

Libyan Delegates Meet for United Nations-Facilitated Talks Aimed at Paving the Way for the Planned December Elections

Delegates from Libya took part in four days of United Nations-facilitated talks this week aimed at creating the legal conditions for the country's planned elections later this year in December. The meeting worked towards ensuring a free and transparent election, and also highlighted the importance of a full withdrawal of foreign troops from the North African nation. The ceasefire between the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) and the Libyan National Army (LNA) has been in effect since late October 2020, and has enabled the current political transition phase. Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh is serving as the temporary prime minister for the interim government facilitated by the United Nations until elections are held on December 24th, 2021. While the transitional government is in place, the United Nations has also been tasked with monitoring the ceasefire via a maximum of 60 personnel officials in the country. The so-called Libya Quartet – made up of the United Nations, the African Union, the European Union, and the Arab League – has collectively emphasized the need for a total expulsion of foreign fighters in order to secure a lasting and peaceful political solution.

The direct cause behind Libya's conflict can be traced back to the Arab Spring in 2011 and the first civil war that ensued. During the pro-democracy movements that swept across the Middle East, Libya began its own protests and the revolution followed. Colonel Gaddafi was the longtime despot in the country, and responded to the Libyan demonstrations with brutal levels of violence and repression. While the reaction initially began with water cannons and rubber bullets, Gaddafi devolved into unleashing lethal force against the protesters using gunfire, tanks, helicopters, and jets. A National Transitional Council (NTC) was formed in opposition to Gaddafi and eventually toppled his regime in late 2011.

The second iteration of the Libyan conflict took place during the past several years and lasted until the recent GNA-LNA ceasefire agreement in October of 2020. Shortly after Gaddafi's demise and the NTC's establishment as the recognized political entity in Libya, elections were held for the country's house of representatives – which sparked ultimate contention and division. As a body, the house of representatives moved its presence to Tobruk in eastern Libya and allied itself with General Khalifa Haftar, a former Army officer under the Gaddafi regime. This set up two opposing forces in Libya – the Libyan National Army under Haftar and the NTC's successor, the General National Congress. Eventually, the internationally-recognized Government of National Accord was created in 2015 to serve as the nation's legitimate political institution, but Haftar and his LNA initiated a reignited conflict against the GNA, resulting in prolonged fighting up until October 23rd of last year.

This week's latest developments regarding the Libyan talks taking place have serious implications for the prospect of stability in the country, with observers hopeful that the scheduled elections in December will be able to proceed as planned. Over the past decade, the conflict in Libya has drawn in external actors and involvement, which has added to the urgency for a peaceful solution to the crisis. While the GNA was formally acknowledged as the country's legitimate government and was supported by countries like Italy, Qatar, and Turkey, other nations such as Russia, France, and the UAE played a destructive role in exacerbating the conflict through their backing of the LNA. Therefore, issue experts point out that the ramifications stemming from a potential smooth transition between the interim government and the December elections go beyond the North African country alone.