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Introduction

While different nations face problems of their own, a nation without an official government is rare to find. Since the death of its former leader in 2011, Libya has lived without a strict ruling force for more than 10 years. Citizens have lived in fear and turmoil as different forces in the country attempted to seize power for their own, and numerous conflicts and civil wars have abated the security levels in the country. While international organizations have continuously attempted to aid the country in multifaceted ways, the political situation in Libya is still far from being over. To secure the economy, ensure the equity of resource distribution, secure the political system, and ensure national security, Libya must elect an official government in its nation, as soon as possible.

Background

The main political issues began in Libya after the former leader Muammar al-Qaddafi had ceased in October 2011. In the midst of confusion about which government will take authority, the power was given to the General National Congress (GNC) in July 2012. The months and years following the shift of authority called upon numerous conflicts between groups. Armed groups including Islam militants and Ansar al-Sharia began attacking the central government in hopes of overthrowing the current leading force and taking power within the country. To counter this attack, the General of the Libyan National Army (LNA), Khalifa Haftar, began attacking back to the armed groups, with attacks going back and forth between the two forces. Eventually, in August 2014, warplanes that attacked Tripoli's main airport officially declared these armed groups as terrorist groups by the parliament. With this declaration, more individual groups began to form in Libya, creating their own institution and leadership roles, creating instability and a need for unity in the ruling forces of Libya.



Armed groups in Libya, now deemed as terrorist groups, attack Tripoli's main airport



Political instability, however, is only one face of this multidimensional issue. With attacks by armed forces taking place in areas of civilian residence, innocent citizens are being directly attacked by bombs, guns, and other weapons. In July of 2024, armed groups attacked the city of Tajura, a city that receives numerous family visits, killing a woman bystander who got shot in the head. Moreover, there were estimated to be nearly 14 civilian casualties in one of these attacks with explosive weapons. These periodic attacks render citizens in fear, with no guaranteed security anywhere they go. Bombings and gunshots, however, are only the direct impacts that citizens must experience. The Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) from the explosives leave numerous areas in Libya contaminated. In the long run, ERW can deprive people's well-being and limit access to or use of water and land. Furthermore, these remnants slow the process of rebuilding infrastructure that may have been damaged from these attacks. With both political and environmental issues surrounding this problem, the situation regarding authority and armed groups in Libya must be more closely examined.



A bystander woman is killed as armed groups clash in a seaside town in Libya

Problems Raised

Political Processes

With continued violence in the nation, 2014 was the last time since Libya has seen formal and official electoral processes occur for political positions. Although international support from the United Nations and other developed nations has been given, Libya is still far from completely settling into democracy. The main reason is that political institutions are fragmented, and different parties hold different opinions on electoral laws and political processes. Specifically, the Government of National Unity (GNU) has failed to accept the policies regarding elections presented by the House of Representatives (HoR), and some parties have refused to attend discussions to gather and unify these laws. These continually postponed elections also pose a great threat to guaranteeing human rights in Libya.

Armed Forces and Civilians

There have been countless dire results from the attacks from armed groups. One of these was the attack from militia groups in the city of Tripoli in August of 2023, which occurred after several months of



peace in the city. There were estimated to be 27 civilian deaths and nearly 100 injuries, but there are likely more casualties from indirect effects of weapons. This conflict was found to have been started by the 444 Brigade and the Special Deterrence Force, two of the strongest armed groups that were active in Libya. After a fight broke out between these two strong groups, innocent civilians were forced to be involved in this damage as well.

What is more, armed forces do not only use bombs and guns as their only means of claiming authority. With some presumably assuming the role of the actual government, some militia groups have proceeded to arrest and detain people at their own will, without any concrete reason as to why they do so. If these groups suspect any suspicious behavior or evidence of civilians who speak against their mission or goals, they may conduct detention and unjust trials without any legality involved. The GNU Ministry of Justice found that in October of 2023, nearly 18,000 civilians were detained in 31 imprisonment areas, with nearly two-thirds of these people arrested without any legal trial.

International Actions

United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)

On November 2023, 5 main institutions in Libya of GNU, HoR, the High Council State, the Libyan National Army, and the Presidency Council gathered along with a representative from the United Nations, Abdoulaye Bathily, to clear the stalemate and expedite the democratic processes in Libya.

With many efforts following this meeting, the UN eventually created the UNSMIL organization, which was formed to aid not only the political issues in Libya but also the economic and educational aspects of the nation. One of the actions that the UNSMIL took was in October of 2023 when they received a draft of Libyan



The UNSMIL hosts a Security Council meeting in Libya on February of 2023

electoral laws from the HoR and proceeded to work with the representatives of the institution to consult and edit these laws.

On the other hand, with some of these efforts not creating much difference, the UN claimed in May of 2024 that the electoral laws each institution created were not united or implemented in the nation in any way. The organization even stated that institutions are placing too much focus on relative power between each other, rather than pursuing democratic elections. Although Libya has plenty of resources to become a stable and developed country, they argued, the unstable politics in the nation is blocking the



country from thriving. Nevertheless, the UNSMIL’s efforts do not stop even after this criticism. In July of 2024, efforts continue as UNSMIL helps complete voter registration in 60 cities in Libya.

The Paris Summit

In December 2021, nations such as France, Germany, Italy, Egypt, and the United States gathered to aid the political transition in Libya and protect the nation against unjust electoral processes that may deprive civilians of any human rights. The meeting aimed to levy the conflict between armed groups in Libya as the vote for a parliament were set in place. Paris warned that any individual or organization who attempts to disrupt the election or political transition by any means may result in facing sanctions.



Various nations meet at the Paris Summit to discuss Libya’s election plans

Key Players

Three Key Legislative Bodies (GNU, LNA, HoR)

Although Libya does not currently have one ruling government, many institutions are keeping Libya’s politics together and are attempting to bring back democracy and stable political means in the country. The GNU is a key institution that most people recognize as the most legitimate government of Libya as of the current situation. This legislative body was formed in 2021 and was the successor of the GNA. Next, the LNA is a group opposed to the GNU and GNA, in which the central leader is known as General Khalifa Haftar. The LNA takes control of many large cities in Libya and plays a large role in their politics as well. The HoR is another key institution that took sides with the LNA and is opposed to the GNU and GNA. As a body that was formed in 2014, the HoR is currently attempting to negotiate with the GNU politically, but this negotiation has not yet been completely stable or successful.

The United Nations

The United Nations has undoubtedly provided much help, not only in bringing back Libya’s political stability but aiding the country in general. To begin, the UN has given much help in the formation of the two key political institutions in Libya—the GNA and the GNU. Specifically, the GNA was formed in 2015, when the Libyan Political Agreement took place in Morocco. As a contract of political agreement, this agreement eventually formed the GNA. As for the GNU, the Libyan Political



Dialogue Form was formed in 2020, where the nation aimed to create unified policies for governance in the country. This forum created the GNU in 2021.

Moreover, the UN has given much technical help in Libyan elections so that they can be clear, fair, and democratic. From a more general perspective, it has also supported the human rights of the country. Without one official ruling body, the human rights of the citizens in Libya were bound to be at risk. The United Nations aimed to protect the basic rights of citizens amid political instability.

Possible Solutions

Agreements and Reconciliation in Libya

Although there have been many small-scale agreements, there hasn't been one that includes all of the Libyan stakeholders such as the major political groups, armed forces, tribes, and key organizations. These major groups in Libya should unite first and decide on how to delegate responsibilities such as politics and governance, safety and security, and resource usage and distribution.

In addition, it may help to establish an organization that reconciles the conflicts that have happened between political groups within the country in the past, between armed groups and the national army, and any violation of human rights that citizens may have experienced. Addressing these past conflicts can work to unite the country. The organization can also create measures to prevent conflicts between communities in the future, putting focus especially on protecting the citizens before an official government steps in.

Resources and Economic Stability

Before an official ruling force is formed, it is key to maintain economic stability as best as



Production of oil in Libya

possible. As oil is a staple resource in Libya, a clear system for managing sources of oil and distributing it across the country is key. This may be when international organizations can step in to help, as deciding the distribution of precious natural resources within the country alone without an objective viewer may lead to conflict. Moreover, if the exporting of oil is carried out effectively, Libya's economy is very likely to thrive.

Although oil is an important natural resource, heavy reliance on oil alone can lead to dangerous outcomes. For other ways to enhance the economy in the country, Libya must foster more job



opportunities for citizens to reduce unemployment and enhance the circulation of money. These new jobs can include sectors such as natural resources and agriculture. This way, when the new government settles, it can direct its attention and focus to political means and not spend too much time on bringing back the economy.

Glossary

Militant

A person or organization that uses force or strong pressure to achieve its goals, especially to achieve social or political change.



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