



Brandeis University

Crown Center  
for Middle East Studies

Mailstop 010  
Waltham, Massachusetts  
02454-9110

781-736-5320  
781-736-5324 Fax  
www.brandeis.edu/crown

# Middle East Brief

*Judith and Sidney Swartz Director  
and Professor of Politics*  
**Shai Feldman**

*Associate Director*  
**Kristina Cherniahivsky**

*Charles (Corky) Goodman Professor  
of Middle East History and  
Associate Director for Research*  
**Naghmeb Sohrabi**

*Myra and Robert Kraft Professor  
of Arab Politics*  
**Eva Bellin**

*Henry J. Leir Professor of the  
Economics of the Middle East*  
**Nader Habibi**

*Renée and Lester Crown Professor  
of Modern Middle East Studies*  
**Pascal Menoret**

*Senior Fellows*  
**Abdel Monem Said Aly, PhD**  
**Kanan Makiya**

*Goldman Senior Fellow*  
**Khalil Shikaki, PhD**

*Research Fellow*  
**David Siddhartha Patel, PhD**

*Marilyn and Terry Diamond  
Junior Research Fellow*  
**Mohammed Masbah, PhD**

*Neubauer Junior Research Fellow*  
**Serra Hakyemez, PhD**

*Junior Research Fellows*  
**Jean-Louis Romanet Perroux, PhD**  
**Ahmad Shokr, PhD**

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## The Failure to End Libya's Fragmentation and Future Prospects

Jean-Louis Romanet Perroux

After forty-two years of a brutal dictatorship during which Colonel Muammar Qaddafi was the sole substantive power-holder, Libyans now have too many decision-making bodies to which to give their allegiance. The country's sovereign power is currently contested among two parliaments, three governments, and nine members of a Presidential Council who are supposed to carry out the functions of both head of state and supreme commander of the armed forces, typically granted to a single President.

This abundance of political bodies is far from affording peace, stability, and prosperity to the country. A myriad of conflicts, from the local to the national levels, bring daily misery to five or six million Libyans caught in this nightmare. Massive unemployment; lack of cash; dramatic loss of purchasing power; worsening shortages of food, water, medicine, and fuel; regular ten-hour-long power outages; and widespread crime and violence sadly describe the reality of most Libyans. Meanwhile, the country has witnessed the penetration of ISIS, the emergence of violent jihadism, and the explosion of illicit trade of arms, drugs, and human beings. Only six years after a popular uprising that united Libyans against a ruthless dictator, Libyans struggle to understand why their resource-rich country did not turn into Qatar or the UAE. Western powers that helped them topple Qaddafi are equally puzzled by the failure of Libya's political transition.

This Brief asks why protracted national and international efforts to create a single and strong Libyan national government have failed, and if they are likely to fail again. To answer these questions, it is necessary to distinguish

among the destabilizing role of international actors, the structural challenges inherent in Libyan state and society, and the constraints imposed by individual leaders.

This Brief identifies the key actors who play roles in the international, national, and individual dimensions in Libya, and it explains what drives their actions. Since each dimension influences the others, they must be understood and managed simultaneously in order to pursue stability. At the international level, the limited engagement of all major powers in Libya during and after the 2011 intervention opened the door to the extensive and unconstrained meddling of regional powers. Conversely, at local and individual levels, actors are subject to various constraints. At the level of Libya's regions and cities, actors follow ethnic and tribal allegiances while seeking to balance the power of competing armed groups. At the individual level, the behavior of decision-makers and citizens is largely dictated by their political attitudes and values. This is not to say that Libyans are not divided by interest, ideology, or religion; but these divisions tell us little about the way in which conflicts are managed.

## The Current State of Affairs

Since the 2014 escalation of violence and the political polarization that divided Libya into two broad camps, Libya has been sliding into a low-intensity civil war. The two sides are broadly referred to as "Islamists" and "anti-Islamists": The former is based in the West, whereas the latter controls most of the East, under the command of General Khalifa Haftar. These tags are largely inaccurate, however, and they grossly simplify heterogeneous and fluid coalitions of interest-driven groups that lack a unifying identity, ideology, or vision.

The Western coalition loosely connects radical Islamists, religiously syncretic minority ethnic groups,<sup>1</sup> revolutionary brigades formed during and after the 2011 conflict, Muslim Brotherhood politicians, and pragmatic businessmen from the powerful city of Misrata. Most of them support Libya's first elected Parliament (the General National Congress, or GNC, elected in July 2012), which refused to dissolve following the June 2014 election. Opposing them, in the East, General Haftar has asserted his indirect control over the last elected Parliament (the House of Representatives, or HoR) and its "interim" government. General Haftar is supported by secular diaspora elites, quietist Salafis (aka pietists, who theoretically do not engage in direct political action), most of the two Southern minority groups (Tubu and Tuareg), federalist tribes, and Libya's Armed Forces, based in the East.

It took one year of concerted work under the aegis of the United Nations for the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) to be signed on December 17, 2015. Many Libyans considered its signing premature, and the Libyan Political Dialogue that produced it, insufficiently large and inclusive. It did pave the way for the establishment of a Government of National Accord (GNA), however, and it laid out a political road map designed to overcome the political stalemate between two parliaments and two governments. The Agreement has produced a complex power-sharing institutional architecture in which the executive shares some of its power with a nine-member Presidency Council of the Council of Ministers (hereinafter referred to as the Presidential Council); and the recognized Parliament (the HoR) is

Jean-Louis Romanet Perroux  
is a Junior Research Fellow  
at the Crown Center.

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bound by the opinions expressed by what remains of its predecessor (the GNC), formally revived under the name the High Council of State.

In turn, the GNC tried to hasten its rebirth—as provided for in the LPA—by establishing the High Council of State, but it did so in violation of the procedures laid out in that agreement, and the Council was dislodged by militias less than one month later.<sup>2</sup> Even as it has lost one-third of its members, the Presidential Council has been unable to make any official decisions, blocked as it is by the unanimity decision-making principle obtaining between the president and his deputies, imposed by the LPA. More than one year after the signing of the LPA, the Government of National Accord, whose theoretical mandate has actually expired, has not been formally recognized by the last elected Parliament, the HoR; it has not gained any popular legitimacy; and it has not asserted its firm control over any territory. Instead of replacing the two previous illegitimate governments, it has added a third one.

What has prevented a strong national government from emerging in Libya?

## The International Dimension

In the few years since the 2011 uprisings, the rules of the geopolitical “game” being played in the Middle East and North Africa have changed dramatically. The U.S. has largely withdrawn from the region, major European powers are absorbed by national and EU-wide crises, Russia’s predominant regional imperative is to secure its bases in Syria, and ISIS has risen in areas of instability. Since no major power is willing to engage sufficiently and clearly enough to constrain the behavior of regional actors, these outside actors have enjoyed a greater freedom of action. This is particularly so, and visible, in Libya, which does not fall entirely in the sphere of influence of any single country.

None of the Western powers that intervened in Libya—the U.S., France, Italy, and the UK—had any appetite to deploy a large force or invest substantive political capital to stabilize the country. As a result, regional powers such as Turkey, Qatar, Sudan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have been allowed to support disparate and conflicting sides in Libya based on their interests and ideology. Without increasing their presence on the ground, since 2014, the United Nations and Western powers have increased their efforts to contain the direct foreign support of armed groups in Libya and to secure the viability of a single political stabilization process.

All international stakeholders have officially endorsed the December 2015 Libyan Political Agreement and the Government of National Accord that it brought about.

A number of countries pay lip service to support the political stabilization road map, however, while simultaneously undermining it. In fact, Russia, though it officially supports the Government of National Accord, has carefully increased its ties to, and allegedly also its military support for, General Haftar, who is a major obstacle to the UN-backed government.<sup>3</sup> Overall, Russia seems to be guided by a “reserved pragmatism”<sup>4</sup> aimed at creating favorable strategic conditions in Libya without engaging much military, financial, or political capital. It does not appear to be pursuing specific strategic objectives, but it does not ignore the potential advantages of having a permanent military base in Libya. Russia welcomes having another friendly secular authoritarian leader in the region besides Syria’s Bashar al-Assad and Egypt’s Abdel Fattah el-Sisi—meanwhile teaching the West a lesson by showing that it is more successful at fostering post-conflict stabilization. In short, Russia has no vital interests in Libya, which allows it to explore multiple options and invest limited resources while potentially reaping future strategic gains.

The roles of Turkey, Qatar, Egypt and the UAE are even more ambiguous, with each country covertly supporting one side in the Libyan conflict in order to advance its strategic interests. The main ideological issue dividing these countries into opposing camps is their conception of the Libyan state and of the role that Islam ought to play in it. The UAE and Egypt support a secular, authoritarian government in Libya, within which religious authorities would play a merely social role. This is compatible with Russia’s secular autocratic model and finds a champion in General Haftar. Turkey and Qatar, on the other hand, believe in the participation of Islamist parties in politics.

For all of these countries, ideological interests overlap with economic ones. Turkish companies have captured the large majority of Libya’s market for the building of infrastructure worth several billion dollars. The UAE and Qatar could potentially compete with Libya in the maritime transport<sup>5</sup> and petrochemical<sup>6</sup> sectors, respectively; rather than facing a regional competitor, they would prefer to cooperate with a friendly regime in Libya and influence its decisions. For Egypt, Libya offers a labor market outlet for over a million unemployed Egyptians; it is an important trading partner; and it is a potential cheap provider of oil.

Thus, each country is willing to support the side that best corresponds to its interests, even if it stands no

chance of achieving complete control over Libya. Except for Egypt, Libya does not represent an existential threat to any of these countries, and a protracted civil war prevents each country's regional antagonists from controlling the country while not causing them any substantial harm. This regional stalemate explains why powers have not played a more constructive role in Libya.

European powers, for their part, have been actively supporting the Government of National Accord and appear to genuinely seek stabilization in Libya. In fact, with the emergence of ISIS in Libya, the rise of Islamic terrorist attacks across Europe, and the increasing flow of migrants leaving Libya's shores for Italy, some European countries have realized that the current stalemate is not acceptable. When push comes to shove, however, the EU recognizes that the task of stabilizing Libya exceeds its capacity—and the organization already has enough on its plate between the challenges imposed by the UK withdrawal from the Union and the struggles that still affect many European economies. Thus, those individual states who are most concerned with Libya's instability are left to devise quick containment measures with respect to their problems. This approach has not escaped the GNA's prime minister, Faiez al-Serraj, who aptly noted in the aftermath of a meeting in London that the international community's "priorities seem to be fighting terrorism and illegal migration," rather than addressing the pressing needs of Libya's population.<sup>7</sup>

As a result, France and Italy are adopting a dual policy, comprising the principle-based support of national stabilization through the Government of National Accord, with a more pragmatic bilateral containment of migration and terrorism. In order to prevent illegal immigrants from leaving Libya, Italy has signed an agreement with the GNA Prime Minister al-Serraj, as opposed to the migration agreement with Turkey that was signed by the European Union.

In order to combat terrorism, French special forces have supported General Haftar's anti-Islamist offensive in the East, while U.S. airpower and Italian paramedics and special forces have supported Misrati forces fighting ISIS in Sirte. The clear division of support provided to either Misrata or Haftar suggests that each country is seeking to advance its strategic interests. Ultimately, however, these bilateral initiatives risk undermining the Government of National Accord, either by empowering opposing armed groups or by convincing Libya's prime minister to sign an agreement on migration that his government, and any government after his, will never be able to honor, which will lead to a humanitarian catastrophe.<sup>8</sup> On a broader scale, the disjointed and contradictory foreign meddling in

Libya continues, unsurprisingly, to perpetuate conflict and instability, which fuels the development of violent jihadism along with the influx of thousands of foreign fighters.

Libya will continue to offer a favorable environment for the development of ISIS cells and jihadist groups for a series of reasons that are unlikely to change in the coming years. For one thing, Libya has a very large and sparsely inhabited territory, whose extensive land and sea borders are extremely difficult to control. Half of Libya's population is less than twenty-five years old, while the country's economy offers few employment opportunities. And given Libya's dwarfed private sector and its failed state institutions, youth unemployment will likely persist even when the country stabilizes.

In the current absence of legitimate and capable state authorities, social fractionalization and political polarization will continue to lead to multiple confrontations throughout Libya—and the resulting death and destruction, and disenfranchisement of some segments of society, may offer new opportunities for violent jihadi groups to recruit fighters, foster alliances, and even establish new strongholds.<sup>9</sup> These are likely to emerge again in neighborhoods and towns that, like Sirte, have been considered bastions of Qaddafi loyalists.<sup>10</sup>

ISIS's potential growth in Libya, however, and its survival in any form beyond isolated cells, would result from and depend on short-term, tactical objectives of conflicting armed groups.<sup>11</sup> Libyans are not divided by sectarian hatreds comparable to those present in the Levant, and violent jihadi ideology enjoys very little popular support. Moreover, unlike in Syria and Iraq, it is unlikely that ISIS will capture oil facilities in Libya, sell oil to fund its operations, or take control of illegal smuggling. All oil and gas extraction, refinement and export installations, and smuggling activities are under the control of local armed groups, which are driven first and foremost by their own economic and factional interests. So although some of them may see an advantage in allowing the development of ISIS or other jihadi groups in areas for whose control they contend with other militias, they will not cede control of their sources of income.

In short, although ISIS in Libya is a serious threat, unlike in Syria and Iraq it lacks both the social and economic preconditions to establish strong foundations in the country. While ISIS cells may develop in several locations in Libya and even conduct some attacks, it is unlikely that ISIS will succeed in establishing a significant national operational force and becoming an independent actor in Libya's complex civil war. This is not to say that violent jihadism will cease to constitute an important "glocal"<sup>12</sup> challenge in Libya, owing to the factors explained above.

## The National Dimension

At the national level, Libya presents deep-rooted challenges with respect to the emergence of a single and strong government for several reasons. First, Libya emerged from the fall of the Qaddafi regime with no centralized security or defense institutions. State organizations, in and of themselves, do not exercise direct, substantive control over Libyan territory and installations; instead, these are under the complete control of hundreds of non-state armed groups, whose allegiance is based on ethnic, tribal, or geographic affiliation, ideology, economic interest, or a combination of these. As a result, no safe public space exists for political engagement, and elected officials are not protected in their efforts to carry out national politics. Even if a single publicly acclaimed government and legislature were to appear, they would be entirely constrained by competing armed groups, who would force them to pass or repeal laws and policies, just as they have done with all Libyan governments since the end of the 2011 revolution.<sup>13</sup>

Secondly, Libyans conceive of state institutions as instruments to capture and cement their power and that of their narrow community. Elected officials have shown that they do not believe in the alternation or sharing of power. Thus, in spite of democratic elections, incumbents have refused to peacefully hand over power, which has led to a multiplication of executive and legislative institutions, each of which has become the institutional guarantor of a coalition of armed groups.

This makes it very difficult to navigate and understand Libyan politics. Let's try to briefly lay out the Libyan political landscape, keeping in mind that executive and legislative institutions do not provide any substantive help in understanding current events in the country, given that they are paper institutions whose survival and actions depend on a number of loosely coordinated armed groups.

The Government of National Accord, headed by Prime Minister Faiez al-Serraj and confined to the Navy barracks in the Abu Sitta coastal neighborhood of Tripoli, enjoys a broad but often nominal international recognition. Its formal legitimacy rests on the Libyan Political Agreement, which requires that the House of Representatives, elected in 2014, approve any proposed GNA cabinet. Since such approval has never been forthcoming, the GNA is legally illegitimate. Moreover, it owes its survival to the protection of a few powerful Tripoli militias, first among which is a pietist Salafi brigade. Since its arrival in Tripoli,<sup>14</sup> the GNA has been unable to extend its

control over the capital and its ministries—for which it competes with the National Salvation Government headed by Khalifa al-Ghwell, and the very GNA-aligned militias that have no intention of withdrawing from the capital, as stipulated in the LPA.<sup>15</sup>

Al-Ghwell's government draws its legitimacy from the General National Congress, the first Parliament, elected in 2012. Although the GNC refused to dissolve following the June 2014 election of the HoR, it was recognized by a handful of governments, including Turkey, Jordan, Sudan, Kuwait, and Serbia, and it continues to sit, largely idle, in Tripoli. Although al-Ghwell's power has steadily decreased since the arrival of the GNA in the capital, he periodically asserts his power by using unaccounted-for windfalls of money to buy the allegiance of disgruntled militias.

Unable to convene in the capital, the House of Representatives established its headquarters in the eastern city of Tobruk, bordering Egypt. It formed its own government in the Eastern city of Bayda, under the helm of Abdullah al-Thani. This "interim national government" and the Parliament that supports it can count on the legitimacy afforded by the June 2014 popular vote—though Libya's Supreme Court declared them both illegal. More worrisomely, they operate under the tutelage of General Khalifa Haftar and his Libyan National Army (LNA).

A third problem is that even when state authorities are able to make decisions and promulgate laws, they are largely unable to implement them. Libyan state institutions lack bureaucratic capacity, other than the two that manage its hydrocarbon resources: the National Oil Corporation, in charge of the extraction and export of oil and gas, and the Central Bank of Libya, in charge of the country's monetary policy and distribution of financial resources. All other state bodies are the remnants of facade organizations and are devoid of any substantive power or decision-making and implementation ability. For four decades, their role was to employ a large majority of working-age Libyans without requiring any substantive work, or often even their physical presence, in return. Thus, the hypertrophic Libyan bureaucracy lacks the procedures, skills, and culture to translate laws and policy into practice. The resulting inability to govern undermines the government's popular legitimacy and support.

Finally, historical, regional, and ethnic divisions further undermine support for a single, strong, national government. The eastern third of the country, called Cyrenaica (aka Barqa), harbors strong federalist and

independence movements. Traditionally a thorn in the side of the Qaddafi regime, the area was heavily targeted by its security forces, and it received few financial resources to develop its infrastructure, despite the fact that the majority of Libyan oil comes from its soil. Understandably, its inhabitants have grown weary of centralized authority.

The Fezzan, Libya's Southern region, suffered from a similar level of neglect, compounded with a destructive social alchemy that Qaddafi played by pitting Arab tribes against minority groups and each other. This region is part of the Sahel, an immense, semi-arid stretch across which semi-nomadic groups have traded for millennia. The Tuareg and Tubu are two such groups, many of whom can claim a longer ancestry on what is known today as Libyan territory than the Arab tribes who ruled them under Qaddafi. While they struggled to have their Libyan citizenship recognized, the regime did not hesitate to recruit them to fight for it. Their relationship to a government in Tripoli will remain problematic in terms of recognition of their rights as citizens, and on account of their cross-border smuggling, which is their traditional—and often only—source of livelihood.

Another indigenous population called Amazigh (aka Berbers), located in Libya's Western "Jebel Nafusa" mountains, also have age-old grievances with Tripoli. This minority was repressed during Qaddafi's Arab nationalist regime. Tamazight language and culture were prohibited in Libya's Arab Jamahiriya (a word coined by Qaddafi to mean "people's republic"). Their repeated calls to recognize their flag, language, and culture in Libya's constitution were largely ignored. Together with the Tuareg and the Tubu, they boycotted the 2014 elections, and they are not likely to support a central government that does not include them and that does not recognize their minority rights.

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## The Individual Dimension

All politics is ultimately conducted by individuals, whose personalities and political culture constrain the realm of possibilities. In Libya, power is distributed among many individuals and institutions, and political leaders contend with military commanders for authority. The two main figures who would have to broker an agreement to pave the way for a Government of National Accord are Faiez al-Serraj and Khalifa Haftar. And their personal histories, character, and political culture could not differ more.

Prime Minister Faiez al-Serraj is a middle-class architect from a respected old family from Tripoli. He was chosen by a process of exclusion on the basis of his independence, his

support for a political agreement, and in spite of his lack of political experience. The daunting task he was given would have benefited from a personality with charisma, initiative, and political vision; but, al-Serraj's non-threatening character may have allowed him to survive thus far. His inclination—and, in fact, his only option—is to engage in dialogue and seek compromise; he has never commanded troops and has little understanding of the use of force. He understands the pragmatic need to craft a power-sharing agreement among conflicting parties, none of which is powerful enough to defeat the others. But he may lack the assertiveness, pragmatism, and creativity to devise viable solutions, move individuals beyond their current positions, and push them to an agreement when needed. More worrisomely, he is unable to impose his authority among the members of the Presidential Council he heads.<sup>16</sup> In the words of a former senior UN official, "al-Serraj is a fatherly figure who would make a great President, not a Prime Minister."<sup>17</sup>

General Haftar, on the other hand, is a career officer who fought for, and then against, Qaddafi; he understands and favors the use of force. In his words: "We are at war, and security issues are paramount. The circumstances do not permit the slower approach required by politics."<sup>18</sup> If he engages in negotiations, such as those with federalist tribes and quietist Salafi groups, it is with the goal of achieving tactical advances. His "Karama" (in Arabic, dignity) campaign targets all Islamists with political aspirations, from jihadi militias to Muslim Brotherhood politicians.

General Haftar seems to contemplate only the possibilities of complete victory (and control) or defeat. Looking retrospectively at his efforts to broker a political agreement between Libya's warring parties, the former head of the UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), Bernardino Leon, lamented that Haftar's two requirements for an agreement were that he would be the head of the army and that the army was not to be placed under civilian oversight.<sup>19</sup> In other words, his sole objective is to establish a military dictatorship (eventually leading to a democratic transition), which is what his aides explicitly told Jonathan Winer, U.S. Special Envoy for Libya, in late 2016.<sup>20</sup> Of course, neither the EU, the U.S., Turkey, Qatar, nor a majority of Libyans would accept military rule.

Haftar's road map—along with his profound differences with al-Serraj—was clearly expressed to an Italian journalist in January: "If he (al-Serraj) really intends to fight to bring peace to our country, he should grab a rifle and join our ranks."<sup>21</sup>

In early May, after well over one year of increasing international pressure on General Haftar, the two men

met in the UAE.<sup>22</sup> This is certainly an encouraging sign, but it is unlikely to lead to a stable, national, power-sharing agreement. The seizure of a vessel carrying weapons to Benghazi Islamists from Western Libya<sup>23</sup> and the bloody fight over the control of an airbase strategically located in the southwest,<sup>24</sup> while talks are ongoing, seem to indicate that gains are still sought through force rather than talks. This is not surprising given that all al-Serraj can offer is a compromise in which General Haftar would control the army under the oversight of a national unity government that would include the Islamists he has sworn to eradicate from Libya.<sup>25</sup>

## Future Prospects

Given the distribution of power in Libya among an extensive and diverse number of actors and the impossibility that a number of them will coalesce into a dominating coalition any time soon, there is no realistic scenario for military rule over Libya in the near term. Despite General Haftar's "charm offensive" in Moscow<sup>26</sup> and Cairo,<sup>27</sup> it is highly unlikely that Russia or Egypt will deploy military forces in Eastern Libya. Both countries are already occupied with military endeavors in Syria and the Sinai, respectively. Moreover, they probably understand that even if they dramatically increased their support for General Haftar, he would still fail to conquer and rule over the entire country, given that any attempt to do so would elicit a counterbalancing intervention by opposing regional powers. Unfortunately, their client appears to ignore this important part of the picture.

As we have seen, then, the prospects for a national government controlling the country are close to nil. Libya is thus bound to linger in a sort of stateless status quo for a number of years, during which a pervasive violence and lawlessness will contrast with "islands of stability" in which Libyans will enjoy a measure of security, access to basic services, some forms of justice, and even some economic activity. The country will increasingly resemble a loose system of city-states more akin to medieval Italy than to a centralized nation-state.

Several cities in Libya have in fact succeeded in establishing a form of local governance, principally by asserting some control over security, justice, and the extraction of wealth. Some elected Municipal Councils have established hybrid security arrangements with local, state, and non-state armed groups; others have been taken over by them. Libya, as a whole, however, will not attain peace and prosperity through semi-independent "islands of stability." Libyans depend upon each other for the extraction and export of oil and gas and for the provision of fresh water<sup>28</sup> and electricity. Moreover, organized crime, human smuggling, and violent jihadism will undoubtedly thrive in uncontrolled territories separating stable enclaves.

For now, Libya's competing proto-city-states are held together in a sort of confederation by the two national institutions extracting and managing Libya's hydrocarbon resources: the National Oil Corporation and the Central Bank of Libya. These institutions, more than anything else, are keeping Libya together and could have the greatest impact on the near-term future of Libya. If there is one merit that should be recognized in the behavior of international actors with regard to Libya, it is their success in keeping the two above-mentioned institutions nationally unified, somewhat functioning, and fairly independent. The division of these institutions could quickly lead to a full-fledged civil war or secession; conversely, if they each remain unitary, they could potentially help foster national compromise and cooperation.

In any case, though some measure of local stability may emerge in parts of Libya, the country will remain highly unstable and prone to conflict. And at this point, it will be so even if all external actors leave the country alone. One hope resides in the constitutional process and the presidential and legislative elections that would follow the adoption of a new constitution.<sup>29</sup> A new set of national institutions could help restart the political process, provided they were elected by a large Libyan majority. But given the low voter turnout in the last national election, Libyans will first have to find the will to engage in the political process.<sup>30</sup> That could be achieved by reviving the Libyan political dialogue that paved the way to the Libyan Political Agreement signed in December 2015 and by broadening participation in it.

## Endnotes

- 1 Such as the Tuareg and the Ibadī Amazigh minorities, located in the Southwest and West, respectively.
- 2 [“High Council of State Evacuated over Rift with Its Security Guards,” \*Libyan Express\*, October 10, 2016.](#)
- 3 On January 11, 2017, General Haftar was received with all fanfare on the Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov off the coast of Libya. See [“Malek Secret Plan to Back Haftar in Libya,” \*Middle East Eye\*, January 25, 2017.](#)
- 4 A term coined by Vasily Kuznetsov in [“What Is Russia’s Thinking on Libya?” \*Al-Monitor\*, March 5, 2017.](#)
- 5 For more on the UAE’s interests in the maritime transportation industry, see [“Dubai Maritime: Dubai Places Considerable Importance on the Maritime Industry in Its Wider Plans to Continue to Diversify Its Economy,” Invest in Group, April 2016.](#)
- 6 For more information on Qatar’s interests in the petrochemical industry, see [“Petrochemicals Increases Its Contribution to Qatar’s GDP,” Oxford Business Group.](#)
- 7 [Sami Zaptia, “Serraj Blames Haftar, Saleh, Elkaber and Ghariani for Libya’s Problems,” \*Libya Herald\*, November 2, 2016.](#)
- 8 On February 2, 2017, GNA prime minister al-Serraj signed a memorandum of understanding with Italy to curb the flow of migrants to Europe. See [“Italy-Libya Sign Agreement to Curb Flow of Migrants to Europe,” \*Euronews\*, February 2, 2017.](#) On March 23, 2017, following an appeal filed by Libyan lawyers, the administrative court of Tripoli suspended the agreement; it will eventually decide the case on appeal.
- 9 ISIS is certainly not the only such group in Libya. Other violent jihadi groups are Al Qaeda affiliates, such as Ansar al-Sharia groups in different Libyan cities and the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade.
- 10 A number of such towns have been marginalized and frequently targeted since the end of the 2011 revolution, such as Bani Walid, Ubari, Sebrata, Warshefana, Riqdalin, and Jmail.
- 11 ISIS persisted in Sirte for almost two years because it constituted a “buffer zone” between armed groups from Misrata in the West and General Haftar’s Libyan National Army in the East. Each side hoped that ISIS would attack their opponent, and neither one was willing to invest its own men and equipment in order to defeat it.
- 12 Meaning, localized, but with global reach.
- 13 The example that best epitomizes this constant checkmate is the passing of the infamous “political isolation law” (Qanoon Alazal Alsiyasi) by the General National Congress (Libya’s Parliament), under siege by armed groups, in May 2013.
- 14 The Government of National Accord arrived in Tripoli after a 12-hour-long journey by boat from Tunisia. Since then, it has not relocated from the heavily guarded naval base where it first established its headquarters. For more, read [“Libya’s U.N.-backed Presidential Council Reaches Tripoli by Ship,” \*Reuters\*, March 30, 2016.](#)
- 15 [“Haithem Tajouri rejects the Tripoli ceasefire as more fighting reported,” \*Libya Herald\*, March 16, 2017.](#)
- 16 Since the beginning of 2017, the Presidential Council has been marred by contradictory statements, resignations, and internal fights. See [“Deputy Leader of Libya’s U.N.-backed Government Resigns,” \*Reuters\*, January 2, 2017.](#)
- 17 Author interview with a former senior UN Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) official, February 2017.
- 18 [Lorenzo Cremonesi, “General Haftar: ‘Italy Has Taken the Wrong Side in Libya,’” \*Corriere della Sera\*, January 4, 2017.](#)
- 19 Author interview, March 2017.
- 20 “Haftar’s aides clearly stated that he is not willing to negotiate with anybody, that he will take over the entire country by a mixture of conquest and guile and will then appoint civilians to carry out civilian tasks. He will then rule for a number of years until Libya is ready for elections.” Author’s notes of a statement by Jonathan Winer, Libya Policy Forum (LPF) roundtable, Washington, D.C., February 23, 2017.
- 21 [Lorenzo Cremonesi, “General Haftar: ‘Italy Has Taken the Wrong Side in Libya.’”](#)
- 22 [“Fayez al-Sarraj meets Khalifa Haftar in UAE for talks,” \*Al Jazeera\*, May 2, 2017;](#) and [“Details emerge of reported Serraj-Haftar agreement, \*Libya Herald\*, May 2, 2017.](#)
- 23 [“EUNAVFORMED operation SOPHIA seizes weapons on board a vessel in International waters,” \*European Union External Action Service\*, May 2, 2017.](#)
- 24 [“Massacre reported as Misratans and BDB take Brak Al-Shatti airbase,” \*Libya Herald\*, May 18, 2017.](#)
- 25 General Haftar refused to meet Prime Minister al-Serraj in person even when an official initiative was organized by Egypt, Haftar’s key regional patron. See [Noura Ali, “Libya: Haftar Refuses to Meet Al-Serraj in Cairo,” \*Middle East Observer\*, February 15, 2017.](#)
- 26 General Haftar was in Moscow twice last year. See [“Libya’s Haftar arrives in Russia after Egypt visit,” \*Middle East Monitor\*, June 28, 2016](#) and [“Libyan general Khalifa Haftar meets Russian minister to seek help,” \*The Guardian\*, November 29, 2016.](#) In January 2017, he made a conspicuous visit on Russia’s aircraft carrier off the coast of Libya. See [“East Libya strongman visits Russian aircraft carrier in Mediterranean: RIA,” \*Reuters\*, Jan 11, 2017.](#)
- 27 See [“Libyan military chief makes unannounced visit to Cairo,” \*Anadolu Agency\*, Jan 19, 2017.](#)
- 28 In particular, Tripoli depends on Southern Libya’s subterranean aquifers for its supply of fresh water.
- 29 At the time of writing, a new draft Constitution is being finalized by the Constitution Drafting Assembly. If it is approved, it will be submitted to the House of Representatives in Tobruk for a vote of endorsement, which would then be followed by a national referendum for its definitive adoption.

30 On June 25, 2014, only 18 percent of eligible Libyan voters cast their ballots in the legislative election—a dramatic drop from the 50 percent turnout in the 2012 legislative elections. For more information, see [International Foundation for Electoral Systems \(IFES\), “Election Guide: Libya.”](#)



Brandeis University Crown Center  
for Middle East Studies

Mailstop 010  
Waltham, Massachusetts  
02454-9110

781-736-5320  
781-736-5324 Fax  
[www.brandeis.edu/crown](http://www.brandeis.edu/crown)

# Middle East Brief

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Jean-Louis Romanet Perroux

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