

ENDING LIBYA'S CIVIL WAR: RECONCILING POLITICS, REBUILDING SECURITY

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More than three years after the fall of strongman Muammar Qaddafi, Libya is in the midst of a bitter civil war rooted in a balance of weakness between the country's political factions and armed groups. With a domestic landscape torn apart by competing claims to power and with interference from regional actors serving to entrench divides, restoring stability in Libya and building a unified security structure will be difficult if not impossible without broad-based political reconciliation.

Polarized Politics, Fractured Security Institutions

- After Qaddafi, Libya's security sector evolved into a hybrid arrangement marked by loose and imbalanced cooperation between locally organized, state-sponsored armed groups and national military and police.
- The system broke down as political and security institutions became increasingly polarized along regional, communal, and ideological fault lines.
- The country is now split between two warring camps: Operation Dignity, a coalition of eastern tribes, federalists, and disaffected military units; and Operation Dawn, an alliance of Islamist forces aligned with armed groups from Misrata. Each camp lays claim to governance and legitimacy, with its own parliament, army, and prime minister.
- Regional backing of the two camps—with Egypt and the United Arab Emirates supporting Dignity and Qatar, Turkey, and Sudan backing Dawn—has deepened these divisions.
- Outside efforts to train and equip Libya's security institutions have failed because of this polarization. There is no effective command structure; trainees have reverted to regional loyalties or are on indefinite leave because there is no military structure for them to join.

Recommendations for Libya's Leaders and Outside Supporters

Implement a ceasefire between Operations Dignity and Dawn and secure the withdrawal of forces taking part in those campaigns. The military units of these coalitions should move out of the major cities, and those that attacked civilians or civilian facilities should be disbanded.

Push for a transitional government that is inclusive of all factions. A face-saving power-sharing formula should encompass all politicians and include supporters of both Dignity and Dawn—if they renounce support for terrorist groups and attacks on civilian facilities.

Implement a regional pact against military interference in Libya's affairs. Outside powers should stop equipping and funding armed groups and push their allies in Libya toward reconciliation. A September 2014 noninterference pact—including Egypt, the UAE, Qatar, and Turkey—is a promising start.

Support the development of a new Libyan security architecture, national army, and police force by harnessing local security initiatives. After a broad political pact is forged, the United States and its allies should focus on supporting a civilian-controlled defense architecture, municipality-based forces, and local disarmament and demobilization efforts.

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