

In the six years since the ousting of long time strongman ruler Moammar Gadhafi, Libya has fractured into pieces, mainly along tribal lines. In 2014, Libya had just a single government in Tripoli, the General National Congress (GNC), which was voted into power by popular election after the civil war ended. The GNC failed to hold elections before its term ended. Then his rival in the East, General Khalifa Hifter asked for its dismissal. The GNC persisted, and three months later, Hifter — backed by Egypt — launched what he called "Operation Dignity" to try to force it from power. The GNC then did hold elections, but turnout was low, and Islamists backed by groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood were defeated. The low turnout led to claims that the elections lacked legitimacy. A coalition backed by Islamist militias and fighters from the powerful western city of Misrata formed "Dawn Movement", that dislodged the newly elected government — the House of Representatives— which fled to eastern Libya to ally with Hifter. The Misratan-Islamist coalition then restored the GNC's power in Tripoli, giving the country two governments.

Outside powers have intervened in an attempt to piece Libya back together even the United Nations has struggled to resolve the Libyan conflict. In 2015, the U.N. brokered a unity agreement — the Libyan Political Agreement — between the country's two rival governments, the General National Congress in Tripoli and the House of Representatives in the eastern city of Tobruk. Instead of unifying the country's governments and bridging its largely east-west divide, the U.N. peace process, however, created a third government, the Government of National Accord in Tripoli, which the House of Representatives never joined.

Despite ongoing and past negotiations many of the underlying disputes among the country's various factions remain unresolved. The UN is making a new effort to reunite what has become a fractious and failed country. On September 20th, 2017 the United Nations General Assembly appointed a new UN Special Envoy to try to start a fresh round of negotiations under a plan that has three phases.

- To convene a drafting committee to modify the Libyan Political Agreement of 2015, that as a by-product created the Government of National Accord.
- To bring the different Libyan actors together through a National Conference in Tunis to discuss ideas for peace.
- After the Conference, the House of Representatives and the Drafting Constitutional Assembly (elected in 2014 that voted on a draft constitution on July 20th this year), will work to organize a constitutional referendum, and presidential and parliamentary elections.

The Libyan Political Agreement were never implemented because the strongman and Commander of the Libyan National Army, Khalifa Hifter, whose forces control more than the half of Libya and the country's vital gas and oil fields, ports and infrastructure, is not accepted in West Libya. General Hifter's troops, supported by Egypt and the United Arab Emirates have been instrumental against jihadists.

At present, the conflict between the President of the UN backed Government of National Accord in Tripoli, al-Sarraj, and General Hifter is reaching a high level, despite efforts by France to bring them to cooperate. The later has received the support of a group of notables and many militia commanders through the "Popular Authorisation Movement to save the Country" that has got 700.000 signatures (almost one third of the Libyan population) who want a main role for Hifter in the new Libya and are encouraging him to march to Tripoli to oust the al-Sarraj Government.

But it seems that Khalifa Hifter is in no hurry to reach Tripoli since he knows that in December 2017 expires al-Sarraj mandate. Perhaps at that moment he might move towards Tripoli if al-Sarraj is not replaced. Despite the fact that some Islamists are against the idea of Hifter having any role in a unified government, they are now for the idea of Hifter having a critical role in reshaping Libya, since his Libyan National Army has the support of moderate Islamists, Salafists and some Misrata militias.

The question is that any amendments to the Libyan Political Agreement of 2015 have to consider removing the power of the Presidency of the Council of the Government of National Accord to appoint and dismiss military commanders and give it to the House of Representatives that in the new process is the key to achieve peace. If such amendment is accepted this will allow the appointment of Hifter as supreme military commander thus would block al-Sarraj or his successor from removing him. Nevertheless, many worry that Hifter is just another strongman in the mould of Gadhafi, a figure who wants to centralize power and rule as an authoritarian.

Amid the power vacuum, the chaos allows the existence of people traffickers, even among some militia groups like the al-Dabashi Brigade, the Abu Brigade and the 48 Battalion, that move refugees and people to send them into the EU; the smuggling of arms mainly in the South of the country that are conveyed to Jihadists in other North African countries and in the Sahel. The reason is that smuggling and human trafficking constitute the backbone of rural economies in Libya. Also the Islamic State militias are making a comeback less than a year after having

suffered heavy defeats.

In Libya's current conflict, the splits remain too strong, with too many divisive figures, for any solutions to emerge in the near future. Nevertheless, the country's proximity to Europe and its chaotic environment — a breeding ground for jihadist groups — has attracted almost every strong actor in the region. As a result, Libya will grow as a point of tension between those outside powers, and their support for competing groups will only deepen the severity of the country's divisions. Competing governments and associated rival militias wrestle for power, allowing jihadist militants to establish themselves.

Other influences:

- The military support that Hifter's Libyan National Army is receiving from Egypt is weakening the chances of any negotiation between the House of Representatives and the Government of National Accord because it gives to Hifter a push for military victory. Nevertheless, it is likely that Egypt's aims may be limited only to have a segment of land along its frontier with Libya free of Islamic Jihadists with the help of the Libyan National Army.
- Russia is taking advantage of the United States lack of interest in Libya and of the small role the United Nations are playing there to craft itself a foothold in another Mediterranean country. Its policy is to help Hifter militarily in exchange of future reconstruction contracts but in an uncompromising way that might allow Moscow to play a role in the UN's efforts to achieve peace.
- The European Union is absent from the Libyan political arena, being only worried by the illegal immigration from the Libyan coast but wishing an end to the internal conflict amongst all warring factions.