

Forum: Security Council (SC)

Issue: Addressing the Libyan Civil War

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Introduction

The First Libyan Civil War began in 2011, throwing Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's supporters into battle against rebel groups determined to bring him down. The civil war started in Benghazi on February 15, 2011, when protests began among those unsatisfied with his actions during his long reign. The protests soon spread throughout the nation, driven by years of political oppression and widespread economic frustration. Not long after, the rebels formed the National Transitional Council (NTC) to steer their campaign against Gaddafi.

Gaddafi had gripped Libya for over 42 years after his bloodless coup ousted King Idris I in 1969. He set up an authoritarian one-man system, mixing socialist ideas with theories from his Green Book. Although Libya enjoyed economic growth thanks to its abundant oil reserves, most of that wealth stayed in the hands of his inner circle. Dissent was stifled, political freedoms were slashed, and a tight security network helped him stay on top. Corruption, inequality, and harsh human rights abuses made people restless, and that tension erupted into open rebellion.

Yet stability remained out of reach. Many militias refused to lay down their weapons, tribal rifts got worse, and the NTC's internal disputes added to the political chaos. That shaky climate paved the way for lingering unrest and, eventually, another civil war.

Definition of Key Terms

1. **Civil War:** A violent conflict between different groups within the same country, often over political control, resources, or ideological differences.
2. **Authoritarian Regime:** A system of government where power is concentrated in the hands of a single leader or small group, with limited political freedoms for the population.

3. **Colonel Muammar Gaddafi:** The leader of Libya from 1969 to 2011. He ruled as a dictator under an authoritarian regime, known for suppressing dissent and controlling Libya's oil wealth.
4. **Rebellion:** An organized resistance or uprising against the government, often driven by demands for political change, justice, or economic reforms.
5. **National Transitional Council (NTC):** A temporary governing body formed by rebels during the Libyan Civil War to represent anti-Gaddafi forces and coordinate efforts to establish a new government.
6. **No-Fly Zone:** A designated area where military aircraft are not allowed to fly, enforced to prevent attacks on civilians and rebel forces.
7. **NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization):** An international military alliance that intervened in Libya during the civil war to enforce the no-fly zone and support rebel forces through airstrikes.
8. **Militias:** Armed groups that are not part of the regular military and often operate independently or under local leadership. Militias played a significant role in the Libyan conflict.
9. **Proxy Conflict:** A conflict in which external countries or powers support local factions with resources, weapons, or troops to pursue their own interests without direct involvement.

Background Information



Gaddafi during a speech in Parliament

The Libyan Civil War emerged in 2011 as part of the wider Arab Spring, a series of uprisings across the Middle East and North Africa that sought to challenge decades-long

authoritarian regimes. As mentioned earlier in the Introduction, Libya's conflict began on February 15, 2011, in Benghazi, where protests broke out. The protests were a direct result of the arrest of human rights lawyer Fathi Terbil, who represented families of prisoners killed in the 1996 Abu Salim prison massacre. This was the final straw for the millions of citizens of the country, who are fueled by deep-seated grievances against Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's 42-year rule, which was marked by political repression, corruption, and economic disparity. The ICC later found that Gaddafi had not only used Rape as a method of controlling people in his inner circle but also experimented on a population of 5 million citizens with his social theories. This included banning all private enterprises, murdering dissidents based abroad and banning books. Freedom of speech and association were absolutely squashed and acts of violent repression were numerous.

Gaddafi's Rule and System of Governance

Muammar Gaddafi came to power in 1969 after leading the Free Officers Movement in a coup that ousted King Idris I.

Gaddafi abolished the Libyan Constitution of 1951, branding it as a neocolonial relic, and implemented his unique political system based on the ideology outlined in *The Green Book*. This system, known as the Jamahiriya ("state of the masses"), promoted a form of direct democracy through people's committees and congresses. Although Libya was theoretically run by such committees and congresses, Gaddafi continued to maintain tight control over all aspects of Governance. His power was strengthened through a network that he created consisting of tribal alliances, loyal militias, and family members, all strategically placed in key military and government positions.

Gaddafi's approach to governance was also marked by his manipulation of rivals and allies. To prevent a potential coup, he deliberately weakened the regular military, putting in more resources into elite security units like the Khamis Brigade (led by his son) and local militias that remained loyal to him. The military's most powerful divisions were composed of members from Gaddafi's own tribe or trusted allies. Meanwhile, the general army was poorly equipped, poorly trained, and often marginalised.

Under Gaddafi, Libya experienced significant economic growth during the 1970s and 1980s due to its vast oil reserves. Libya became one of the wealthiest nations in Africa, with GDP per capita surpassing that of many developed countries.

In 2017, Libya had a GDP per Capita of \$2410, in contrast to other African Nations such as Kenya which had a GDP per Capita of \$140. Additionally, Gaddafi established welfare programs providing free education, healthcare, and housing assistance, and life expectancy rose from 51 years in 1969 to 74 years by 2010.

So why were citizens still unhappy? Because these numbers don't paint the full picture. Wealth distribution was highly uneven. Eastern Libya, in particular, suffered from systemic neglect, underdevelopment, and infrastructure decay, creating deep resentment among its population. According to the World Inequality Database, in the year 2000, the Bottom 50% of the Population controlled just over 4% of total wealth in the nation yet the top 1% of the Population had access to over 25%.

Additionally, Libya ranked 146th out of 178 countries in the corruption perception index measured in 2010. An estimated 13% of Libyans were unemployed, and many families lacked stable incomes. In contrast, members of Gaddafi's family and loyal elites enjoyed lavish lifestyles, which further fueled public anger.

Uprising and Escalation

In February 2011, Fathi Terbil was arrested, an event that fueled large-scale protests in Benghazi. As the citizens witnessed the success of uprising movements in Tunisia and Egypt, they finally summoned up the courage to rebel against the regime of Gaddafi. In the past, uprisings against him did take place but they were quickly unsuccessful due to the fear he instilled through society as mentioned earlier. Thus, this is one of the first large-scale uprisings. Demonstrators called for an end to Muammar Gaddafi's regime, more political freedoms, and a fair distribution of the country's oil income. Although the demonstrations were originally peaceful, they were met with tear gas, live ammunition, and heavy weapons from security forces against civilians, which further enraged citizens to respond with similar violence, thus escalating protests into an armed rebellion.

The rebellion gained momentum in eastern Libya, where inequality was most prominent, with Benghazi emerging as its epicentre. Rebel forces seized military installations, weapons, and ammunition, allowing them to challenge Gaddafi's forces. On February 27, 2011, the rebels established the National Transitional Council (NTC) in Benghazi as the interim governing body representing anti-Gaddafi factions. The NTC called for international support, while Gaddafi denounced the rebels as terrorists and foreign agents.

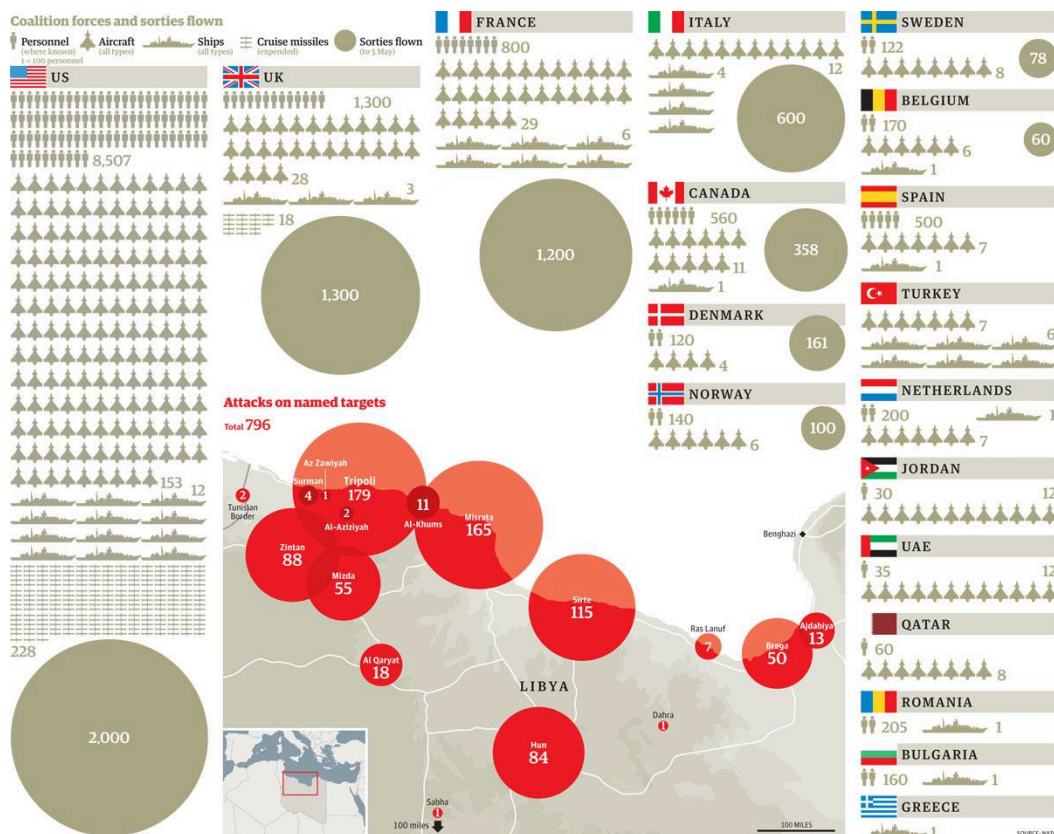
International Response

The majority of the international community, led by the West, swiftly condemned Gaddafi's brutal crackdown on protesters. On February 26, 2011, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 1970, which froze Gaddafi's assets, imposed a travel ban on his inner circle, and referred Libya to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for investigation into crimes against humanity. As Gaddafi's forces advanced toward rebel

strongholds in eastern Libya, fears of an impending massacre in Benghazi prompted further international action.

On March 17, 2011, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1973, authorizing a no-fly zone over Libya and the use of "all necessary measures" to protect civilians. NATO launched Operation Unified Protector, a bombing campaign targeting Gaddafi's military installations, air defences, and supply lines.

Collapse of Gaddafi's Regime



With NATO air support, rebel forces launched a series of successful offensives during the summer of 2011. Key cities, including Misrata, Zawiya, and Tripoli, fell to rebel control. On August 20, 2011, rebel forces entered Tripoli, effectively ending Gaddafi's hold over the capital. Gaddafi fled to his hometown of Sirte, where loyalist forces mounted a final stand. On October 20, 2011, Gaddafi was captured and killed by rebel fighters in Sirte. Three days later, the NTC declared Libya "liberated," marking the official end of the conflict.

Post-Gaddafi Fragmentation

After the fall of Gaddafi, Libya never came to stability. The National Transitional Council did not have centralized authority or resources to effectively unify the country. A

number of armed militias, tribal factions, and Islamist groups competed for power and influence.

The Rise of the Militias

The lack of a national army's presence allowed the emergence of armed groups and militias to fill in the power vacuum. Originally they were formed to fight against Gaddafi's forces; but they soon began fighting each other and the interim government. By 2012, there were over 200 armed groups in Libya, most of which refused to disarm or integrate into state security forces. This resulted in street violence and an insecure environment for the citizens. The most significant militias included the February 17 Martyrs Brigade, the Libya Shield Force, and a host of tribal groups based in Misrata and Zintan. Islamist militias, such as Ansar al-Sharia, also became powerful, particularly in eastern Libya.

Political Divide and Renewed Conflict

The first post-Gaddafi elections in Libya were held in 2012 and gave birth to the General National Congress, which was tasked with the drafting of a new constitution. Its work was paralyzed by political infighting, corruption, and militia influence. By 2014, Libya had plunged into a second civil war, with the country divided between two rival administrations: the internationally recognized United Nations-backed Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli, and the Libyan National Army - or LNA - led by General Khalifa Haftar which was in control of eastern Libya operating out of Benghazi.

While the GNA is officially recognised by the UN as Libya's legitimate government, it holds little power on the ground, and some distrust its Islamist politics. Haftar's supporters say he is a bulwark against extremism, while others see him as another would-be military dictator. The GNA, supported by Turkey and Qatar, has hardly asserted its influence beyond Tripoli; on its part, the LNA is led by Haftar and is under military support from Egypt, the UAE, and Russia. Since then, involvement by foreign powers has made Libya a battleground for proxies, using its soil as the playground for their interests.

Current Situation

Humanitarian Crisis

The ongoing conflict has caused a severe humanitarian crisis. Over 1 million people require humanitarian assistance, and 200,000 Libyans remain internally displaced. Libya has also become a major hub for human trafficking and migrant smuggling, with thousands of refugees risking perilous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea. Reports of human rights

abuses, including torture, arbitrary detention, and attacks on civilians, have further worsened the situation.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates there are about 636,000 migrants and refugees in the country, mostly from sub-Saharan Africa. Some are held in government-run detention centres and unofficial prisons run by armed groups, where conditions are horrific: detainees report unhygienic and overcrowded conditions without adequate food and water. Human rights watchdogs also say forced labour and abuse are rife.

Current International Efforts

Over the last few years foreign powers have increasingly intervened in Libya's civil war to defend their own strategic and economic interests. The GNA is backed by the UN and western countries, but its main allies are Turkey, Qatar and Italy. The LNA enjoys the support of Russia, Egypt, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and, to a lesser extent, France and Jordan.

The foreign parties have flooded Libya with weapons and drones, ignoring a UN arms embargo. Russia has sent mercenaries and Sudanese men have been recruited to fight alongside the LNA; in January 2020 the Guardian reported that Turkey sent Syrian recruits along with its own soldiers, to defend the Tripoli government.

In early 2021, a leaked confidential report by the United Nations revealed that the former CEO of Blackwater, Erik Prince breached the Libyan arms embargo by supporting and supplying weapons to Khalifa Haftar under an operation that cost \$80 million. In 2019, Prince deployed foreign mercenaries to eastern Libya - associated with the LNA, who were armed with gunboats, attack aircraft, and cyberwarfare capabilities. While it isn't confirmed that the UAE was behind this attack, international specialists suspect that they were due to the fact that the mercenaries had offices, shell companies, and bank accounts in the Gulf nation.

The Berlin Conference in 2020 sought to halt foreign intervention and establish a roadmap for elections but it did not lead to any lasting truce. In October 2020, a nationwide ceasefire was brokered under UN auspices - partly due to the growing nature of the COVID-19 Virus, leading to the formation of a transitional government under the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2021. However, political divisions, ongoing militia activity, and external interference continued to interfere with peace efforts. At the moment, Libya remains deeply divided, with no clear path for the future.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

Government of National Accord

The internationally recognized legitimate Government of Libya, the GNA will be trying to retain Tripoli, with an apparent priority for the restart of oil production and exports. It appeals for international intervention in order to counterbalance the LNA. During the debate, GNA is going to seek consensus for the sanctions against foreign LNA supporters such as the UAE and Russia, in addition to working on the creation of frameworks on unified governance and reconciliation.

Libya National Party

LNA led by the general Khalifa Haftar is controlling extensive areas of Eastern and Southern Libya and will be trying to enlarge the areas of its control. It argues that it brings stability with military rule, as a result of the supposed incompetence from the GNA. Backed by countries like Egypt, the UAE, and Russia, the LNA seeks international recognition of its authority as a means of legitimizing actions such as the shutdown of oil production as pressure tactics against the GNA. To summarize, it aims to legitimize its control and present itself as a force of stability in post-conflict Libya.

UAE

The United Arab Emirates has been one of the primary backers of the LNA, providing military support through the use of armed drones against the GNA whom it considers a threat to regional stability. The UAE is interested in gaining influence in Libyan politics, since it is considered a strong ally for trade of energy. At the debate, the UAE will defend its involvement as necessary to counter extremism and will push back against any resolution that would sanction or restrict foreign intervention, while advocating for a role for the LNA in a future political settlement.

Russia

Another powerful LNA backer, Russia, aims to increase its influence in the Mediterranean through strategic partnerships with Libya. It is accused of seeking to guarantee the supremacy of the LNA, using mercenaries among other surreptitious methods, to maintain access to Libya's resources. Russia's goals on the debate will include opposition to any Western-initiated resolutions undermining its engagement; it will call for a ceasefire that will help the LNA and give primacy to its role as one of the mediators of Libya's peace process.

Turkey

Turkey's views contrast most of its Middle Eastern counterparts (UAE, Egypt and Russia). In its support for the GNA, Turkey also pursues its regional reach in the Mediterranean, especially with energy deals. Thus, Turkey will continue to pursue the GNA's legitimacy in the debate and resist any resolution that would give a veneer of legitimacy to the LNA. Turkey will also try to safeguard clauses that guarantee its own interests in the region from energy exploration.

United Nations

The United Nations and the international community are trying to push for peace, stability, and unity in Libya. The main topics they are concerned with involve the resumption of oil production, the reduction of foreign interference, and the humanitarian situation. During the debate, the UN will be pushing for a ceasefire agreement, steps toward curbing arms supplies, and support for humanitarian aid and reconstruction efforts. The UN's ultimate goal is to pave the way for national elections and a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Security Council Resolution 1970, 26 February 2011 (**S/RES/1970**).
 - Imposed an arms embargo, a travel ban, and asset freezes on Muammar Gaddafi, his family, and key government figures. It referred Libya to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for investigation into crimes against humanity. While the resolution had good intentions, the arms embargo was poorly enforced, with weapons continuing to flow into Libya. The ICC referral was an important move for accountability, but the ongoing conflict limited its immediate impact.
- Security Council Resolution 1973, 17 March 2011 (**S/RES/1973**)
 - Authorized a no-fly zone over Libya and the use of "all necessary measures" to protect civilians from Gaddafi's forces. This led to NATO's military intervention under Operation Unified Protector. The resolution successfully prevented Gaddafi's forces from overwhelming Benghazi and other rebel strongholds, protecting civilian lives in the short term. However, the NATO intervention was criticized for exceeding its mandate, contributing to regime change without a clear plan for Libya's post-conflict stabilization.

- Security Council Resolution 2009, 16 September 2011 (**S/RES/2009**)
 - Established the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) to assist in Libya's post-conflict transition. It also lifted parts of the arms embargo and allowed the National Transitional Council (NTC) to access frozen assets for humanitarian aid. The resolution provided initial support for Libya's transition, but UNSMIL faced significant challenges due to the fragmented political landscape and the rising power of militias. The lifting of the embargo contributed to further arms proliferation, exacerbating instability.
- Security Council Resolution 2016, 27 October 2011 (**S/RES/2016**)
 - Officially ended NATO's no-fly zone and military operations in Libya and recognized the country's liberation. It encouraged efforts to stabilize Libya. The absence of a coordinated international plan allowed militias to fill the power vacuum, hindering long-term peace efforts.
- Security Council Resolution 2259, 23 December 2015 (**S/RES/2259**)
 - Endorsed the formation of the Government of National Accord (GNA) as Libya's legitimate government. It called for a ceasefire and support for the GNA's authority. The resolution provided international legitimacy to the GNA but failed to unify Libya's rival factions. The GNA struggled to gain control beyond Tripoli, and General Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) rejected its authority, leading to further conflict and violence in the region.
- Security Council Resolution 2570, 16 April 2021 (**S/RES/2570**)
 - Supported Libya's transitional Government of National Unity (GNU) and preparations for national elections. It emphasized disarmament, reunification of institutions, and respect for human rights.

Possible Solutions

The Libyan civil war demands innovative solutions to restore peace and rebuild the nation. Below are key strategies aimed at addressing the conflict and ensuring stability.

Digital peace infrastructure through UN involvement would include blockchain-based tracking of oil revenues to ensure fair and equitable distribution among regions. A national digital ID system could merge databases, reduce corruption, and clarify voter rolls, with oversight from external organizations. Additionally, online dispute resolution platforms would provide swift and consistent handling of local property, business, and civil conflicts.

UN peacekeepers should be deployed with the goals of restoring the economy, reestablishing order, and distributing humanitarian aid. They would work to prevent further domestic conflicts, such as peaceful protests, violent demonstrations, and rebel activities, while safeguarding against unrest during the transition period.

A reintegrated security architecture could establish a centralized chain of command under a newly formed force to unify decision-making. Joint training academies supported by international partners would help raise professional standards and foster respect for human rights. Economic reintegration packages would offer ex-fighters viable civilian livelihoods to reduce the incentive to return to conflict.

Coordinated humanitarian corridors monitored by international NGOs would ensure the reliable delivery of food, medical supplies, and shelter to conflict-affected regions. Educational investments should focus on creating a unified national curriculum, improving teacher training, and upgrading infrastructure. Furthermore, a coalition of governmental and non-governmental organizations could sponsor scholarships and vocational programs to rebuild schools and open new opportunities for Libyan youth.

Bibliography

Useful Links

- UN Security Council Sanctions Committee (Resolution 1970)
Monitor and learn about the arms embargo, travel bans, and asset freezes related to the Libyan conflict.
<https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1970>
- United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)
Official website with press releases, reports, and peacebuilding updates.
<https://unsmil.unmissions.org/>
- Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – Libya
Details on displacement, refugee assistance, and protection concerns in Libya.
<https://www.unhcr.org/libya.html>
- World Food Programme (WFP) – Libya
Up-to-date info on food security assessments, relief operations, and

humanitarian needs.

<https://www.wfp.org/countries/libya>

- International Organization for Migration (IOM) – Libya
Focuses on migration flows, migrant protection, and capacity-building for border management.
<https://libya.iom.int/>
- ReliefWeb – Libya Crisis
Central hub for humanitarian updates, situation reports, and detailed crisis analyses.
<https://reliefweb.int/country/lby>
- Chatham House – Libya
Research, commentaries, and policy briefs on Libya’s politics and security challenges.
<https://www.chathamhouse.org/topics/libya>
- International Crisis Group – Libya
In-depth conflict analysis, policy recommendations, and frequent situation updates.
<https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/north-africa/libya>
- Human Rights Watch – Libya
Human rights investigations, reporting on violations by various factions, and advocacy materials.
<https://www.hrw.org/middle-east/n-africa/libya>
- Amnesty International – Libya
Focus on abuses against civilians, detention conditions, and policy recommendations.
<https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/middle-east-and-north-africa/libya/>

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