

the deployment of three mobile medical teams to provide primary healthcare in flood-affected areas.¹¹⁶

The Labour government has not announced its country allocations for 2024/25 or future years. In July 2024 it made three specific funding announcements:

- £21 million across Libya, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Chad over the next three years to support international agencies working with migrants and refugees.
- £2 million to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for its work in Libya, including for voluntary refugee returns from the country.¹¹⁷
- £2 million to support up to 150,000 Sudanese refugees in Libya fleeing violence in Sudan.¹¹⁸

UK aid programmes

Conflict Stability and Security Fund

From 2018 to 2022, £39.5 million, or 65% of UK aid to Libya, has come via the cross-government Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). Almost all the remainder, £21.3 million, has come from the FCDO and its predecessors.¹¹⁹

From 2018 to 2023, the UK provided £69.1 million in bilateral aid to Libya. Of this, £43.7 million (63%) was from the cross-government Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF) or its successor, the Integrated Security Fund. Almost all the remainder, £25.4 million, has come from the FCDO and its predecessor departments (in 2023, £250,000 also came from the Scottish Government).

The CSSF was established in 2015. It aimed to address conflict, stability, and security challenges overseas, with a focus on those that threaten UK national security, and used a mixture of aid and non-aid funding.¹²⁰

In 2023, the government announced it would replace the CSSF with the Integrated Security Fund, with a budget of around £1 billion, from 1 April 2024.¹²¹ Specific spending plans for ISF have not been set out.¹²² In August

¹¹⁶ HC Deb, [18 October 2023](#), c82WH

¹¹⁷ FCDO, [UK steps up work to reduce illegal migration](#), 18 July 2024

¹¹⁸ FCDO, [New UK support for up to 150,000 vulnerable Sudanese refugees](#), 12 July 2024

¹¹⁹ FCDO, [Data underlying statistics on international development final UK ODA spend 2023](#), September 2024

¹²⁰ Gov.UK, [CSSF: about](#)

¹²¹ FCDO, [New fund announced to support UK's national security priorities](#), 13 March 2023

¹²² HCWS291 [[UK ISF](#)], 26 February 2024

2024 the Labour government said the ISF would be considered as part of the ongoing spending review.¹²³

In October 2023 the government said that CSSF funding in Libya in 2023 totalled £6 million. It aimed to facilitate peace efforts and included:

developing community-level councils, supporting civil society organisations and collaborating with Chatham House to help key Libyan institutions to become more accountable and transparent.¹²⁴

Reductions to the CSSF budget

Total funding for the CSSF fell from £1.2 billion in 2020/21 to £830 million in 2022/23. In its Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region spending, CSSF bilateral spending fell from £165.3 million in 2020/21 to £100.3 million in 2021/22 to £83.6 million in 2022/23.¹²⁵

MENA programmes in Algeria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia were closed or reduced in 2021/22. The Sudan programme was also closed in 2021/22, with the government citing spending restraints on its aid budget. In June 2023 the government said that the changes were made in line with its MENA strategy under the integrated review of UK defence, security, development, and trade policy, which “mandated a tighter focus for spending on conflict and instability, and insecurity, where there was a threat to the UK”.¹²⁶

Joint Committee assessment on CSSF reductions in 2023

The UK Parliament’s Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy published a report on the CSSF in September 2023.

The Committee criticised the reductions to the CSSF as a “false economy.” It heard evidence from Mercy Corps that the CSSF was increasingly focused on security rather than conflict prevention through development programmes, while the HALO Trust said reductions in the MENA region were “not consistent with the aim of the fund” given the frequency of conflict in the area.¹²⁷

Other UK aid programmes in Libya

The majority of [current active FCDO programmes](#) in Libya are focused on educational engagement through the British Council and UK universities.¹²⁸

¹²³ PQ HL 516 [[UK ISF](#)], 12 August 2024

¹²⁴ HC Deb, [18 October 2023](#), c82WH

¹²⁵ FCDO, [CSSF annual report 2020 to 2021](#), December 2021, p20; FCDO, [CSSF annual report 2021 to 2022](#), May 2023, section 2, figure 4; FCDO, [CSSF annual report 2022 to 2023](#), January 2024, Annex A, figure 5

¹²⁶ [Written evidence by Baroness Neville-Rolfe, Cabinet Office Minister](#) (PDF), June 2023; Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [CSSF](#), 20 September 2023, para 11

¹²⁷ Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, [CSSF](#), 20 September 2023, paras 10, 13

¹²⁸ FCDO Development Tracker, [Libya: active programmes](#)

The largest value programme, aside from the CSSF, is the FCDO's MENA regional humanitarian response. This is a fund that works across the region to facilitate and provide humanitarian aid.¹²⁹

No UK aid goes directly to the Libyan Government or its agencies.¹³⁰

¹²⁹ FCDO Development Tracker, [MENA regional humanitarian response](#), updated 11 October 2023

¹³⁰ PQ HL 4958 [[Libya: development aid](#)], 23 December 2021

4

Role and influence of foreign actors

The influence of foreign powers in Libya is complex. Foreign powers support can be fluid and reflects their own national agendas. Support may involve military as well as political support to key actors.

The internationally-recognised Tripoli administration

The UK, US and other western countries are supportive of the Government of National Unity (GNU), having supported the previous Government of National Accord in Tripoli.

Neighbouring Algeria also favours the western government, as does Turkey, whose troops halted the advance of the LNA on Tripoli in 2020.¹³¹ Turkey has deals with the GNU covering energy, maritime and security.¹³²

The eastern administration and LNA

Russia and Egypt support the eastern forces of the Libyan National Army and House of Representatives.¹³³

Russia has supplied weapons to the LNA and has also deployed the Africa Corps to the country.¹³⁴ The Africa Corps has replaced the Russian contractor Wagner Group across the continent following the group's collapse in 2023. A Foreign Affairs Committee report published in July 2023 documented Wagner Group's presence in Libya since 2018.¹³⁵ The FCDO has said there is evidence of "human rights abuses and war crimes conducted by Wagner in Libya".¹³⁶ The Institute for the Study of War suggests Russia is using Libya as

¹³¹ Ahmed Helal, For Turkey, the Libyan conflict and the eastern Mediterranean are inextricably linked, Atlantic Council, 28 October 2020

¹³² BBC Monitoring, Libyan officials discuss military ties with Turkish counterparts, Al-Wasat website (Cairo), 24 September 2024

¹³³ [Africa file special edition: Russian diplomatic blitz highlights the Kremlin's strategic aims in Africa](#), Institute for the Study of War, 6 June 2024

¹³⁴ Karim Mezran, [The end of Libya's false stability period](#), Atlantic Council, 20 September 2024

¹³⁵ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Guns for hire: the Wagner Group exposed](#), 18 July 2023, HC 167 2022-23

¹³⁶ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Written evidence submitted by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development office](#), November 2023

a “staging ground to reinforce its military deployments” across Africa, including the Sahel, and to secure a naval base on the Libyan coast.¹³⁷

In 2020, the House of Representatives approved a motion authorising Egypt to directly intervene militarily if needed, following Turkey’s halting of the LNA’s westward push.¹³⁸

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) was one of the “most fervent” supporters of General Haftar, according to Turkish academic Fuat Sefkatli, but has since stepped back. The UAE reportedly withdrew funding of the Wagner group in 2022.¹³⁹

The eastern administration is also reaching out to the US; the Benghazi-based House of Representatives contracted with a Washington-based lobbying firm, Vogel Group, in November 2023.¹⁴⁰ The commander of US Africa Command met General Haftar and other senior LNA members during a visit to Libya in August 2024. The commander also met the Prime Minister and other senior officials in Tripoli.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ [Africa file special edition: Russian diplomatic blitz highlights the Kremlin’s strategic aims in Africa](#), Institute for the Study of War, 6 June 2024

¹³⁸ [Eastern parliament seeks Egypt’s direct intervention in Libya war](#), Al Jazeera, 14 July 2020

¹³⁹ Fuat Sefkatli, [Strategic shifts: The UAE’s evolving role in the Libyan dossier](#), 6 March 2024

¹⁴⁰ Murky waters around Tobruk, Africa Confidential, 2 November 2023

¹⁴¹ [Africom commander visits Libya](#), US Africa Command, 29 August 2024

5 Migration

Libya is a conduit for migrants who have travelled across Africa seeking to access Europe via the Mediterranean sea. High numbers of people have died in boat crossings, with Libyan authorities limited in their ability to control the flow of migrants or prevent groups from financially benefiting from the trade.

The EU has sought for some time to limit deaths by strengthening search and rescue operations along the Libyan coast, under [successive maritime operations](#) operated by its border and coast guard agency, Frontex, and by supporting Libyan efforts to bolster its own coast guard.¹⁴² However, human rights groups have criticised the treatment of migrants who have been returned to Libya and detained in state-run detention centres.¹⁴³

The EU has also sought to reduce the number of attempted migrant crossings by focusing on the town of Agadez in Niger which has become a “well established transit hub”, according to Peter Tinti, a senior research fellow at Chatham House on transnational organised crime.¹⁴⁴

However, the European Court of Auditors has criticised a €5 billion emergency trust fund for Africa, set up in 2015 as the EU’s “main tool for actions to support migration related issues in Libya”.¹⁴⁵ In a report published in September 2024, the auditors said the fund lacked focus and failed to address the risk of human rights abusers benefiting from European money.¹⁴⁶ The auditors said that even after seven years in operation “the commission is still unable to identify and report on the most efficient and effective approaches to reducing irregular migration and forced displacements in Africa”.¹⁴⁷ The Guardian newspaper described the report as a “quietly devastating critique of one of the EU’s flagship policies”.¹⁴⁸

The head of UNSMIL has also raised concerns about the number of [Sudanese refugees](#) fleeing the civil war. An estimated 97,000 Sudanese refugees have arrived in Libya since April 2023. However, UNHCR warns that, given the vast

¹⁴² European Council, [Migration flows: EU actions in Libya](#), 5 May 2022

¹⁴³ [Europe silent on plight of detainees in Libya, says migration chief](#), The Guardian, 26 May 2022

¹⁴⁴ Peter Tinti, [Tackling the Niger-Libya migration route](#), 5 August 2024

¹⁴⁵ EU, [EU support on migration in Libya](#) (PDF), February 2022

¹⁴⁶ European Court of Auditors, [Auditors step up criticism of EU migration fund for Africa](#), 25 September 2024

¹⁴⁷ EU, [EU support on migration in Libya](#) (PDF), February 2022

¹⁴⁸ [EU fund to stem migration from Africa ‘fails to address risks’ – watchdog](#), The Guardian, 25 September 2024

remote land border, it is challenging to provide an accurate number of Sudanese refugees in the country.¹⁴⁹

Commons Library briefings:

- [Is turning back migrants at sea compatible with international law?](#), September 2021
- [Migration pressures in Europe](#), September 2015

¹⁴⁹ UNHCR, [Sudan situation: Sudanese refugees and asylum-seekers in Libya](#), 5 September 2024

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