

Libya's slide into anarchy

[Chris Scott](#) discusses the latest developments in Libya

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photo credit: United Nations Photo

What with all the recent problems in Ukraine, and increasing fears over ISIS, you could be forgiven for not noticing Libya's recent problems. However despite hopes in 2011 that Western intervention could help set Libya on the path to more stable government, the country has since fallen victim to further fighting between rival militias. This has prompted the United Nations to pass a resolution calling for a ceasefire, and the implementation of sanctions against parties who back rival militias in the region.

The origins of the latest conflict can be found in February 2014, when General Khalifa Haftar attempted to dissolve the Islamist dominated Libyan parliament, the General National Congress (GNC). This followed the failure of the GNC to dissolve parliament and call fresh elections in November 2013, as had previously been intended. After then agreeing to elections in June, which led to the creation of the House of Representatives to replace the GNC, the Islamist parties incurred significant losses. Refusing to accept the result, the Islamists accused the new House of Representatives of being made up of former Gaddafi loyalists, leading to the outbreak of violence between different armed groups.

The fiercest fighting has focused around Tripoli international airport, which on the 23rd of August fell into the hands of militias headed Libya Dawn, an Islamist militia group supportive of the GNC. This is in spite of recent pressure on the group as it became the target of air strikes by other regional powers, believed to have been Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As a result the predominantly Islamist movement has largely gained control of Tripoli, and formed its own government to rival the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives later denounced the groups responsible for seizing the airport, denouncing those involved as 'terrorists'.

Since the takeover of Tripoli airport the Libyan Prime Minister Abdullah al-Thinni has resigned along with the cabinet, in order to pave the way for a new, inclusive government. It is hoped that if the new administration contains individuals from all sides, it could help to end the conflict.

In spite of this there are growing fears that the involvement of other regional countries in carrying out airstrikes could see the civil war escalate into a regional conflict. While the forces led by General Haftar are backed by the UAE and Egypt, Libya Dawn is being backed by Qatar. Prior to the airstrikes these

countries had already been active in providing weaponry and aid to their preferred militias. Egypt in particular sees the Islamist groups fighting in Libya as an extension of the Muslim Brotherhood, who have been declared a terrorist group by the government.

Any sanctions implemented by the UN are likely to be targeted predominantly at leaders of Libya Dawn, in addition to other militia groups that are aligned to it. The UN has also denounced involvement by other states in the region as stoking the conflict, rather than making a solution more likely. This stems from fear that as government control weakens yet further, it could make the country a safe haven for jihadists.

Going further still, the French president François Hollande has called for “exceptional support” to be provided to Libya, in an attempt to stop it descending into further anarchy. However given the growing likelihood of increased intervention by Western powers in Syria and Iraq to stop ISIS, there remains little appetite to become involved in another regional conflict if possible. However the problems that these countries, particularly Syria, have had in recent times can show the dangers of non-intervention, or otherwise of intervening too late.



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