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# Libya: Transition and U.S. Policy

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## Summary

Libya's post-Qadhafi transition has been disrupted by armed non-state groups and threatened by the indecision and infighting of interim leaders. Since an armed uprising ousted the government of Muammar al Qadhafi in late 2011, interim authorities have failed to form a stable government, address pressing security issues, reshape the country's public finances, or create a viable framework for post-conflict justice and reconciliation. The insecurity that was prevalent in Libya in the immediate wake of the 2011 conflict has deepened, and armed militia groups and locally organized political leaders remain the most powerful arbiters of public affairs. Violence among various forces in Tripoli and Benghazi has escalated since mid-2014, driven by overlapping ideological, personal, financial, and transnational rivalries. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has documented indiscriminate use of military weaponry, abductions, unlawful killings, and the internal displacement of more than 100,000 Libyans during the fighting. The U.S. State Department describes Libya as a "terrorist safe haven," and the U.S. government suspended operations at the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli and relocated U.S. personnel out of the country in July 2014. On August 31, Libya's interim government acknowledged that "the majority of the ministries, institutions, and associations" in the capital were no longer under its control and demanded that armed groups refrain from destroying state property.

Since 2011, security in Libya has largely been a function of self-restraint among citizens and militias coexisting in an atmosphere of atomized power and contested political legitimacy, amplified by the proliferation of military weaponry among citizens and non-state groups. Such self-restraint has diminished as campaigns of political intimidation, patterns of criminality, assassinations, and the consolidation of militia influence, at times with state support, have eroded some Libyans' trust in each other and in the political process. Criminals and violent Islamist extremist organizations have exploited these conditions, and the latter have strengthened their military capabilities and advanced their ideological agendas inside Libya and beyond its borders. Elections for legislative bodies and a constitutional drafting assembly have been held and transparently administered, but have been marred by declining rates of participation, threats to candidates and voters, and zero-sum political competition.

Amid new reports of armed intervention and other apparent attempts by governments in the region to influence events in Libya, U.S. officials and other international actors now seek to convince Libyan factions and their regional supporters that inclusive, representative government and negotiation are preferable to competing groups' attempts to achieve dominance through force of arms. On August 27, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2174, authorizing the placement of financial and travel sanctions on individuals and entities in Libya and internationally who are found to be "engaging in or providing support for other acts that threaten the peace, stability or security of Libya, or obstruct or undermine the successful completion of its political transition."

Congress has appropriated funding for U.S. transition assistance and security assistance programs, and Members of Congress are considering FY2015 appropriations requests related to Libya. Congressional consideration of the circumstances surrounding the September 2012 attacks on U.S. facilities and personnel in Benghazi also is ongoing, notably under the auspices of a House Select Committee on the Benghazi attacks established in May 2014 by H.Res. 567. For the time being, conflict mitigation appears to be the Obama Administration's top policy priority in Libya, and political consensus among Libyans may remain elusive.

## Contents

Overview.....	1
Recent Developments .....	3
Operation Dignity and Fighting in Eastern Libya .....	3
Operation Libya Dawn and Fighting in Western Libya.....	5
Disputed Legitimacy and International Responses.....	7
Challenges for International Actors .....	8
U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress .....	9
U.S. Foreign Assistance and Requests.....	9
Select Security Issues.....	13
Ansar al Sharia and Other Libya-based Extremist Groups.....	13
Outlook .....	15

## Figures

Figure 1. Map and Basic Country Data .....	4
Figure 2. Select Libyan Figures.....	6

## Tables

Table 1. U.S. Assistance to Libya FY2010-FY2015.....	11
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## Appendixes

Appendix. Libyan History, Civil War, and Political Change .....	16
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## Contacts

Author Contact Information.....	18
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## Overview

More than three years after the start of the 2011 anti-Qadhafi uprising in Libya and two years after the September 2012 attacks on U.S. facilities and personnel in Benghazi, Libya's security situation is dire and the future of its political transition is in question. The State Department describes Libya as a "terrorist safe haven,"<sup>1</sup> and U.S. personnel were temporarily relocated from the country under U.S. military protection in July 2014 amid escalating violence between militias. Obama Administration officials have stated in testimony before Congress that armed Islamist extremist groups are gaining strength in areas of eastern and southwestern Libya and are exploiting unsecured weapons flows and weak border controls. These networks appear to be linked to terrorism in the region, and support foreign fighter and weapons flows to Syria.<sup>2</sup> Libya's interim government has acknowledged its loss of control over state ministries, as some armed militias and some members of the country's first post-Qadhafi elected legislature seek independently to assert themselves as legitimate leaders relative to members of the recently elected Council of Representatives and the interim government.

The shared desire of the U.S. government and other international actors to empower Libyan state security forces has been confounded by the strength of armed non-state groups and a fundamental lack of political consensus among Libya's interim leaders. Recent fighting and political maneuvering among rival factions and armed groups reflect a number of unresolved debates over Libya's security relationships with foreign governments; the proper role for Islam in political and social life; mechanisms for the provision of local and national security; the political future of Qadhafi-era officials; the relative centralization or decentralization of national administrative authority; competing fiscal priorities; and the ongoing exploitation of Libyan territory by terrorists, arms traffickers, and criminals. Clashing personal ambitions and competition over illicit financial proceeds also reportedly have contributed to unrest.

Public and intra-General National Congress tensions were driven in part by differences of opinion over the future roles and responsibilities of armed militias, the relative influence of powerful local communities over national affairs, and the terms governing the political exclusion of individuals who had formerly served in official positions during the Qadhafi era. Disagreements between Islamist politicians and relatively secular figures also contributed to the gradual collapse of consensus over the transition's direction. These groups differed over some domestic legal and social developments as well as Libya's security relationships with regional and international governments.

Gradually, an unspoken code under which Libyans sought to refrain from shedding other Libyans' blood in the wake of Qadhafi's ouster deteriorated under pressure from a series of violent confrontations between civilians and militias, clashes between rival ethnic groups, and the blatant targeting of security officers by an unidentified, but ruthless network in Benghazi. That code was rooted in shared respect for the sacrifices of anti-Qadhafi revolutionaries and in shared fears that the 2011 predictions of Muammar al Qadhafi and his supporters would come true: that Qadhafi's downfall would be followed by uncontrollable civil strife and chaos.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> State Department Bureau of Counterterrorism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2013, Chapter 5, April 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Country Reports on Terrorism 2013, Chapter 2: Country Reports: Middle East and North Africa, April 2014.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Sayf al Islam al Qadhafi, who remains in detention in Libya and is sought for arrest by the International (continued...)

Persistent discord over these issues has disrupted the post-Qadhafi transition and, as of September 2014, appears to be pushing the country toward a multifaceted civil war involving secular partisans, moderate Islamists, local militias, tribal groups, Islamist extremists, and, reportedly, foreign powers. The outgoing leader of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Tarek Mitri, summarized the political challenges at the root of Libya's conflicts in the following way in an August 27 briefing to the U.N. Security Council:

The Libyan experience illustrates the fact that transition is fraught with great risks, some being due to perceived conflicting interests and mutual fears, the legacy of more than four decades of despotic rule, as well as reactivated enmities and reinvented hatred in the struggle for power. These risks are also those of seeing Libya's future impacted by regional polarization and proxy rivalries. The threat of derailing the movement of change initiated by the revolution is, in all probability, mounting. Reversing the descent into more instability and uncertainty cannot happen unless various actors in Libya's public life commit themselves, in words and in deeds, to a democratic political process. The democratic process cannot be reduced to the ballot box and to the emergence of numerical majorities and minorities. Its progress is conditional on upholding principles of pluralism, inclusivity, separation of powers, [and] adherence to agreed democratic values and norms.

The same day, the Security Council expanded the scope of the existing Libya sanctions regime and tightened security assistance approval requirements under the existing arms embargo by adopting Resolution 2174, which seeks to deter Libyans and outsiders from exacerbating the situation or further undermining Libya's fragile transitional institutions. Specifically, the resolution extends travel and financial sanctions to all groups found to be "engaging in or providing support for other acts that threaten the peace, stability or security of Libya, or obstruct or undermine the successful completion of its political transition." The Security Council and influential Member States are now considering how best to apply balanced pressure using the new resolution to convince or compel the range of actors vying for control in Libya "to engage in peaceful and inclusive political dialogue and to respect the democratic process."<sup>4</sup>

U.N. Security Council Resolution 2174 creates a mechanism through which individuals and groups on all sides of the conflicts in Libya may be sanctioned for undermining security and disrupting the transition. Applying such sanctions in a manner that does not subject the international community to accusations of favoritism or partisanship may prove more difficult. Opposing sides in Libya are apt to see actions targeting them as evidence of bias on the part of interested third parties. Foreign governments who may be backing different sides in Libya also may refuse to comply with restrictions on arms transfers, travel, and financial transactions with potentially broader implications for regional and international security.

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(...continued)

Criminal Court, said in a February 2014 television statement: "Libya, unlike Tunisia and Egypt, is about tribes, clans, and alliances. Libya does not have a civil society or political parties. Libya is made up of tribes that know their areas, allies, and people. ... If secession or a civil war or a sedition occurs ... do you think the Libyans will be able to reach an agreement on how to share oil within a week, a month, or even two or three years? If your answer is yes, then you are mistaken. ... My brothers, we are tribes, and we will resort to arms to settle the matter since arms are available to everyone now. Instead of mourning the death of 84 people, we will mourn the death of hundreds of thousands of people. Rivers of blood will run through Libya and you will flee. There will be no oil supplies, the foreign companies, foreigners, and oil companies will leave tomorrow, and the distribution of oil will come to an end..." U.S. Government Open Source Center (OSC) Report FEA20110221014695, "Libya: Al-Qadhafi's Son Addresses Citizens; Warns of Civil War, 'Colonization,'" *Al Jamahiriya* Television (Tripoli), February 20, 2011.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2174, August 27, 2014.

Indications of the potential challenges associated with U.N.-backed transition-support sanctions can be seen in Yemen, where, as of September 2014, a similar mechanism had yet to be tested by the addition of a single name to its list of sanctioned individuals, months after the Security Council acted to urgently prevent new violence. Using diplomacy and sanctions to dismantle the alliances of convenience and restrain the opportunism that have pushed Libya into conflict may require significant attention and will from members of the international community who are otherwise concerned with a number of other serious security crises in the broader Middle East and around the world.

## Recent Developments

The unravelling of Libya's post-Qadhafi transition intensified in late 2013, as a campaign of unsolved assassinations targeting security officers swept Benghazi; a militia force briefly kidnapped then-Prime Minister Ali Zeidan; militias killed protesting civilians in Tripoli and Benghazi; and rival coalitions within the General National Congress (GNC, elected July 2012) clashed over the future of Zeidan's government and the GNC's mandate and term of office. Zeidan survived numerous attempted no confidence votes during his tenure (November 2012 to March 2014), which was marked by a series of crises stemming from armed groups' demands for the political isolation of Qadhafi-era officials, militias' seizure of oil infrastructure, and the strengthening of armed Islamists in the east and the south.

Long-expected elections for a Constitutional Drafting Assembly were delayed until February 2014, and were ultimately marred by low turnout and violence that prevented voters in some areas from selecting delegates.<sup>5</sup> In late March, a coalition of Islamist and independent forces in the GNC garnered enough votes to oust Zeidan amid a growing boycott by other GNC members that made it difficult for the body to operate with a politically viable quorum. Under increasing political pressure to leave office, GNC members voted to replace the GNC with a new 200 member Council of Representatives (COR), to which legislative authority would be transferred.

## Operation Dignity and Fighting in Eastern Libya

In May 2014, forces loyal to Qadhafi-era retired general Khalifah Haftar launched an armed campaign unauthorized by interim authorities dubbed *Operation Dignity* to evict Islamist militia groups from eastern Libya. Haftar capitalized on widely shared presumptions that certain armed Islamist groups were responsible for the assassination of security officers and were cooperating with foreign jihadists, including Al Qaeda, its regional affiliates, and Syria-based armed groups. More controversially, Haftar broadened his rhetoric and objectives to include pledges to cleanse Libya of Islamists, including supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

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<sup>5</sup> The revised transitional roadmap calls for an elected Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) to produce a draft constitution for consideration by elected legislators and the Libyan public. Forty-eight out of 60 of the Assembly's members were elected in February 2014 amid very low voter turnout; elections to fill the remaining 12 seats have been delayed due to boycotts and security disruptions. As of May 14, Libya's High National Election Commission reported that 55 members had been elected. According to the 2011 interim constitutional declaration, the CDA is scheduled to have four months from its first session to produce a draft constitution for consideration, a timeline which many outside observers viewed as ambitious and potentially problematic even prior to recent events. The CDA held its first meeting on April 20, in Al Bayda.

Figure I. Map and Basic Country Data



In the months since, Libya appears to have been drawn deeper into a region-wide struggle between pro- and anti-Islamist forces. Haftar's actions and those of his opponents have helped to push many of the country's latent tensions to the surface and contributed to Libya's polarization on ideological and community lines. This polarization was visible during a summer 2014 political struggle between supporters of Prime Minister Abdullah Al Thinni and the leading coalition of Islamists and independents within the GNC, which sought to replace Al Thinni prior to the June 25 elections for the new COR.

Haftar's armed extremist military opponents and his relatively more moderate political adversaries have responded vigorously to his challenges. By late August, the *Operation Dignity* military campaign had suffered several setbacks on the battlefield at the hands of the U.S. designated Foreign Terrorist Organization Ansar al Sharia (AAS) and that group's allies in an emergent coalition known as the Benghazi Revolutionaries' Shura Council. Haftar's forces remain strongest outside of Benghazi and have bases of operation near Marj and Tobruk, where the COR is meeting. In fierce fighting in and around Benghazi, AAS and its partners seized control of military bases belonging to Haftar-aligned forces, including the Benghazi-based Saiqah (Lightning) Special Forces unit, which had been a primary target of the campaign of assassinations and attacks attributed by some observers to AAS and other armed Islamists. AAS and other Islamist forces also acted to strengthen defenses near Darnah—their eastern stronghold—and paraded with weaponry in the central town of Sirte.

## Operation Libya Dawn and Fighting in Western Libya

Meanwhile, in western Libya, fighting erupted along political, ideological, and community lines with two coalitions of forces battling for control of Tripoli's international airport, government facilities, other strategic infrastructure, and areas around the capital. Tensions between locally organized militia groups in the west predated the launch of Haftar's operations in the east. Over time, however, fighting and rhetoric in the two theaters has become more interrelated, with some western-based forces endorsing and offering material support to Haftar's campaign and the COR and others mobilizing to isolate Haftar's erstwhile allies and/or the COR before their own interests can be threatened.

Specifically, some armed groups from the city of Misrata and smaller Islamist militias formed a coalition known as *Operation Libya Dawn* and launched a multi-pronged offensive in July 2014 to take control of main Tripoli's international airport. Participants have included Libya's Central Shield Force, members of the Tripoli-based Libya Revolutionaries Operations Room (LROR), the Knights of Janzour Brigade, militias from Zawiya, and several Misrata-based militias, including the *Marsa* and *Hatin* Brigades. The airport had long been held by a rival coalition of militias largely from Zintan—the *Sawa'iq* and *Qaaqaa* Brigades, and the Martyr Mohammed Madani Brigade—who opposed the GNC-leading Islamist-independent coalition during its final months in office. Libya Dawn operations since the fall of the airport have included clashes with militias in Tripoli's Suq al Jumah neighborhood and militias affiliated with the Warshafanah tribe south and west of the city.

**Figure 2. Select Libyan Figures**

 <p><b>Interim Prime Minister Abdullah al Thinni</b></p> <p>Interim Prime Minister Abdullah al Thinni replaced ousted former prime minister Ali Zeidan in April 2014 and was reappointed by members of the Council of Representatives in late August 2014 after remaining in office in order to avoid a leadership vacuum during the transition between the GNC the COR. He visited Washington in August 2014 and continues to engage with U.S. and other government officials seeking to support Libya's transitional institutions. Al Thinni's family and home have been targeted by armed groups seeking to influence his official decisions.</p>	 <p><b>Mohammad Zahawi</b></p> <p>Mohammad Zahawi is the most publicly prominent leader of Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi, where he appears to be directing the group's counteroffensive against forces led by retired General Khalifa Haftar. Zahawi has been an outspoken opponent of Libya's transition to democratic governance, which his group rejects in favor of the imposition of Islamic law (sharia). Zahawi recently has moved to portray himself as a military commander, appearing in social media posted materials alongside allied militia commanders and surveying areas where Ansar al Sharia forces have clashed with pro-Haftar groups. Zahawi has not been named as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist pursuant to Executive Order 13224.</p>
 <p><b>Council of Representatives (COR) President Aqila Saleh Issa Qwaider</b></p> <p>COR President Aqila Saleh Issa Qwaider (also spelled Ageela Gwaider) was elected narrowly by new members of Libya's legislature in an August 2014 meeting in Tobruk. A native of the town of Al Qubbah in eastern Libya, Qwaider served as a legal counselor during the Qadhafi era. He is leading the COR as it seeks to establish its legitimacy among Libyans who were divided over the tenure and actions of its predecessor, the General National Congress. Deputy Presidents Muhammad Ali Shu'ayb and Humayd Ahmad Ali Humah also were elected to the COR leadership.</p>	 <p><b>Salah Badi</b></p> <p>Salah Badi is a former pro-Islamist member of the GNC and leader of a militia group from Misrata implicated in a shooting incident that killed dozens and wounded hundreds of civilians in Tripoli in November 2013. Badi reportedly led his militia's recent participation in <i>Operation Libya Dawn's</i> campaign to oust Zintan-based militia groups from the Tripoli International Airport.</p>
 <p><b>General Khalifa Belqassem Haftar</b></p> <p>General Khalifa Haftar is a former member of the Qadhafi-era Libyan armed forces who joined the Libyan opposition movement in 1988 after his forces were defeated during failed Libyan military operations in Chad. Haftar returned to Libya from the United States in 2011 and took command of some anti-Qadhafi forces, including some military defectors. Since Qadhafi's fall, he has been critical of interim leaders' handling of security issues, and sought leadership positions in the armed forces. In February 2014 Haftar broadcast a statement claiming to have suspended interim government institutions. In mid-May 2014, he launched "Operation Dignity," an ad hoc military campaign against Islamist militia groups in eastern Libya, attracting support from some key military officers and drawing criticism from interim government leaders, who characterized his actions as a coup attempt.</p>	 <p><b>Nouri Abou Sahmain</b></p> <p>Nouri Abou Sahmain served as President of the General National Congress (GNC) from mid-2013 to August 2014. Abou Sahmain's tenure was characterized by his assertion of the authority of the GNC relative to the GNC-endorsed executive offices of the Prime Minister and the cabinet. As of early September 2014, Abou Sahmain refused to recognize the transfer of legislative authority to the Council of Representatives and continued to claim authority for himself and the GNC. Abou Sahmain is a member of Libya's Amazigh minority community and was elected as an independent member of the GNC. He remains engaged in a political partnership with leaders from Misrata, members of the Justice and Construction party (some of whom are Muslim Brotherhood members), and other Islamists.</p>
 <p><b>Mahmoud Jibril</b></p> <p>Mahmoud Jibril served as lead executive for the opposition National Transitional Council (NTC) government during the 2011 anti-Qadhafi conflict. He was opposed and prevented from becoming interim Prime Minister by a range of Islamist and nationalist figures who questioned his former role as an economic planning official under the Qadhafi government. He organized and leads the National Forces Alliance, a coalition that succeeded in winning the largest number of party-affiliated seats in the GNC in July 2012 elections but was increasingly sidelined during the GNC's tenure. Reports allege he has sought support from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates in competing for influence against his Libyan detractors.</p>	 <p><b>Abdulrahman al Swehli</b></p> <p>A prominent political figure from Misrata, Swehli led the Union for the Homeland movement as a member of the GNC and allied with other Islamists and nationalists in opposition to the Zeidan government and its supporters. A Qadhafi-era dissident, he has been an outspoken advocate for the political isolation of Qadhafi-era officials, which his critics argue masks a broader strategy to increase the political power and economic opportunity available to his Misratan and Islamist allies.</p>

**Source:** Prepared by CRS. Images derived from official Libyan and U.S. government sources and social media sources.

## Disputed Legitimacy and International Responses

Militias on both sides of the fighting in the west had previously aligned themselves with Libya's Ministry of Defense and continue to claim political legitimacy for their operations. This dynamic mirrors the broader political contest between the ex-leaders and principal beneficiaries of the GNC and those marginalized by the GNC and/or supportive of Haftar's anti-Islamist goals. Former GNC President Nouri Abou Sahmain claims he and the GNC remain the legitimate legislative authorities in Libya, based nominally on a dispute over terms for the formal handover of legislative authority to the COR and rejection of the COR's calls for international assistance. Some elected COR members continue to boycott its sessions and may support continuing government leadership roles for anti-COR members of the GNC. In August 2014, former GNC president Abou Sahmain and some other former GNC members announced the appointment of a "salvation government" to be led by Omar al Hassi, rejecting the leadership of Interim Prime Minister Abdullah al Thinni, who was reappointed by the COR in late August. The United States government, the European Union, and several Middle Eastern governments<sup>6</sup> have stated their view that the COR and the interim government led by Al Thinni are the legitimate governing bodies in the country.

Resolution 2174 refers to inclusivity and respect for elected institutions as important elements of a potential solution, which suggests that all parties demanding the exclusion of their adversaries—be they former regime supporters, secular nationalists, or Islamists—may be under increasing international scrutiny in the weeks and months ahead. The COR and Al Thinni conceivably could offer inclusive leadership positions to figures now contesting their legitimacy, in spite of recent vows to pursue legal recourse against *Operation Libya Dawn* participants and supporters. It remains to be seen how *Libya Dawn* leaders, former members of the GNC who oppose the COR's authority and Al Thinni's leadership, or others opposed to Haftar and/or the COR would respond to an offer to form a unity government.

The vehement and violent opposition to democratic governance voiced by Ansar al Sharia and some other Islamist groups suggest that these groups may be more durably at odds with the majority of Libyans' preferred outcome for the transition and for the country's long-term security. In late August, Ansar al Sharia leaders appealed to supporters of *Operation Libya Dawn* to "Unite with the mujahideen in Benghazi and have their same aims, objectives, and goals," and to, "Declare that your fight is for the sake of the Islamic sharia rather than for democratic legitimacy."<sup>7</sup> The advent of such an alliance would further complicate the security situation in the country, but would likely divide *Libya Dawn*'s supporters, given the range of motives and goals that exists among them. On August 31, Ansar al Sharia rejected an agenda proposed by the newly formed Tripoli Revolutionaries' Shura Council (an alliance of Islamist militias supportive of *Operation Libya Dawn*) based on the Council's statements of support for a democratic system.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> An Egypt-backed regional initiative launched in August 2014 recognizes the COR as Libya's legitimate governing body and offers political and security support.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Government Open Source Center (OSC) Report TRN2014082318896718, "Libya: Ansar al-Sharia Calls On 'Dawn of Libya' Leaders to Join Mujahideen against Haftar's Forces," Twitter, August 22, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> OSC Report IMN2014090143268632, "Libya: Tripoli Revolutionaries Announce Formation of Group's Shura Council, Issue Statement," Twitter, September 1, 2014; and, OSC Report TRR2014090103849470, "Libya: Ansar al-Sharia Comments on Founding Statement by Tripoli's Revolutionaries Shura Council," Twitter, August 31, 2014.

## Challenges for International Actors

For the United States and other backers of the interim government, Libya's deteriorating security conditions, fragmented political scene, and shifting transition timelines present several policy dilemmas. The State Department has said that the United States government does not condone or support Haftar's actions and has not assisted them. At the same time, U.S. officials have not specifically rejected Haftar's operations against armed extremist groups or the actions of specific armed groups in western Libya other than to warn of consequences for groups found to have destroyed or damaged civilian aircraft and infrastructure at the Tripoli International Airport. The core of the U.S. message to date has been to call on "all parties to renounce violence and resolve differences through political dialogue and participation in the democratic process."<sup>9</sup> Convincing or compelling parties to do so has proven more difficult.

The timeline for Libya's anticipated transition to a more durable political system has been repeatedly extended and challenged. Since 2011, U.S. officials and others working to support Libya's transition and to combat Libya-based transnational threats have relied on interim leaders and institutions to make difficult policy, budget, and personnel decisions and to identify and support joint priorities. Those leaders are now engaged in bitter political struggles and questioning each other's patriotism and legitimacy. Internationally recognized interim government officials are not in control of key state bureaucracies or security forces. In a reinforcing cycle, indecision and insecurity have eroded the legitimacy of leaders on all sides and eroded citizens' trust in institutions tasked with reversing threats to Libya's stability.

Outsiders, including the United States, have felt increasingly obliged to help break this negative cycle and to insist on an expedited transition, while recognizing that, in the words of U.S. Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, "no one can make Libyans' choices for them" and that outside intervention may inflame problems further.<sup>10</sup> Some news reports allege that some Middle Eastern governments, including those of Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Sudan, and Qatar, have offered financial and/or military support to their preferred interlocutors in Libya in the hope of influencing the outcome of ongoing struggles for power. U.S. engagement with these governments may be further complicated by international efforts to impose costs on individuals and groups on all sides of Libya's various divides who are threatening the security and stability of the country.

Furthering the difficulties facing international actors, security conditions—including a rash of kidnappings targeting foreign diplomats—have led many countries to withdraw their personnel and suspend or terminate assistance programs, including those aimed at strengthening central government and security forces. UNSMIL has evacuated its personnel from Libya, but its new leader, Bernardino León, remains actively engaged in conflict resolution efforts and UNSMIL officials have stated their intention to return staff to Libya as soon as the security situation allows.

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<sup>9</sup> The White House, Statement by the President on the Elections in Libya, June 26, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> OSC Report IML2014042533918510, "U.S. Supports Efforts to Enhance, Reform Security Institutions in Libya," *Libya Herald* (Tripoli), April 24, 2014.

## **U.S. Policy and Issues for Congress**

The September 2012 Benghazi attacks, political infighting, and ongoing violence have challenged U.S. plans to engage in a more comprehensive security assistance and transition support relationship with Libya. Prior to the escalation of conflict in May 2014, some Libyans had questioned the interim government's decision to seek foreign support for security reform and transition guidance, while some U.S. observers had questioned Libya's need for U.S. foreign assistance given its oil resources and relative wealth. During recent fighting, some Libyans have vigorously rejected others' calls for international support and assistance and traded accusations of disloyalty and treason in response to reports of partnership with foreign forces. These dynamics raise questions about the potential viability of the partnership approach favored by the Obama Administration and some in Congress, which seeks to build Libyan capacity, coordinate international action, and leverage Libyan financial resources to meet shared objectives.

In some cases where the United States government has desired Libyan government action on priority issues, especially in the counterterrorism sector, U.S. officials have weighed choices over whether U.S. assistance can build sufficient Libyan capacity quickly and cheaply enough, whether interim leaders are appropriate or reliable partners for the United States, and whether threats to U.S. interests require direct U.S. action. Ongoing conflict and political intrigue may amplify these questions and complicate U.S. partnership with Libyans further, as some Libyans contest the legitimacy of institutions and leaders with whom the U.S. government has sought to cooperate.

Administration officials have referred to the withdrawal of U.S. Embassy personnel from Libya as temporary. The implications of armed groups' reported infiltration of an evacuated U.S. facility in Tripoli for any future return of diplomatic personnel remain to be seen.

Congress may choose to conduct oversight of ongoing U.S. diplomatic efforts or set terms for the potential resumption of U.S. diplomatic operations in Libya. U.S. security and transition assistance programming also may merit reevaluation in light of recent developments.

## **U.S. Foreign Assistance and Requests**

U.S. engagement in Libya since the anti-Qadhafi conflict ended has shifted from humanitarian assistance to focus on transition assistance and security sector support. Over \$25 million in USAID-administered programs funded through the Office of Transition Initiatives, regional accounts, and reprogrammed funds were identified between 2011 and 2013 to support the activities of Libyan civil society groups and provide technical assistance to Libya's nascent electoral administration bodies. The security-related withdrawal of some U.S. personnel from Libya in the wake of the Benghazi attacks temporarily affected the implementation and oversight of U.S.-funded transition assistance programs. As noted above, Administration officials are reviewing U.S. security assistance programs in light of recent events, and it remains to be seen what impact the withdrawal of U.S. personnel from Libya may have on the implementation of specific U.S. assistance programs going forward.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ambassador Deborah Jones, Remarks at Stimson Center, Washington, DC, May 21, 2014.

The FY2014 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 113-76, Division K, Sections 7015(f) and 7041(f)) conditions the provision of U.S. foreign assistance to the central government of Libya on a State Department certification that the government is cooperating with U.S. government efforts to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for the September 2012 Benghazi attacks. The act and accompanying explanatory report further require detailed notification to the appropriations committees of planned obligations of funds for Libya programs, to include vetting procedures for recipients. The act also prohibits the provision of U.S. assistance to Libya for infrastructure projects “except on a loan basis with terms favorable to the United States.”

Administration officials have remained committed to providing transition support to Libyan government entities and civil society groups and requested new funding earlier this year to continue programming in FY2015 (see **Table 1**). The FY2015 State Department foreign assistance budget request identifies similar strategic goals as the FY2014 request: “1) supporting Libyan government efforts to develop a basic security capability to reduce threats and sustain a successful democratic transition, and 2) maintaining progress on Libya’s transition to a permanent, inclusive democracy accountable to the Libyan people.”<sup>12</sup>

Of the funds requested for FY2015, \$9.5 million in Economic Support Fund (ESF) monies would support U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) programs “to help consolidate-democratic reforms” through technical assistance, training, capacity building, and electoral process support, including \$3 million requested in part to fund the development of a “public financial management framework.” The Administration also requested an additional \$20 million in global FY2015 Transition Initiatives funding over FY2014 levels and hopes to use \$10 million of its Complex Crises Fund request “to address emerging needs and opportunities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.” Funds appropriated in these accounts may be programmed for operations in Libya.

The FY2015 Foreign Operations Appropriations bill under consideration in the House (Section 7041(f) of H.R. 5013) would extend the existing “Benghazi cooperation” certification requirement and existing spending and vetting plan requirements. The Senate version of the bill (Section 7041(f) of S. 2499) would similarly extend these requirements and authorize the use of an unspecified amount of FY2015 and prior year funds from the Complex Crises Fund, Economic Support Fund, International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (INCLE), Nonproliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR), and International Military Education and Training (IMET) accounts for purposes including security sector reform efforts. The Senate bill would require cost-matching by Libya “to the maximum extent practicable.”

To date, the United States has initiated security assistance efforts to provide training to security sector leaders and to improve Special Forces units and border security, although the implementation of related programs has been delayed by developments in Libya. On January 22, 2014, the Administration notified Congress of its intent to establish a Libyan-government funded military training program in Bulgaria to create a General Purpose Force (GPF) of 6,000-8,000 Libyan personnel. Congressional committees of jurisdiction reviewed and approved the proposed \$600 million Foreign Military Sale for the training program.

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<sup>12</sup> In FY2014, the State Department’s budget justification also identified “enhancing the Libyan government’s capacity to bring to justice those responsible for the Benghazi attacks” as a primary U.S. goal.

**Table I. U.S. Assistance to Libya FY2010-FY2015**  
(thousands of dollars, by account/program and fiscal year of appropriation unless noted)

Account/Program	FY2010	FY2011	FY2012	FY2013	FY2014 Estimate	FY2015 Request
<b>Complex Crises Fund (CCF-OCO)</b>				15,000	-	-
<b>Foreign Military Financing (FMF)</b>	150	-	150	949	-	-
<b>International Military Education and Training (IMET)</b>	319	-	296	142	1,500	1,500
<b>USAID Transition Initiatives (TI/TI-OCO)</b>	-	4,000	1,500	4,825	-	-
<b>Department of Defense (DoD) Nonlethal Support</b>	25,000	-	-	-	-	-
<b>DoD Counterterrorism Fellowship Program</b>	-	-	-	30	-	-
<b>Section 1206 Train and Equip</b>				8,420		
<b>Global Security Contingency Fund</b>	-	-	22,650	-	-	-
<b>International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement</b>	-	-	-	-	1,500	1,000
<b>Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI)</b>	3,530	3,145	NA	NA	TBD	TBD
<b>Middle East Response Fund (MERF)</b>	-	25,615	-	-	-	-
<b>Democracy Fund</b>	-	600	-	-	-	-
<b>Development Assistance</b>	-	470	-	-	-	-
<b>Economic Support Fund (ESF)</b>	-	-	-	-	-	-
ESF-Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO)	-	-	3,000	5,000	-	-
ESF-USAID Middle East Regional Programs	-	175	-	2,850	TBD	9,500
<b>Nonproliferation, Antiterrorism, Demining and Related Programs (NADR)</b>			2,100	1,437	2,940	3,500
Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Export Control and Related Border Security Assistance (EXBS)	-	500	-	-	-	-
Counterterrorism Engagement (CTE)	95	-	-	-	-	-
Conventional Weapons Reduction (CWD)	-	5,750	-	-	-	-
Global Threat Reduction (CTR)	500	-	-	-	-	-
Nonproliferation Disarmament Fund (NDF)	-	34,300 <sup>a</sup>	-	-	-	-
Regional Strategic Initiative (RSI)	-	9	-	-	-	-
<b>Humanitarian Funding</b>						
Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance (ERMA)	-	25,000	-	-	-	-
International Disaster Assistance (OFDA)	-	13,300	-	-	-	-
International Disaster Assistance (FFP)	-	15,700	-	-	-	-
Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA)	-	35,000	8,800	-	-	-
<b>Estimated Total (subject to change)</b>	<b>29,594</b>	<b>163,564</b>	<b>38,496</b>	<b>38,653</b>	<b>5,940</b>	<b>15,500</b>

**Sources:** U.S. Department of State communication to CRS, June 2012; State Department congressional budget justification and notification documents. Amounts subject to change. Estimated totals may not reflect all funds.

**Note:** NA = Not Available, TBD = To Be Determined

a. NDF funds reprogrammed from multiple fiscal years—FY2003, FY2004, FY2009, and FY2010.

In June 2014, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Derek Chollet testified before Congress that “Libya’s political turmoil and a deteriorating security situation” prevent the U.S. government from being able “to have the necessary U.S. personnel on the ground in Tripoli” to execute the GPF program. According to Chollet, “Other factors include a lack of vetted training candidates, a lack of pledged Libyan funding, and weak security institutions.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Investigations into 2012 Attacks on U.S. Facilities and Personnel in Benghazi**

U.S. Ambassador to Libya Christopher Stevens and three other U.S. personnel were killed on September 11, 2012, during an assault by armed terrorists on two U.S. facilities in Benghazi, Libya’s second-largest city. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) remains the lead U.S. agency tasked with pursuing the individuals responsible for the attacks. Other government agencies, including the State Department, the Department of Defense (DOD), and elements of the intelligence community (IC), support the FBI’s efforts to bring the attackers to justice.

On September 28, 2012, the U.S. intelligence community concluded publicly that the incident was a “deliberate and organized terrorist attack carried out by extremists,” and said that at the time it remained “unclear if any group or person exercised overall command and control of the attack and if extremist group leaders directed their members to participate. However, we do assess that some of those involved were linked to groups affiliated with, or sympathetic to Al Qaeda.”<sup>14</sup> In January 2014, a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence report on the attacks stated that, “Individuals affiliated with terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar al Sharia, Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula [AQAP], and the Mohammad Jamal Network, participated in the September 11, 2012, attacks.”<sup>15</sup> In June 2014, U.S. forces apprehended Ahmed Abu Khattala, a Libyan suspect in the attack, in a military operation in Libya. Abu Khattala has been transferred to the United States and is awaiting trial. The U.S. government has offered up to \$10 million through the State Department’s Rewards for Justice program for information that helps to apprehend and prosecute those responsible for the attack.

Prior to Abu Khattala’s capture, U.S. military officials referred to continuing intelligence gaps in Libya in unclassified testimony before Congress, with U.S. AFRICOM Commander General David Rodriguez saying on April 8, 2014, that continuing U.S. efforts against the network responsible for the Benghazi attacks are “made more difficult, obviously, by the security situation.”<sup>16</sup> Rodriguez added that U.S. investigators “don’t have everybody identified and located,” and said that the feasibility of operations to apprehend or otherwise target suspects in Libya “depends ... on the situation and the risk that people want to take.” Security conditions in the country have deteriorated further since that time, and U.S. Embassy personnel have departed, with unknown implications for support of similar operations.

Administration officials have repeatedly described Libya as a high risk operational environment, even with regard to routine diplomatic operations in Tripoli, which were suspended in July 2014. Operational risks presumably are higher in areas of Libya that are controlled by anti-U.S. forces. In conjunction with the relocation of U.S. diplomatic personnel from Libya on July 26, 2014, the U.S. State Department issued a travel warning for Libya that “warns U.S. citizens against all travel to Libya and recommends that U.S. citizens currently in Libya depart immediately.”

Across Libya, attacks on foreign diplomatic facilities and personnel and on foreign nationals have continued, and reports suggest the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli and related facilities have been damaged by recent fighting. Since April 2013, other reported attacks have targeted the French and Russian embassies in Tripoli; the Turkish Consul in Benghazi; the Finnish and Swedish consulates in Benghazi; a U.S. national teaching in Benghazi; a Turkish national in Tripoli; oil workers from the United Kingdom and New Zealand; Egyptian Christians in Benghazi; Tunisian Embassy employees and a Libyan employee of the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli; and the Jordanian ambassador to Libya, Fawaz al Etan, who was kidnapped and subsequently released, among others.

<sup>13</sup> Assistant Secretary Chollet, Testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa, June 25, 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Statement, Director of Public Affairs for the Director of National Intelligence Shawn Turner, September 28, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, *Review of the Terrorist Attacks on U.S. Facilities in Benghazi, Libya, September 11-12, 2012*, January 15, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Deputy Assistant Secretary Amanda Dory and General David Rodriguez, Press Briefing, April 8, 2014.

## Select Security Issues

The U.S. intelligence community's January 2014 unclassified Worldwide Threat Assessment described the terrorist threat to Western and Libyan government interests in Libya as "acute, especially in the east of the country." Administration officials repeated these views in subsequent congressional testimony and statements. U.S. AFRICOM Commander General David Rodriguez has described Libyan institutions as "very, very weak"<sup>17</sup> and warned that Al Qaeda adherents and affiliates are gaining strength as "arms, ammunition, explosives from Libya ... continue to move throughout the region in northwest Africa."<sup>18</sup> U.S. and French officials also have issued public warnings about the reported presence and activities in southwestern Libya of terrorists and arms traffickers, including members of Al Qaeda affiliates. When asked in March 2014 to compare threats to U.S. security from Libya and Syria, Defense Department Assistant Secretary Michael Lumpkin said, "my sense is that Libya isn't where Syria is today, but again—left unchecked, left without the proper engagement in building the partnership capacity with the nascent Libyan forces—that we could end up in a situation where it's not too dissimilar if no attention is paid to it."<sup>19</sup> U.N. officials and reports confirm these trends, and UNSMIL reported on August 27 that,

The threat from the spread of terrorist groups has become real. Their presence and activities in a number of Libyan cities are known to all. At present, the chaotic security situation and the very limited capacity of the government to counter this threat may well have created a fertile ground for a mounting danger in Libya and beyond.<sup>20</sup>

## Ansar al Sharia and Other Libya-based Extremist Groups

On January 10, 2014, the U.S. State Department announced the designation of Ansar al Sharia in Benghazi and Ansar al Sharia in Darnah as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and as Specially Designated Global Terrorist entities under Executive Order 13224. According to the State Department, the groups:

have been involved in terrorist attacks against civilian targets, frequent assassinations, and attempted assassinations of security officials and political actors in eastern Libya, and the September 11, 2012 attacks against the U.S. Special Mission and Annex in Benghazi, Libya. Members of both organizations continue to pose a threat to U.S. interests in Libya.<sup>21</sup>

Ansar al Sharia has vigorously condemned the military operations against it by Haftar-aligned forces as a "war against the religion and Islam backed by the West and their Arab allies." In a statement issued on May 19, the group called on pro-sharia tribal figures to support the group against Haftar and said "the war declared is against the application of the sharia and the establishment of the religion. This war is led by the infidels, the Jews and the Christians, as well

<sup>17</sup> Press Briefing by Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Amanda Dory and Gen. Rodriguez, Washington, DC, April 8, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> Testimony of General David Rodriguez, Commander, U.S. Africa Command [AFRICOM], before the Senate Armed Services Committee, March 6, 2014.

<sup>19</sup> Testimony of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low- Intensity Conflict [SOLIC] Michael Lumpkin before the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Emerging Threats and Capabilities, March 11, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Report of U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), February 2014.

<sup>21</sup> State Department, Terrorist Designations of Three Ansar al-Shari'a Organizations and Leaders, January 10, 2014.

as the seculars and traitors who support them.”<sup>22</sup> In a follow-on statement on May 27, an Ansar al Sharia leader warned the United States against intervention in Libya and condemned Haftar, saying: “They said that their war was against terrorism and extremism, as they claim, but the reality is that their aim is to take over power.... We remind America that if it tries to intervene, we remind it of its despicable defeats in Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia, and that it will see worse from Libya than what it has seen [so far].”<sup>23</sup>

Libyan media and Ansar al Sharia social media accounts suggest that the organization’s current operations extend to Benghazi, Sirte, and areas of eastern Libya and include military training, security patrols, outreach and education efforts, and public works projects. The group also has publicized its efforts to deliver relief supplies to civilians in northern Syria and other countries. The U.S. government has not released a detailed unclassified assessment of the size and capabilities of Ansar al Sharia in Libya. Publicly available information suggests the group’s membership may be in the high hundreds or low thousands of individuals, some of whom possess truck-mounted anti-aircraft guns, rocket-propelled grenades, military-style uniforms, and assault rifles. Some images suggest the group possesses man-portable air defense missiles (MANPADs).

In its recent counterattacks on pro-Operation Dignity forces, Ansar al Sharia has displayed improved military capabilities, and reports suggest it has succeeded in capturing new military equipment. In allying itself with and fighting alongside members of other Islamist and anti-Haftar militias in eastern Libya, the group may be expanding its potential base of political support. Members of Libya’s Shield Forces, a militia formerly affiliated with the Ministry of Defense, reportedly are fighting alongside Ansar al Sharia under the rubric of the Benghazi Revolutionaries’ Shura Council. Nevertheless, Ansar al Sharia’s hard-line rhetoric and rejection of alternatives to Islamic law also may create new enemies for the group.

Other Islamist militia forces and services organizations based in the eastern city of Darnah also pose a challenge to Libyan authorities, including the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade and the Islamic Youth Shura Council of Darnah. The latter group conducted a large display of military weaponry in a convoy near the city in early April 2014, and the former group, named for the victims of a Qadhafi-era prison massacre of predominantly Islamist detainees, has questioned the authority of transitional officials. Constitutional Assembly and Council of Representatives elections were disrupted in Darnah in February and June 2014, respectively, in light of Islamist militia threats. The Youth Shura Council has posted images of its checkpoints and seizures of alcohol and contraband goods, and the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade routinely posts images of its social services activities. Ansar al Sharia members conducted and publicized similar operations when that group was establishing itself in Benghazi in 2012.

In southwestern Libya, Islamist extremist operatives reportedly are active, and may be using remote areas to serve as safe havens or transit areas for operations in neighboring Niger and Algeria. Some press reports suggest that Mokhtar Belmokhtar, the leader of the group responsible for the January 2013 attack on the natural gas facility at In Amenas, Algeria, in which three Americans were killed, may be in southwestern Libya. U.S. officials have not publicly confirmed those reports but describe Belmokhtar’s group—Al Murabitoun—as active in the area and as “the

<sup>22</sup> OSC Report TRN2014052021537855, “Libya: Ansar al-Sharia Vows To Defend Benghazi Against Attacks, Calls On Tribes To Cooperate,” May 19, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> OSC Report IML2014052831841695, “Libyan Ansar Al Shari’ah Praise Their ‘Victory’” Libya TV (Doha), May 27, 2014.

greatest near-term threat to U.S. and international interests in the Sahel, because of its publicly stated intent to attack Westerners and proven ability to organize complex attacks.”<sup>24</sup>

## Outlook

The 2012 attacks in Benghazi, the deaths of U.S. personnel, the emergence of terrorist threats on Libyan soil, and the internecine conflict between Libyan militias have reshaped debates in Washington about U.S. policy toward Libya. Following intense congressional debate over the merits of U.S. and NATO military intervention in Libya in 2011, many Members of Congress welcomed the announcement of Libya’s liberation, the formation of the interim Transitional National Council government, and the July 2012 national General National Congress election, while expressing concern about security in the country, the proliferation of weapons, and the prospects for a smooth political transition.

To date, the Obama Administration and Congress have agreed to support a range of security and transition support assistance programs in Libya, some of which respond to specific U.S. security concerns about unsecured weapons, terrorist safe-havens, and border security. Identifying and bringing those involved in the September 2012 Benghazi attacks to justice has become a priority issue in the bilateral relationship, as has confronting any Al Qaeda affiliated groups present in Libya. Securing stockpiles of Libyan weapons also remains an issue of broad congressional concern, as does ensuring that transitional authorities act in accordance with international human rights standards in pursuing justice and handling detainees.

U.S. officials must weigh demands for a response to immediate security threats emanating from Libya with longer-term concerns for Libya’s stability, the survival of its nascent democratic institutions, and the future of U.S.-Libyan relations. Decisions about responding to threats to U.S. security are complicated by the relative weakness of the Libyan state security apparatus and the risk of inflaming public opinion or undermining the image of elected Libyan leaders through direct or overt U.S. security responses. If conflict persists, congressional debate over transition and security assistance programs in Libya may intensify, with advocates possibly arguing for further investment to prevent a broader collapse and critics possibly arguing that a lack of political consensus among Libyans makes U.S. assistance unlikely to achieve intended objectives.

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<sup>24</sup> State Department Bureau of Counterterrorism, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2013*, Chapter 6, April 2014.

## **Appendix. Libyan History, Civil War, and Political Change**

The North African territory that now composes Libya has a long history as a center of Phoenician, Carthaginian, Greek, Roman, Berber, and Arab civilizations. Modern Libya is a union of three historically distinct regions—northwestern Tripolitania, northeastern Cyrenaica or Barqa, and the more remote southwestern desert region of Fezzan. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ottoman Empire struggled to assert control over Libya’s coastal cities and interior. Italy invaded Libya in 1911 on the pretext of liberating the region from Ottoman control. The Italians subsequently became mired in decades of colonial abuses against the Libyan people and faced a persistent anti-colonial insurgency. Libya was an important battleground in the North Africa campaign of the Second World War and emerged from the fighting as a ward of the Allied powers and the United Nations.

On December 24, 1951, the United Kingdom of Libya became one of Africa’s first independent states. With U.N. supervision and assistance, a Libyan National Constituent Assembly drafted and agreed to a constitution establishing a federal system of government with central authority vested in King Idris Al Sanussi. Legislative authority was vested in a Prime Minister, a Council of Ministers, and a bicameral legislature. The first parliamentary election was held in February 1952, one month after independence. The king banned political parties shortly after independence, and Libya’s first decade was characterized by continuous infighting over taxation, development, and constitutional powers.

In 1963, King Idris replaced the federal system of government with a unitary monarchy that further centralized royal authority, in part to streamline the development of the country’s newly discovered oil resources. Prior to the discovery of marketable oil in 1959, the Libyan government was largely dependent on economic aid and technical assistance it received from international institutions and through military basing agreements with the United States and United Kingdom. The U.S.-operated air base at Wheelus field outside of Tripoli served as an important Strategic Air Command base and center for military intelligence operations throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Oil wealth brought rapid economic growth and greater financial independence to Libya in the 1960s, but the weakness of national institutions and Libyan elites’ growing identification with the pan-Arab socialist ideology of Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser contributed to the gradual marginalization of the monarchy. Popular criticism of U.S. and British basing agreements grew, becoming amplified in the wake of Israel’s defeat of Arab forces in the 1967 Six Day War. King Idris left the country in mid-1969 for medical reasons, setting the stage for a military coup in September, led by a young, devoted Nasserite army captain named Muammar al Qadhafi.

The United States did not actively oppose the coup, as Qadhafi and his co-conspirators initially presented an anti-Soviet and reformist platform. Qadhafi focused intensely on securing the immediate and full withdrawal of British and U.S. forces from military bases in Libya, which was complete by mid-1970. The new government also pressured U.S. and other foreign oil companies to renegotiate oil production contracts, and some British and U.S. oil operations eventually were nationalized. In the early 1970s, Qadhafi and his allies gradually reversed their stance on their initially icy relationship with the Soviet Union and extended Libyan support to revolutionary, anti-Western, and anti-Israeli movements across Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. These policies contributed to a rapid souring of U.S.-Libyan political relations that persisted for decades and was marked by multiple military confrontations, state-sponsored acts of Libyan terrorism

against U.S. nationals, covert U.S. support for Libyan opposition groups, Qadhafi's pursuit of weapons of mass destruction, and U.S. and international sanctions.

Qadhafi's policy reversals on WMD and terrorism led to the lifting of international sanctions in 2003 and 2004, followed by economic liberalization, oil sales, and foreign investment that brought new wealth to some Libyans. After U.S. sanctions were lifted, the U.S. business community gradually reengaged amid continuing U.S.-Libyan tension over terrorism concerns that were finally resolved in 2008. During this period of international reengagement, political change in Libya remained elusive. Government reconciliation with imprisoned Islamist militants and the return of some exiled opposition figures were welcomed by some observers as signs that suppression of political opposition had softened. The Qadhafi government released dozens of former members of the Al Qaeda-affiliated Libyan Islamist Fighting Group (LIFG) and the Muslim Brotherhood from prison in the years prior to the revolution as part of its political reconciliation program. The Bush Administration praised Qadhafi's cooperation with U.S. counterterrorism efforts against Al Qaeda and the LIFG.

Qadhafi's international rehabilitation coincided with new steps by some pragmatic government officials to maneuver within so-called "red lines" and propose minor reforms. However, the shifting course of those red lines increasingly entangled would-be reformers in the run-up to the outbreak of unrest in February 2011. Ultimately, inaction on the part of the government in response to calls for guarantees of basic political rights and for the drafting of a constitution suggested a lack of consensus, if not outright opposition to meaningful change among hardliners. This inaction set the political stage for the revolution that overturned Qadhafi's four decades of rule and led to his grisly demise in October 2011.

Political change in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt helped bring long-simmering Libyan reform debates to the boiling point in January and early February 2011. The 2011 revolution was triggered in mid-February by a chain of events in Benghazi and other eastern cities that quickly spiraled out of Qadhafi's control. The government's loss of control in these cities became apparent, and broader unrest emerged in other regions. A number of military officers, their units, and civilian officials abandoned Qadhafi. Qadhafi and his supporters denounced their opponents as drug-fueled traitors, foreign agents, and Al Qaeda supporters. Until August 2011, Qadhafi and his forces maintained control over the capital, Tripoli, and other western cities. The cumulative effects of attrition by NATO airstrikes against military targets and a coordinated offensive by rebels in Tripoli and from across western Libya then turned the tide, sending Qadhafi and his supporters into retreat and exile. September and early October 2011 were marked by sporadic and often intense fighting in and around Qadhafi's birthplace, Sirte, and the town of Bani Walid and neighboring military districts. NATO air operations continued as rebel fighters engaged in battles of attrition with Qadhafi supporters.

Qadhafi's death at the hands of rebel fighters in Sirte on October 20, 2011, brought the revolt to an abrupt close, with some observers expressing concern that a dark chapter in Libyan history ended violently, leaving an uncertain path ahead. The self-appointed interim Transitional National Council (TNC) and its cabinet took initial steps toward improving security and reforming national institutions. Voters elected an interim General National Congress (GNC) in July 2012. The GNC assumed power on August 8, 2012, and voted to replace itself with a 200-member Council of Representatives (COR). The GNC's tenure grew increasingly controversial, and more than half of its membership had resigned or was no longer active by mid-2014. The COR election was held in June 2014 and the COR convened in August. A Constitutional Drafting Assembly was partially elected in February 2014 and in April began developing a draft constitution.

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