



## THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY IN LIBYA: THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE NEW-ELECTED INTERIM GOVERNMENT FOR THE LIBYAN PEACE

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### BACKGROUND

- On 5<sup>th</sup> of February, UN-mediated Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) voted to designate an interim government to prepare the war-torn country for the elections, which will be held in December 2021.
- The results were perplexing to the international community since less-known candidates won against the famous figures, Saleh-Bashaga. Saleh was also expected to be an alternative leader against Haftar in the Eastern Side, whom the foreign actors made political investments to him.
- The selection process comes one month later after the new US administration started its term and has yet to implement its foreign policy with respect to Libya. As a result, the unexpected picture causes internal and foreign actors to wait and assess how the events will evolve in the new environment.

### LIBYA

We witnessed the remarkable withdrawal of Khalifa Haftar's forces from western Libya in the last summer. After Haftar's withdrawal, the fighting turned into a stalemate at central Libya – Sirte-Jufra Front, and the civil war ended with a permanent ceasefire agreement on 23<sup>rd</sup> of October in Geneva. At the beginning of November 2020, an UN-sponsored political process—named the Libya Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF)—took over.

The first outcome of the LPDF process was an election date: the 24th of December 2021. This was the easiest step. Then, LPDF members agreed upon a unified governing mechanism to lead the country until the elections. Compared with the third and fourth steps, this second step was an easy one as well. In the third step, LPDF was required to agree on an election method for the interim leadership. This was achieved only by the intervention of an advisory committee formed by Stephanie Williams, a former US diplomat, from the 24 members of the LPDF. The fourth step was the election of the four names, who will lead the country until the December elections. By design, these four names are composed of one Prime Minister (PM) –from Tripolitania (Western Libya); head of Presidential Council (PC) – from Cyrenaica (East Libya) and two deputy PC members –one from Tripolitania, one from Fezzan (South Libya).

In this last step, many internal and external actors worked behind the scenes for their list to be elected. Among all the lists, the one composed of Aguila Saleh – as the head of PC, Fathi Bashagha – as the PM-designate, and Osama al-Juwaili, one of the two deputies of Aquila Saleh, was the most expected outcome. These three figures were representing the popular power bases of the current politics in the country. GNA Interior Minister Bashagha is the frontman of Misrata, Political Islamists and Turkey block. Head of UN-recognised Libya parliament, Saleh, is the leading eastern figure representing the status quo elites of Eastern Libya. Prominent Zintani Commander and Commander and Western Military Zone, Juwaili, is one of the most powerful military figures in the west.

Surprisingly, these expected winners lost the competition to a less known and modest list: Mohamed Younes al-Menfi as the head of PC, and Abdullah Hussein al-Lafi and Musa al-Koni his deputies, and Abdulhamid Dbaiba as the PM. From this choice, one can conclude that LPDF members had enough status quo and wanted a change, or political rivals of the Saleh and Bashagha tactically supported a rival. There are also rumours that Khalifa Hafter [supported these fewer known names](#) because he is afraid of losing its ground to Agila Saleh.

The head of PC Mohamed al-Menfi from Eastern Libya does not have a loyalty to Hafter, making him a relatively desirable actor for Turkey. He is known as a political Islamist and among the founders of the High Council of State, which is controlled by political Islamists. Moreover, when the GNA signed an MoU to delimitate maritime borders with Turkey, al-Menfi was expelled from Athens as the Libyan ambassador.

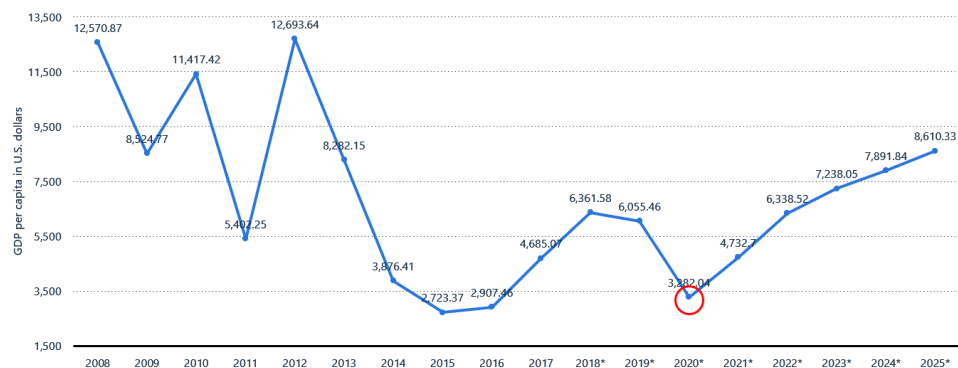
PM-Elect Dbeibeh is a wealthy man whose name connotes [corruption](#) during the [Qaddafi era](#) and now including [offering a bribe to LPDF members](#). He also has strong business ties with Turkey. After his election, he [stated to Turkish state-run Anadolu agency](#) that "We will have great solidarity with the Turkish people and state. Turkey is our ally, friend, and brother. It also has great opportunities to support Libyans in achieving their true goals. Turkey is our true partner for us."

Menfi declared their three priorities as the unification of army through post-Berlin Conference Joint Military Commission process, unification of the institutions and reconciliation. Economic and security institutions are critical for the elections and the unification process. Economic conditions will determine the participation and success of the elections. Moreover, appointments to key economic agencies such as Libya's state National Oil Corporation (NOC), the Tripoli Central Bank of Libya (CBL) -since more than [90 % of exports are dependent](#) on oil and petroleum- are of utmost significance since any change over them may spark tensions between the sides and deadlock the negotiations.

Security of the elections will be consequential. Security responsibility should be unified under the Interior Ministry or the Army, and the controversial topics other than these three, such as the departure of foreign mercenaries, will be left to the new government. Of course, a **complete** merge of different armed and military groups in post-conflict countries necessitates a [Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration](#) (DDR) process. In the current landscape, DDR seems a remote possibility in Libya.

## Libya: Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in current prices from 2008 to 2025 (in U.S. dollars)

Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in Libya 2025

Source: [Statista](#) (IMF Data)

There are so much distrust and hatred between the warring parties, and no concrete framework that guarantees **their future** exists. Without DDR, integrating different groups into one army is very challenging if not possible. Adding the existence of foreign military presence into the current picture is another complication. What can ameliorate this situation is to create a UN peacekeeping force. Managing a peace process without putting UN boots on the ground is not feasible to achieve peace. Because in the end, after making decisions, who will monitor the developments and enforce the parties, and foreign actors to keep their promise is a substantial obstacle.

Given the highly polarised political climate, prevailing zero-some mentality and the deep grievances caused by a decade of internal conflict, it is too early to celebrate. The real problem will be the ability to govern the country as a whole after the election of interim leadership. As had happened following 2015- Skhirat agreement, even after agreeing upon a new mechanism and names – the risk of turmoil is still relatively high. Moreover, the current ceasefire is quite fragile: Rival parties accusing each other of violations of confidence-building measures. Contrary to the ceasefire deal, the foreign military did not depart the country. External actors, who think that the UN process would hurt their interest in the country, are waiting and preparing for the failure of the LPDF process. So, the risk indicators of going back to an armed conflict are still relatively high in Libya.

## EGYPT AND THE GULF COUNTRIES

The election of a new interim government re-entrenches the status-quo and politicking among elites that are manoeuvring for better positioning while waiting for the dust to settle in the many changing dynamics in the region. This election has not changed the balance of power or brought the two main camps into a semblance of an agreement. Haftar is still biding his time and waiting for an opening to regain what he has lost in recent months. Meanwhile, this ongoing "[institutionalised disunity](#)" will leave Libya vulnerable to the influence of foreign powers, Egypt, Russia, Turkey, and the UAE. These foreign powers will keep up their efforts to stifle any real progress while reaping economic benefits. Thus, Egypt and the UAE will most likely continue their support of Haftar and their other allies to keep their foothold and control various income sources.

Moreover, with the new US administration still settling down and studying its next move, no regional power would make a move before the US position gets clearer. Additionally, with looming elections in Iran, Iraq, and Israel, with the possibility of relaunching nuclear talks between Iran and the US, any significant power grab or major shift becomes less and less likely.

In such a regional and international environment, this change in Libya is only a perpetuation of the status quo, waiting to see in which direction the dust will settle. A feverish rush will then possess all the different players trying to reserve the best seats on the ride. Egypt and the Gulf are no exception, especially with their other much more pressing priorities. It will be a wait and see game, with intense behind the scene political maneuvering and alliance making to prepare the ground for the upcoming regional change, or possibly the elections.

## EUROPEAN UNION

The HR/VP [Borrell](#) has welcomed the agreement of Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) and expressed his intentions to work with Abdul-Hamid Dbeibah, Prime Minister-elect. Yet, there is no enthusiasm neither in Brussels nor in the capitals and the EU, and its member states (including competing parties Italy and France) seems to take a « wait and see » position in Libya. What is interesting is the fact that Italy submitted a [memorandum for demarcating](#) the maritime borders that conjures up Turkey's deal in 2020 just one day before the election.

## RUSSIA

Moscow [claims](#) Washington has structured the current stage of the peace process in Libya in its own interests since US diplomat Stephanie Williams was the interim head of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya. At the same time, Russia does not consider it expedient for the United States to publicly oppose these measures, which could, to some degree, be helpful to the Kremlin. Moreover, the Russian side has not yet established links with the Fayeaz al-Sarraj government's powerful Minister of Internal Affairs, Fathi Bashagha, who has very close connections not only with Turkey but also with Western countries. Further, Moscow does not ignore the idea of negotiating with alternative candidates who, in general, are opposed to the current format of the inter-Libyan dialogue and could play a role if it fails.

Additionally, it cannot be ruled out that Russia would like to build its own permanent military bases in Libya, mainly where there are already Russian mercenaries, after its success in having a robust presence on the other side of Eastern Mediterranean, Syria. Thus, in Sirte, a naval base could be built, or in Jufra, an air force facility. The issue is that Sirte is named as the city intended to house the new authorities and should demilitarise the city itself.

## TURKEY

Turkey watched the process relatively calmly since there are candidates in [favour](#) of Turkey in all the lists. The popular ticket was a viable option for Ankara since it does not want to see Hafter in the future of Libya, and Saleh portrayed himself as an alternative leader in Eastern Libya as the head of HoR. Egypt, France, and Russia would like to keep Hafter at arm's length for some time to enhance Saleh's profile. At the same time, Bashaga will guarantee that Turkey's presence and interests in Libya will not be harmed in this option. Then, the surprising results came in; Saleh-Bashaga list lost, and al-Nenfi and Dbeibeh were appointed to the interim government.

This does not mean that Turkey is not content with the current situation. On the contrary, Ankara still has an advantage in Libya because, as mentioned above, al-Menfi is a political Islamist and does not have a close relationship with Hafter, and Dbeibeh has business ties with Turkey.

The loss of Bashaga-Saleh means Turkey still has to deal with Hafter in the coming months, while Turkey's presence and the maritime delimitation deal are still protected. Furthermore, Ankara does not have a will to pull back its presence from Libya, that Erdogan made it clear when responding to Macron's request. He dispels the idea of [Turkey's withdrawal](#) by saying that "... there are soldiers of Chad, Mali, Wagner, you pull them out of there, pull them out, then let us have a conversation about these [Turkish withdrawal]".

Declaring a pure victory for Ankara by looking at the results is misleading for several reasons. First, they are less-known names and have a slim power base. Hence, they have to compromise and incorporate people from different ethnic and cultural background to solidify their position. This situation has substantial importance with regard to increasing diversity and possibility for the reunification of the war-torn country while diminishing their power and restricting their room for manoeuvre.

Second, their close relationship with Turkey will create a scepticism towards their decisions, and they will face hardship to justify their actions and defend their objectivity. Considering the Debibeh's notorious family name and the fact that he faces many accusations comprising his efforts to buy votes in LPDF, proving their neutrality is a very daunting task for the interim administration.

Third, the new government established by the interim cadre needs approval from HoR to become legitimate. In case the HoR rejects the appointments, the UN-led LPDF can play a back-up role, but this will undermine the legitimacy of the new cabinet and deepen already existing cleavages. As the leader of HoR, Saleh's support is therefore crucial to solidify the new government's power even though LPDF approve and support the new government.

Consequently, the new situation has some setbacks for Turkey. A Libya without Hafter seems very far away. He has destroyed the alternative option of Saleh's leadership. Everything is so fresh; Turkey will wait for some time to see how the events will evolve.

## STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Based on the analyses above, it is highly likely that:

- **A risk of conflict in Libya is not likely to occur soon, considering that all actors are positioning themselves according to the new leadership in Libya and waiting for the new US administration to manifest its position vis-à-vis Libya. Moreover, the interim government is temporary until the elections -they may put an effort to delay the process-. Actors have to anticipate whether the Libyans can go to the ballot box or not and its results.**
- The possibility of retaining the Russian presence in Sirte and Jufra could be to send an official Russian mission to these bases, which could assist the new Libyan authorities in establishing a unified armed force, with the possibility of withdrawing Russian mercenaries from the region. To do so, Russia will have to receive the approval of the officially recognised new authorities in Libya, and Moscow can use its own statistics' in the Libyan sector.
- A shared understanding will possibly be achieved by Russia and Turkey. It should be borne in mind that in the region, Ankara is already building two bases for itself: an airbase in al-Watiya and a naval base in Misrata. In view of the plans announced by the US regarding the need to free Libya from a foreign military presence, a rapprochement of the positions of Moscow and Ankara on the Libyan road is also expected.
- For the Gulf and Egypt, it will be a "wait and see" period, with intense political manoeuvring, in preparation for possible regional shifts and changes. Such a stance could open the door for local and temporary agreements and understandings while supporting their main allies and political factions.