Africa-Libya-EU: From Pragmatic Engagement to Strategic Partnership

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ABSTRACT

Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011, Libya has struggled to establish a stable political order, becoming a focal point of regional and international geopolitical competition. This paper examines Libya's political transition through four interconnected dimensions: the country's geopolitical significance, the challenges of constitutional and institutional development, the limitations of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) roadmap, and the prospects for military unification. It argues that Libya's strategic location between Europe, North Africa, and the Sahel, combined with its substantial energy resources, has encouraged external intervention and intensified domestic political fragmentation. The paper critically evaluates Libya's constitutional trajectory, highlighting the absence of a broadly accepted constitutional framework capable of reconciling competing political and regional interests. It further assesses the UNSMIL-led political roadmap, arguing that its emphasis on electoral milestones and elite bargaining has failed to address the underlying structural causes of instability, including fragmented security institutions, competing centers of authority, and the influence of foreign actors. Particular attention is given to efforts aimed at unifying Libya's rival military structures, which remain hindered by political mistrust, divergent regional interests, and the persistence of armed groups operating outside state control. Finally, the study analyzes the role of the European Union, emphasizing how concerns related to migration management, energy security, and regional stability shape EU engagement in Libya. While the EU has supported political dialogue and institutional development, its policies often prioritize security and migration objectives over long-term state-building. The paper concludes that sustainable political transition in Libya requires a more inclusive constitutional settlement, meaningful security sector reform, and greater alignment between international initiatives and Libya's domestic political realities.

Keywords: Libyan Transition, Power-sharing, UNSMIL, Tribal Consultative Council, Establishing Security, Unfinished Business from 2011 Constitution.

INTRODUCTION

The modern Libyan state emerged gradually during the Ottoman period, when the provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan were brought under a common imperial framework. Although these regions retained strong local and tribal identities, Ottoman administration introduced institutions of governance, taxation, and territorial organization that laid the foundations of a future state. At the same time, the Senussi religious movement developed extensive social, religious, and commercial networks, particularly in Cyrenaica, creating a source of political cohesion that would later become central to Libyan independence. (Vandewalle, 2018; Vandewalle, 2006).

The process of state formation was interrupted by the Italian invasion of 1911. Italian colonial rule sought not merely political control but settler colonization, provoking fierce resistance led largely by the Senussi movement and figures such as Omar al-Mukhtar. Anti-colonial resistance became a defining component of Libyan national identity and linked the struggle for independence to the emergence of a common political consciousness across the country's regions. (Ahmida, 2009; Lugan, 2016)

The defeat of Italy during the Second World War created a new international context in which Libyan independence became possible. The United Nations subsequently played a decisive role by supporting the establishment of an independent Libya. The leadership of Idris al-Senussi was also significant because of his political and religious legitimacy and his ability to negotiate among Libya's competing regional interests. The adoption of a federal system initially provided a compromise between regional autonomy and national unity. Ultimately, the success of the independence movement resulted from the combination of sustained anti-

colonial resistance, Senussi political organization, regional compromise, international diplomacy, and the weakening of European colonial power after World War II. These factors culminated in Libya's independence on **24 December 1951**, marking the formal emergence of the modern Libyan state.

Under King Idris al-Senussi, Libya became the first state to gain independence through a United Nations process. However, the monarchy inherited a country with weak institutions, limited infrastructure, regional divisions, and few administrative traditions capable of sustaining a modern nation-state. One of the principal challenges was creating loyalty to a national government among populations whose political identities remained primarily regional or tribal. (Vandewalle, 2018; St. John, 2025)

The discovery of oil in the late 1950s transformed Libya's prospects. Oil revenues enabled the state to finance education, healthcare, transportation networks, and public administration. Nevertheless, scholars such as Dirk Vandewalle argue that oil wealth also created a distributive state in which governments relied on resource revenues rather than broad institutional development and citizen participation. Consequently, economic modernization advanced more rapidly than political institutionalization. (Vandewalle, 2018; Vandewalle, 2006)

In September 1969, Muammar Gaddafi and a group of young military officers overthrew King Idris. The revolution was inspired by Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism, and demands for social justice. Gaddafi argued that Libya should reject both Western capitalism and Soviet-style communism and instead pursue an alternative model of political and economic organization. (Vandewalle, 2006; Laessing, 2020)

This alternative was articulated in *The Green Book*, where Gaddafi proposed what he called the **Third Universal Theory**. The theory presented itself as a middle way between capitalism and socialism. Capitalism, according to Gaddafi, concentrated wealth and power in the hands of economic elites, while communism concentrated power in party bureaucracies and suppressed individual initiative. His proposed solution was a system based on direct popular participation, social ownership, and economic redistribution without the centralized party-state associated with Marxism. (Gutenberg, 2025; Vandewalle, 2006)

The political dimension of the Green Revolution rejected representative democracy. Gaddafi argued that parliaments, political parties, and elections merely transferred power to small elites. Instead, citizens were expected to participate directly through People's Congresses and People's Committees. In theory, sovereignty belonged to the masses, creating what Gaddafi called the *Jamahiriya*, or "state of the masses." (Vandewalle, 2006)

Economically, the Green Revolution sought a balance between state ownership and private accumulation. Major sectors such as oil remained under state control, while wealth redistribution, subsidized housing, free education, and free healthcare expanded significantly. Libya achieved some of the highest literacy rates and human development indicators in Africa during the 1970s and 1980s. Oil revenues funded large infrastructure projects and improved living standards across much of the country. (Allan, 2022; Vandewalle, 2018)

The early success of the Green Revolution rested on three principal factors: abundant oil revenues, strong state control over resource distribution, and broad public support for anti-colonial and nationalist policies. Many Libyans experienced substantial improvements in education, healthcare, and social welfare compared with the monarchy period. Libya also gained influence in African and Arab affairs through Gaddafi's ambitious foreign policy. (Laessing, 2020; Pack, 2021)

Yet the contradictions of the system gradually became apparent. Although the Green Book promoted direct democracy, decision-making increasingly depended on Gaddafi and revolutionary institutions loyal to him. Political opposition was restricted, independent institutions remained weak, and the state became highly dependent on oil revenues. As Vandewalle argues, the concentration of power and the absence of autonomous institutions limited the regime's capacity to adapt to economic and political challenges. (Vandewalle, 2006; Vandewalle, 2018)

When the 2011 uprising erupted during the Arab Spring, the regime collapsed after a civil war and NATO intervention. The fall of Gaddafi removed the central authority that had held together Libya's regional, tribal, and political divisions. Since then, competing governments, militias, and foreign actors have struggled for influence, demonstrating that many of the challenges of state formation first encountered after independence remain unresolved today. (Laessing, 2020; Pack, 2021; Williams, 2025)

The post-1969 Libyan experience can be understood as an attempt to use oil wealth to construct a radically different political and economic order, followed by the gradual erosion of the institutions that sustained that order and, ultimately, the collapse of the regime in 2011. J. A. Allan's *Libya: The Experience of Oil* is particularly useful for understanding this transformation because it shows that the redistribution of oil wealth and the expansion of public services had already begun before Gaddafi's revolution, while the 1969 revolution subsequently reorganized the economy and placed most production, distribution, and resources under public control (Allan, 1981).

Gaddafi's project therefore did not simply begin with the discovery of oil; rather, it radicalized an existing process of state-led development. Oil provided the material foundation for this project by allowing the regime to finance infrastructure, education, healthcare, housing, subsidies, and extensive public employment without depending heavily on domestic taxation. The result was a profound transformation of Libyan society, with oil revenues being converted into redistribution and social development. Allan nevertheless stresses an important qualification: Libya's development indicators had already been improving before 1969, meaning that the revolution's principal achievement was not necessarily to initiate modernization but to reorganize how oil wealth was controlled and distributed (Allan, 1981).

This economic transformation was accompanied by Gaddafi's attempt to construct a political system that rejected both Western liberal capitalism and Soviet-style socialism. The *Green Book* presented the **Third Universal Theory** as an alternative or "middle way." Capitalism was criticized for allowing private ownership and economic inequality to produce exploitation, while conventional socialism and communism were criticized for transferring power from economic elites to party and bureaucratic elites. Gaddafi therefore proposed a system based on what he described as direct popular participation and social ownership. The objective was to eliminate the distinction between rulers and ruled by transferring political authority to popular congresses and economic control to workers and communities.

The political expression of this philosophy was the **Jamahiriya**, or "state of the masses." Political parties and conventional representative institutions were rejected on the grounds that they merely produced a new political elite. Instead, citizens were theoretically expected to exercise authority through People's Congresses and People's Committees. In practice, however, the gap between the theory of popular sovereignty and the concentration of power around Gaddafi and the revolutionary apparatus became increasingly significant. This contradiction would eventually become one of the central weaknesses of the Libyan system.

The regime nevertheless achieved substantial material results. The combination of high oil revenues, state control, redistribution, and ambitious development policies produced major improvements in infrastructure and social services. Allan's analysis is particularly important because it complicates both celebratory and purely negative interpretations of Gaddafi's rule: the revolution reorganized the economy on a much more publicly controlled basis, but many improvements in living standards were part of a longer development process associated with the oil boom rather than being exclusively the product of the revolution (Allan, 1981).

The political system became increasingly difficult to sustain because the institutions created in the name of popular participation did not develop into autonomous mechanisms of accountability. The concentration of political authority, restrictions on opposition, and dependence on oil revenues meant that the state remained highly personalized. Thus, the apparent stability of the Jamahiriya depended heavily on the ability of the regime to distribute oil wealth while maintaining coercive and political control.

The nuclear issue illustrates another dimension of Gaddafi's relationship with the international system. Norman Cigar's study of Libya's nuclear disarmament examines the country's decision to abandon its nuclear weapons-related ambitions and place its program under international scrutiny. This decision was significant because

Libya sought reintegration into the international community after years of confrontation with Western powers. The abandonment of its weapons programs therefore became part of a broader attempt to normalize relations with the United States and European states. (Cigar, 2010).

The international dimension is also central to understanding the eventual collapse of the regime. Libya's strategic importance was not limited to its political system: its enormous petroleum reserves, geographic position in the Mediterranean, and role in African and Arab politics made it an important object of international competition. The struggle over Libya therefore cannot be reduced to an exclusively domestic conflict between Gaddafi and his opponents.

The 2011 uprising transformed these tensions into open conflict. The collapse of the regime did not, however, produce an institutional state capable of replacing it. Instead, the dismantling of Gaddafi's highly centralized system left behind weak national institutions, competing armed groups, and unresolved struggles over the distribution of political and economic power. This is why the post-2011 period is better understood not simply as a transition from dictatorship to democracy, but as a profound crisis of state reconstruction.

Stephanie T. Williams provides an important perspective on Libya's post-2011 trajectory because her analysis is informed not only by scholarship but also by her direct experience as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Adviser on Libya and her involvement in international mediation. In *Libya Since Qaddafi: Chaos and the Search for Peace*, she presents the post-Gaddafi period as a prolonged crisis of state reconstruction rather than simply a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. The fundamental problem, in her interpretation, was that the overthrow of Gaddafi removed the central authority that had held Libya together without producing a sufficiently legitimate and effective national institutional framework to replace it. (Williams, 2025).

Williams emphasizes that the 2011 revolution created a **political vacuum** in which revolutionary brigades, local militias, political organizations, tribal networks, and emerging institutions competed to determine the country's future. The weakness of the central government meant that armed groups retained considerable autonomy, while successive transitional authorities struggled to establish a monopoly over the legitimate use of force. Consequently, state-building became inseparable from **security-sector reform**: without integrating or disarming armed groups and creating unified national security institutions, political institutions could not exercise effective authority throughout the country. (Williams, 2025).

The political crisis became particularly severe after the emergence of **rival political institutions in 2014**. Rather than producing a single national government, Libya developed competing centers of political authority in the east and west. Williams shows that this division was not simply ideological. It involved competing claims to legitimacy, control of state institutions, access to financial resources, and influence over the country's security apparatus. Political fragmentation therefore reinforced military fragmentation, while military power in turn allowed competing political actors to maintain their claims to authority. (Williams, 2025).

The **2019 assault on Tripoli** represented a major turning point in this process. Khalifa Haftar's Libyan National Army launched an offensive against the internationally recognized Government of National Accord in an attempt to seize the capital. Instead of quickly resolving Libya's political division, the offensive produced another major military confrontation and internationalized the conflict further. Williams' analysis demonstrates how domestic actors increasingly depended on external military and financial support, making Libya simultaneously a civil conflict and a theatre for wider regional competition. (Williams, 2025).

The intervention of foreign powers became particularly important during this period. Turkey provided decisive military assistance to the Tripoli-based government, while other external actors supported Haftar. This internationalization changed the balance of power on the ground and helped prevent the capture of Tripoli. It also demonstrated one of the central problems of the Libyan peace process: international actors frequently supported competing Libyan factions even while publicly supporting UN-led negotiations. Williams therefore treats **international mediation and foreign intervention as interconnected rather than separate phenomena**. (Williams, 2025).

The **Berlin Process**, launched in 2020, attempted to address this problem by bringing the principal external actors together and creating a framework for supporting a political settlement, a ceasefire, and an arms embargo. The approach was significant because Libya's conflict could not be resolved solely through negotiations among Libyan actors while foreign governments continued to provide military assistance to their preferred factions. Williams' experience illustrates the difficulty of translating international consensus into effective implementation on the ground. (Williams, 2025).

The October 2020 **nationwide ceasefire agreement** nevertheless represented an important achievement. It reduced the risk of another large-scale war and created the conditions for renewed political negotiations. The ceasefire also demonstrated that military de-escalation could open space for political processes. However, Williams emphasizes that ending active fighting was only the first step: Libya still lacked unified security institutions, a settled constitutional framework, and agreement over the distribution of political and economic authority. (Williams, 2025).

Williams also places considerable emphasis on Libya's **economic fragmentation**. The country's oil wealth should theoretically provide the financial foundation for national reconstruction, but control over economic institutions and public resources became part of the political struggle. Rival authorities sought influence over state finances, oil production, and public spending, meaning that economic institutions became instruments of political competition. This created a paradox in which the resources necessary to rebuild the state could simultaneously reinforce the divisions preventing state consolidation.

The problem of **security-sector reform** is therefore inseparable from economic and political reform. Armed groups have often developed their own networks of patronage and access to state resources, while political authorities have sometimes relied on militias for protection. Williams' analysis suggests that simply creating new government institutions cannot solve the problem if these institutions remain dependent on fragmented armed actors. A functioning Libyan state requires not only political agreement but also the gradual establishment of unified security institutions capable of operating under civilian authority. (Williams, 2025).

Another important element in Williams' interpretation is the weakness of Libya's **political transition**. Elections have repeatedly been presented as the mechanism through which competing claims to legitimacy could be resolved, but elections alone cannot create functioning institutions. If rival actors reject electoral outcomes, if constitutional rules remain contested, or if armed groups retain the ability to impose political preferences, elections can become another arena of conflict rather than a solution to it.

Williams therefore presents the post-2011 crisis as a **cycle of political fragmentation, armed competition, foreign intervention, and unsuccessful institution-building**. Political institutions remain weak because armed actors retain power; armed actors remain powerful because national institutions are weak; foreign states intervene because Libya's internal divisions create opportunities for external influence; and foreign intervention in turn makes domestic political compromise more difficult.

Her perspective is particularly valuable because it moves beyond the idea that Libya simply "collapsed" after Gaddafi. Instead, she shows that the country entered a prolonged process of **contested state reconstruction**. The central question after 2011 was not merely who should govern Libya, but what kind of state could emerge from the destruction of the Jamahiriya: whether Libya could construct legitimate national institutions while reconciling regional interests, integrating armed groups, managing oil revenues, and limiting foreign interference. (Williams, 2025).

Ultimately, Williams' account suggests that the fundamental challenge facing Libya is the reconstruction of a **legitimate, unified, and effective state**. The ceasefire and successive UN initiatives created opportunities for political settlement, but sustainable peace requires more than stopping military confrontation. It requires agreement over political legitimacy, security institutions, economic governance, constitutional arrangements, and the distribution of power and resources. In this sense, the post-2011 Libyan crisis represents the unfinished process of state formation that began with independence in 1951 and was radically reshaped—but not ultimately resolved—by Gaddafi's revolution in 1969. (Williams, 2025).

The 2019 offensive by Khalifa Haftar against Tripoli was especially consequential because it transformed Libya's political division into another major military confrontation and disrupted the UN political process. Williams shows how the failure of political negotiations was closely connected to military realities: actors who possessed armed forces could resist or circumvent political agreements, while foreign states continued to support competing Libyan factions.

The subsequent Berlin Process attempted to restore international consensus while addressing Libya's political, military, and economic tracks simultaneously. During the COVID-19 pandemic, UN mediation also contributed to the October 2020 nationwide ceasefire. Yet the persistence of rival institutions demonstrated that a ceasefire alone could not resolve the deeper structural problems of state authority, security, and control over economic resources (Williams, 2025).

The central analytical thread connecting these works is therefore the **relationship between oil, state power, and political institutions**. Under the monarchy, oil financed the construction of a young state; under Gaddafi, oil became the financial foundation for an attempt to replace conventional state institutions with the Jamahiriya; after 2011, control over oil institutions and revenues became one of the principal stakes in the struggle between competing political and military actors. Libya's contemporary crisis consequently reflects not the absence of a state-building project, but the unresolved consequences of a state that became exceptionally dependent on centralized control over oil wealth.

Libya occupies a strategically vital position in North Africa, with a lengthy coastline along the Mediterranean Sea that places it at the crossroads between Africa and Europe. It shares borders with Egypt to the east, Sudan and Chad to the south and southeast, Niger and Algeria to the southwest and west, and Tunisia to the northwest. This geographic location gives Libya significant influence over key Mediterranean maritime routes, migration flows, and regional trade corridors.

Rich in natural resources, Libya holds some of Africa’s largest proven oil reserves, making it a crucial player in global energy markets. Its oil exports have significant implications for international energy security, particularly for Europe, which relies on stable access to these resources. However, since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime in 2011, Libya has struggled with political fragmentation and instability. Competing governments and armed factions have created a complex and volatile landscape that draws in numerous regional and international actors, each pursuing their own strategic interests.

The country’s instability has far-reaching consequences. Libya serves as a major transit point for migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa seeking passage to Europe, creating ongoing humanitarian and security challenges. Moreover, the turmoil within Libya has had destabilizing effects on neighboring countries, contributing to the spread of arms trafficking, terrorism, and conflict throughout the Sahel region.

On the international stage, Libya has become a focal point of geopolitical competition. Powers such as the United States, Russia, Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and France have all intervened—often backing different factions—turning Libya into a proxy arena that shapes broader regional and global dynamics. Control over Libya also translates into strategic military and naval advantages in the Mediterranean, affecting the balance of power among NATO members, the European Union, and rival states.

THE UN FRAMEWORK

UNSCR 2510 (2020) was adopted by the UN Security Council on 12 February 2020, with 14 members voting in favour and Russia abstaining. It was adopted against the background of the escalating Libyan conflict, particularly the fighting around Tripoli between forces aligned with the internationally recognised Government of National Accord and the Libyan National Army under Khalifa Haftar. The conflict had increasingly become internationalised, with several foreign states providing military, political, or logistical support to competing Libyan actors. This undermined previous efforts to achieve a political settlement and contributed to repeated violations of the UN arms embargo.

The resolution was particularly important because it formally endorsed the conclusions of the Berlin Conference on Libya, held on 19 January 2020. The Berlin process brought together the principal international actors involved in Libya and sought to establish a common framework for ending the conflict. By endorsing the Berlin conclusions, the Security Council gave them formal UN backing and reinforced the idea that the Libyan crisis should be resolved through a comprehensive political process rather than through military victory.

A central principle of UNSCR 2510 was that there was no military solution to the Libyan conflict. The Council therefore called on the Libyan parties to engage seriously in negotiations and supported a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process facilitated by the United Nations. The resolution sought to create the conditions for a lasting ceasefire, followed by political dialogue and institutional arrangements capable of addressing the underlying divisions within Libya.

The resolution also placed significant emphasis on the arms embargo. The Security Council called on Member States to comply fully with the existing embargo and to refrain from intervening in ways that would intensify the conflict. This was particularly significant because foreign military assistance had become one of the major factors sustaining the fighting. UNSCR 2510 therefore connected the achievement of a ceasefire with the need to reduce external military involvement in Libya.

Another important element was the establishment of a framework for ceasefire monitoring and implementation. The resolution supported UN efforts to facilitate negotiations between the parties and develop mechanisms through which a ceasefire could be maintained and monitored. This reflected the recognition that simply declaring a ceasefire would not be sufficient; mechanisms were needed to build confidence, verify compliance and prevent the parties from returning to armed confrontation.

The broader significance of UNSCR 2510 is that it transformed the Berlin Conference from a diplomatic initiative into a formally endorsed component of the UN framework for resolving the Libyan conflict. It therefore provided the political foundation for subsequent UN engagement. The resolution did not itself resolve Libya's political or military divisions, but it established an internationally supported framework based on ceasefire, political dialogue, respect for the arms embargo and reduction of foreign interference.

UNSCR 2542 (2020) was adopted on 15 September 2020, with 13 members voting in favour and China and Russia abstaining. It followed the political framework established by UNSCR 2510 and focused more directly on the role and functioning of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). Its purpose was to ensure that the United Nations continued to have the institutional capacity to facilitate Libya's political transition, support the ceasefire process and assist Libyan actors in implementing agreements reached through negotiations.

The resolution extended the mandate of UNSMIL until 15 September 2021. UNSMIL was given a central role in facilitating an inclusive Libyan political process, including political, economic and security discussions. The mission was expected to bring together Libya's divided political and institutional actors and help them reach arrangements for the country's future governance.

A particularly important aspect of UNSCR 2542 was its emphasis on supporting the ceasefire process. By this stage, the parties had made progress towards ending the major fighting, but the ceasefire remained fragile. UNSMIL was therefore expected to assist the parties in negotiating and implementing ceasefire arrangements and to support mechanisms designed to prevent renewed conflict. This made the resolution an important bridge between the political commitments contained in UNSCR 2510 and the practical implementation of those commitments.

UNSCR 2542 also strengthened the UN's role in supporting Libya's political transition and elections. UNSMIL was tasked with assisting Libyan institutions and political actors in creating the conditions necessary for constitutional and electoral arrangements. The objective was ultimately to establish legitimate national institutions through a political process rather than through force.

The resolution also recognised that Libya's crisis was not purely military or political. The country faced serious economic, humanitarian and human-rights challenges, and these issues were closely connected to the conflict. UNSMIL's mandate therefore included support for human rights, humanitarian efforts, governance and institutional development. The mission was expected to assist Libyan authorities and institutions in addressing these problems while promoting stability and reconciliation.

Another significant feature of UNSCR 2542 was its approach to UN leadership in Libya. The resolution provided for the appointment of a new UN Special Envoy and adjusted the leadership structure of UNSMIL. This was intended to strengthen the UN's mediation efforts and provide clearer political direction for the peace process.

Taken together, UNSCR 2510 and UNSCR 2542 form part of a broader UN strategy for resolving the Libyan conflict. UNSCR 2510 provided the political framework by endorsing the Berlin process, supporting a ceasefire, rejecting a military solution and calling for an end to foreign interference. UNSCR 2542 subsequently strengthened the institutional and operational role of UNSMIL so that the United Nations could facilitate negotiations, support ceasefire implementation, assist political and constitutional processes, and promote longer-term institutional stability.

The key distinction is therefore that UNSCR 2510 is primarily about establishing and endorsing the political framework for peace, whereas UNSCR 2542 is primarily about enabling the UN mission to facilitate and implement that framework. The two resolutions should not be viewed as isolated measures. They represent successive stages of the international response to the Libyan conflict: first establishing the diplomatic and political framework, and then strengthening the UN mechanism responsible for supporting its implementation.

RATIONALE

The rationale for uniting Libya stems from the deep divisions that have persisted since the overthrow of Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. The country has since been fragmented, with competing governments, militias, and fractured institutions fueling ongoing conflict, instability, and humanitarian crises. Uniting Libya under a single, legitimate government is essential to restore stability and end the violence and chaos that have plagued the nation for over a decade. Political unity is also necessary to rebuild national institutions, including governance structures, the rule of law, and public services, which are critical for long-term development.

Moreover, Libya’s economy heavily relies on its oil wealth, and unity is crucial to ensure stable control and equitable management of these resources to finance reconstruction and social programs. A strong, unified government helps reduce foreign interference by limiting the influence of external powers backing different factions, allowing Libya to reclaim its sovereignty. Additionally, unity enables coordinated responses to pressing humanitarian issues such as migration flows, displacement, and human rights concerns.

The United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCRs) play a vital role in supporting Libya’s unity and peace process by providing the international legal and diplomatic framework necessary to address the conflict. These resolutions encourage Libyan parties to engage in inclusive political dialogue to peacefully resolve their disputes. They support ceasefires and impose arms embargoes aimed at limiting the flow of weapons that fuel the conflict, urging all parties to respect these ceasefires. The UNSCRs legitimize UN-led mediation efforts and peace initiatives, facilitating negotiations toward political solutions.

Furthermore, these resolutions emphasize the importance of protecting civilians, upholding human rights, and establishing mechanisms to hold perpetrators of violence accountable. They also highlight the necessity of free and fair national elections to establish a legitimate and unified government. Overall, the UNSCRs are designed to create the conditions needed for Libya to overcome fragmentation and conflict, laying the groundwork for peace, stability, and national reconciliation.

In addition to providing a framework for peace, the UNSCRs serve as a rallying point for international cooperation, encouraging states to support Libya’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. The resolutions also underscore the importance of inclusive political processes that involve all regions and communities within

Libya, recognizing that sustainable unity requires addressing the grievances and aspirations of diverse groups. While the path to unity is complex and fraught with setbacks, the consistent backing of the international community through these resolutions helps maintain momentum toward a peaceful resolution. Ultimately, uniting Libya is not only about ending conflict but also about building a resilient, functioning state capable of meeting the needs of its people and contributing positively to regional stability.

The US Perception of Libya

Pentagon officials repeatedly argued that large-scale U.S. intervention would be ineffective or counterproductive until there was a legitimate Libyan political authority and reliable local partners to work with. The led from behind during the Libya campaign, an official largely budged NATO mission.

Several factors drove that view.

No clear partner on the ground. Pentagon officials repeatedly described Libya as a complicated and muddled environment with many militias, factions, tribes, and political groups. They emphasized the need to identify who was trustworthy and capable before providing significant support.

Preference for Libyan-led solutions. U.S. officials often said that if Libyan forces aligned with a recognized government could handle threats themselves, that would be preferable to direct American military involvement. In 2016, Pentagon spokesman Peter Cook explicitly said that progress by Libyan government-aligned forces against ISIS could reduce the need for U.S. military action.

Concern about legitimacy. Defense Secretary Ash Carter argued that the formation of a functioning government would create opportunities for the international community to support legitimate Libyan security forces rather than intervening amid a fragmented civil conflict.

Avoiding ownership of another civil war. After Iraq and Afghanistan, many Pentagon leaders were wary of becoming the decisive actor in another country's internal conflict. Choosing winners among rival militias or tribes could deepen the conflict and make the U.S. responsible for the outcome.

Intervening selectively against ISIS. The Pentagon was willing to conduct targeted strikes against ISIS in Libya when it viewed the group as a threat, but it distinguished those counterterrorism operations from broader involvement in Libya's internal power struggles.

So the underlying logic was less **"let the tribes fight it out"** and more: **"We don't want to intervene deeply in a fragmented civil conflict until there is a legitimate government and dependable local partners."** Critics argued that this caution allowed instability to persist, while supporters argued that deeper intervention without a viable political framework would likely have made matters worse.

The EUs objectives and interests: END-MEANS

The European Union’s policy in Libya is guided by several interconnected objectives, but its effectiveness is best assessed not by its intentions alone, but by the instruments through which those intentions have been pursued.

The first objective is to support the UN-led political process, particularly UNSMIL, on the assumption that a unified Libyan state is indispensable to regional stability. The principal instrument has been diplomatic and political support for UN mediation. This has helped sustain an international framework for dialogue, but it has not overcome Libya’s institutional division or produced national elections. The instrument has therefore been useful for maintaining a process, but insufficient for delivering a settlement.

This limitation should not, however, be mistaken for complete failure. In a fragmented political environment, preventing the collapse of dialogue is itself a form of conflict management. The EU has helped preserve an

international consensus around a Libyan-led process, even when the principal Libyan actors have resisted compromise. The difficulty is that diplomatic legitimacy does not automatically create political leverage.

The second objective is to contain regional spillover, especially tensions involving Greece and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. Here the EU has relied on diplomacy, maritime monitoring, sanctions, and engagement with regional actors. These measures have helped constrain some external activity, but they have not removed the geopolitical incentives that draw outside powers into Libya. The result is containment rather than resolution.

The EU's position is further complicated by the fact that external involvement in Libya is not uniformly destabilizing. Turkey, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Russia, and other actors have pursued competing interests, but some have also acquired substantial influence over the Libyan parties themselves. Consequently, excluding external powers is neither realistic nor necessarily desirable. The more practical objective is to prevent their competition from becoming a substitute for Libyan politics.

The EU's interests in Libya are of a permanent nature: (1) keep the oil and gas flowing (2) the migrants out (3) the islamists down. Ghaddaffi delivered on these goals, and when the regime fell the Eu didn't understand initially how to proceed while the UK and France and to a lesser extent Italy disengaged.

The third objective is to accommodate Khalifa Haftar within a viable political settlement. This reflects the assumption that no durable peace can be achieved by excluding one of Libya's principal centres of military and political power. Diplomatic engagement with Haftar and his external supporters has consequently become necessary. Yet accommodation carries its own danger: engagement may normalize the political role of military power and weaken incentives for institutional compromise.

The effectiveness of this instrument therefore depends on conditionality. Engagement can be constructive if it brings powerful actors into a political framework; it becomes counterproductive if political recognition is detached from commitments to civilian institutions, elections, and restraint. The EU must consequently distinguish between **engaging an actor because he is influential and endorsing the manner in which that influence was acquired or exercised**.

The EU's broader interests further complicate these objectives. It seeks secure oil supplies, reduced irregular migration, and the containment of armed and Islamist actors regarded as security threats. These interests have produced a mixture of economic engagement, migration cooperation, border-management measures, and security assistance. Their record is uneven. Oil flows have continued but remain vulnerable to political disruption; migration has been managed rather than resolved; and security cooperation has reduced some immediate risks without addressing the political fragmentation that sustains them.

Migration policy illustrates the dilemma particularly clearly. Cooperation with Libyan authorities may reduce departures or improve European control over migration routes, but it does not resolve the conditions that generate displacement. Nor does migration cooperation necessarily strengthen the legitimacy of the Libyan state. Indeed, if assistance is channelled primarily through fragmented security structures, it can reinforce precisely the institutional divisions that European diplomacy seeks to overcome.

Economic engagement presents a similar contradiction. Libya's oil wealth gives the EU a strong incentive to preserve production and exports, yet treating energy stability as an overriding objective can encourage short-term accommodation with competing political authorities. Energy security therefore needs to be understood as an outcome of political stability, rather than as a substitute for it.

EUBAM Libya should be evaluated as a capacity-building mission rather than a direct security operation. Its main objective is to strengthen Libya's border-management institutions and their ability to combat smuggling, trafficking, terrorism, and irregular migration. The Mission has provided training, technical assistance, strategic advice, and support for border infrastructure. It has also improved coordination between Libyan customs, police, coastguard, and border authorities. These achievements demonstrate progress in institutional capacity. However, EUBAM cannot directly control Libya's borders or enforce Libyan law because of its non-

executive mandate. Its effectiveness therefore depends on fragmented Libyan institutions that often lack unified authority. Persistent smuggling, trafficking, and irregular migration show that improved technical capacity has not yet produced effective national border control. The Mission's impact is also uneven across Libya, particularly in the south where porous borders and weak state presence create major challenges. EUBAM has therefore been more successful in **building capacity than transforming the security environment**. Its contribution to migration management is similarly limited because it cannot address the wider political and economic networks sustaining irregular migration. Overall, EUBAM has achieved **partial effectiveness**: it has strengthened institutions and coordination, but durable border security ultimately depends on broader political and security-sector consolidation in Libya.[1]

To strengthen EUBAM Libya, the EU should move from primarily technical assistance toward a more **outcome-based and regionally differentiated approach**. The Mission should strengthen its presence in Fezzan and other weakly governed border areas, where smuggling and trafficking networks are particularly resilient such as vis-a-vis Haftar-controlled borders sectors of Libya with Egypt. It should improve coordination between Libyan border guards, customs, police, coastguard, and judicial authorities rather than training institutions in isolation. EUBAM should also establish clearer performance indicators, such as improved border-crossing management, information sharing, investigations, and sustained use of EU-supported equipment. Assistance should be tied to institutional accountability and respect for human rights, particularly in migration management. Greater cooperation with municipalities and legitimate local authorities could improve local ownership while avoiding dependence on individual armed groups. Finally, EUBAM should be more closely coordinated with UNSMIL and other EU instruments so that border management contributes to the broader objective of **building unified, accountable Libyan state institutions** rather than simply containing migration and cross-border crime.

Security policy faces the same structural constraint. Counter-terrorism and border management can suppress immediate threats, but they cannot create a unified security sector where political authority remains divided. Security assistance is consequently most effective when it supports institutional unification rather than merely strengthening individual armed actors.

The central weakness of EU policy is therefore not the absence of objectives, but the **distance between instruments and outcomes**. Diplomatic support has preserved the peace process without producing political unification. Regional engagement has moderated external competition without eliminating it. Engagement with Haftar has recognized political realities without resolving the question of military power. Migration and security instruments have addressed symptoms more effectively than causes.

There is also an important problem of competing priorities. The EU simultaneously seeks democratic legitimacy, migration control, energy security, counter-terrorism, and regional stability. These objectives do not always point in the same direction. A policy designed to secure immediate migration cooperation may favour actors whose legitimacy is contested; a policy designed to preserve oil production may discourage confrontation with powerful elites; and a policy designed to promote elections may threaten actors whose cooperation is necessary to maintain short-term stability.

The EU should therefore avoid assuming that **stability and democratization are automatically synonymous**. In the short term, an imperfect political accommodation may prevent renewed conflict; in the long term, however, institutionalizing political competition through legitimate elections remains necessary to prevent temporary accommodation from becoming permanent fragmentation.

Nor should elections be treated as an end in themselves. Holding elections without agreement on the constitutional framework, security arrangements, and acceptance of results could merely relocate the conflict from the battlefield to the ballot box. European policy should therefore support elections as part of a broader process of institutional settlement, rather than as a deadline detached from political realities.

[1] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eubam-libya/eubam-libya-european-union-border-assistance-mission-libya-civilian-mission_und_en

The EU should consequently pursue neither disengagement nor unconditional engagement. Its policy should instead be organized around a clearer hierarchy: support the UN-led political process, coordinate more closely with regional powers, engage all actors capable of affecting a settlement, and attach diplomatic and economic incentives to concrete progress toward institutional unification and elections.

Its leverage should also be used more strategically. Sanctions, diplomatic recognition, economic assistance, migration cooperation, and security support are more effective when they reinforce one another. At present, these instruments can sometimes pull in different directions, allowing Libyan actors to benefit from European cooperation without making equivalent political concessions.

The essential lesson is simple. **Libya's instability cannot be managed indefinitely through separate instruments aimed at separate symptoms.** Political fragmentation, external intervention, migration, economic insecurity, and armed competition are parts of the same problem. The effectiveness of European policy will therefore depend less on adding new instruments than on making existing ones serve a coherent political settlement.

The EU's task is not to choose between stability and political transformation, but to sequence them intelligently: first preventing renewed war, then strengthening institutions capable of containing political competition, and ultimately supporting a legitimate transfer of authority through elections. Its influence will remain limited, but a coherent policy can ensure that European instruments no longer work at cross-purposes. In Libya, as elsewhere, the measure of diplomacy is not the number of initiatives undertaken, but whether those initiatives gradually make political compromise more advantageous than continued division.

ROADMAP UNSMILS

The **Libyan Political Roadmap**, introduced by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), represents a strategic framework aimed at addressing the country's prolonged political crisis. This roadmap is structured around three foundational pillars: establishing a technically sound and politically viable electoral framework, unifying state institutions through the formation of a new government, and initiating a structured dialogue encompassing governance, economic, security, and reconciliation issues. These elements are designed to operate concurrently, ensuring a comprehensive approach to Libya's multifaceted challenges.

A critical component of this roadmap is the emphasis on **inclusive dialogue**. UNSMIL has committed to engaging a broad spectrum of Libyan society, including political parties, civil society, academia, and marginalized groups such as women, youth, and persons with disabilities. This inclusive approach aims to foster a national consensus, ensuring that the political process reflects the diverse perspectives and needs of the Libyan populace.

However, the roadmap's success hinges on several factors. The **unification of institutions** is paramount, as Libya's fragmented political landscape has been a significant impediment to progress. The establishment of a unified government with a clear mandate and limited timeframe is essential to create an environment conducive to credible elections. Additionally, the **operational readiness of the High National Elections Commission (HNEC)** must be prioritized, addressing any existing vacancies and ensuring financial independence to facilitate the electoral process.

The roadmap also acknowledges the necessity of **security sector reform**. The presence of armed groups and militias has exacerbated instability, making it imperative to restructure and unify military and security institutions under a single, recognized authority. This restructuring is vital to restore order and build public trust in state institutions.

Moreover, the roadmap incorporates **safeguards** to mitigate potential delays or obstructions. UNSMIL has indicated its readiness to take necessary measures, including seeking the support of the UN Security Council, to ensure the process remains on track and that the aspirations of the Libyan people are realized.

The UNSMIL Roadmap is fundamentally premised on the assumption that conducting procedurally sound elections will be sufficient to unify Libya's fragmented institutions. However, this view is overly simplistic and ultimately flawed. It misreads the complex socio-political realities on the ground, where consensus on the political endgame is neither shared by all stakeholders nor accepted by the true power brokers who operate within Libya's deeply rooted tribal and social structures. The Libyan people are not merely seeking elections for their own sake; rather, they aspire to modernize the relationship between the state and society, strengthen governance, and achieve a stable, secure, and united Libya on their own terms. Crucially, this vision is not about wholesale Westernization but about gradual, organic transformation that respects the rhythm, traditions, and dynamics of Libyan society. Within this context, a new tribal coalition is emerging as a foundational element underpinning power, signaling that any sustainable political solution must engage with these evolving local realities rather than impose externally conceived models.A successful roadmap for Libya requires a comprehensive, inclusive, and results-driven strategy balancing political, security, economic, and social dimensions. Broad national ownership and coordinated international support are indispensable to ensure sustainable peace, effective governance, and economic recovery. This memo outlines critical pillars and actionable recommendations essential for Libya's transition toward stability and development.

The fact that UNSMIL was not established as a Chapter VII enforcement mission reflects the international community's reluctance to assume direct responsibility for Libya's internal political and military conflict. UNSMIL was created primarily as a political mission intended to facilitate mediation, institution-building, elections, human-rights monitoring, and a Libyan-led political settlement. Although the Security Council has adopted separate Chapter VII measures concerning Libya, including sanctions and the arms embargo, it did not give UNSMIL the broad coercive authority associated with a peace-enforcement operation.

This distinction was particularly important because Libya lacked a single, uncontested national authority. After the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, competing governments, militias, tribal and regional networks, and foreign-backed factions exercised power. Giving UNSMIL Chapter VII enforcement powers could therefore have required the UN to decide which Libyan actors should be compelled to surrender territory or authority. Rather than becoming an armed party to the conflict, UNSMIL was intended to remain an intermediary capable of negotiating with the various Libyan factions.

The absence of a Chapter VII mandate can therefore be understood as part of a broader strategy of limited international involvement. The UN and Western governments were willing to impose external constraints, such as sanctions and the arms embargo, and to conduct limited counterterrorism operations, but they were reluctant to undertake the much more consequential task of enforcing a political settlement inside Libya. In this sense, the limited mandate of UNSMIL reflected not simply a legal choice but a political calculation: without a legitimate and broadly accepted Libyan government, coercive international intervention risked making the UN itself a participant in Libya's civil conflict.

This also helps explain the cautious approach of the United States and the Pentagon. Rather than intervening directly to determine which Libyan faction would prevail, Western governments generally sought to encourage Libyan actors to reach a political settlement themselves. The result was a paradox: the international community possessed significant coercive instruments under Chapter VII, but was unwilling to use them to impose a comprehensive political order. UNSMIL was consequently left primarily with the tools of mediation and diplomacy, while the underlying competition between Libyan armed and political factions continued.

In summary, while the Libyan Political Roadmap presents a comprehensive and inclusive strategy to address the country's challenges, its success will depend on the genuine commitment of all Libyan stakeholders, the effective implementation of reforms, and sustained international support. The path to stability and unity is complex, but with concerted efforts, Libya can aspire to a peaceful and long-term democratic future. Libya's vast oil wealth undeniably presents a genuine opportunity for national reconstruction and development, making a stable and prosperous future a real possibility. However, this potential remains unrealized for now. The manipulation and gerrymandering of electoral processes—a phenomenon all too familiar across the Arab world and under authoritarian regimes—pose significant obstacles. These practices undermine the legitimacy

of elections and entrench existing power structures, preventing the emergence of truly representative governance and delaying the country's progress toward genuine political unity and stability.

The approach of the European Union and the broader international community toward Libya often appears marked by a troubling combination of naivety and inefficacy. Despite their extensive resources and strategic interests in the region, these actors have frequently failed to fully grasp the complex socio-political fabric and deep-rooted divisions that define Libya's internal dynamics. This has led to policies that are overly simplistic, inadequately coordinated, and detached from the realities on the ground. The emphasis on procedural milestones, such as organizing elections without addressing foundational issues of governance, security, and social cohesion, reflects a shallow understanding of Libya's intricate power structures and local contexts. Consequently, international efforts risk exacerbating instability rather than fostering sustainable peace and reconstruction. This gap between ambition and execution underscores the need for a more informed, patient, and context-sensitive engagement strategy that aligns with the aspirations and agency of Libyan stakeholders. Moreover, Libya's vital oil exports remain disrupted, and the coffers of the Central Bank are depleted, exacerbating the country's economic fragility. Behind-the-scenes diplomatic efforts have been necessary to prevent Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis from raising the Libyan issue at the European Council, an intervention that subsequently prompted renewed engagement by Athens with Tripoli's authorities. This delicate interplay highlights the fragile and often reactive nature of international diplomacy surrounding Libya. In light of these complexities and economic pressures, a critical question emerges: how should the international community and Libyan stakeholders proceed to break the cycle of instability and chart a viable path forward?

The clearest judgment on UNSMIL rests on a distinction between the political roadmap of the moment, the Security Council mandate that authorizes the Mission, and what Libya and UNSMIL have actually brought to pass. These are related, but they are not one and the same. UNSMIL was created in 2011 to assist Libya in security, political dialogue, reconciliation, constitution-making, elections, institution-building, human rights, and economic recovery. Its character has always been facilitative rather than executive. It may convene, persuade, advise, and assist; it cannot itself impose a constitution, create a legitimate government, or compel Libya to hold elections.

Table

Period	Roadmap	Result
2011–2015	Post-Gaddafi transition toward a constitutional and democratic state	Political and electoral processes were established, but fragmentation returned to conflict.
2015–2020	Libyan Political Agreement and Government of National Accord	A national framework emerged, but rival institutions and armed groups endured.
2020–2021	Ceasefire and LPDF Roadmap, with elections planned for 24 December 2021	The ceasefire held and a Government of National Unity was formed; national elections were postponed.
2022–2023	Constitutional and electoral settlement through the 6+6 process	Electoral laws advanced, but the political agreement needed for national elections did not.
2023–2024	Bathily initiative and institutional dialogue	Consultation continued, but the central deadlock remained; Bathily resigned in April 2024.
2024–2025	Advisory Committee and new political initiative	Recommendations produced the foundation for a new UNSMIL roadmap, while municipal elections offered tangible progress.
2025–2026	Electoral framework, institutional unification, and national elections	The process remains incomplete; the principal Libyan institutions have made little meaningful progress on the first stages.

The essential distinction, then, is between a roadmap and a mandate. A roadmap declares what ought to happen; a mandate defines what UNSMIL is empowered to do. The 2020–21 roadmap could set December 2021 as the date for elections, but it could not give UNSMIL the authority to settle disputes over electoral law, candidate eligibility, or the distribution of political power. The same limitation governs the present roadmap. UNSMIL possesses influence, legitimacy, mediation, and technical expertise; it does not possess sovereignty.

This explains much of the apparent contradiction in its record. The Mission may be judged by political outcomes that it lacks the power to impose.

The strongest achievement has been in security. The October 2020 ceasefire remains UNSMIL's clearest success. The 5+5 Joint Military Commission reduced the danger of renewed nationwide war and created a framework for military dialogue. Yet the achievement remains incomplete: Libya has no fully unified military, foreign forces and mercenaries have not been entirely removed, and the state has not secured an uncontested monopoly over force. The violence of 2025 exposed how fragile the settlement remains.

The electoral record is more paradoxical. UNSMIL has provided substantial technical assistance to the High National Elections Commission, supported voter registration and electoral procedures, and helped advance municipal elections. Yet the central prize—national parliamentary and presidential elections—has remained beyond reach. The failure lies less in the mechanics of voting than in the politics surrounding them: constitutional authority, electoral law, candidate eligibility, sequencing, and the fear of losing power.

Institutional unification remains the deepest unresolved problem. Libya's competing centres of authority have repeatedly failed to agree on the rules by which political power should be transferred. Some institutions, including the Central Bank, have moved toward greater coordination, but the fundamental division of political and security authority persists.

UNSMIL's record in human rights and the economy is similarly mixed. It has monitored abuses, supported dialogue, and encouraged institutional reform, while its economic work has helped bring Libyan actors together. Yet arbitrary detention, abuses against migrants, weak accountability, opaque expenditure, and dependence on oil revenues reveal problems that mediation alone cannot cure.

Since 2025, UNSMIL itself has undergone reform, placing greater emphasis on the political settlement, institutional unification, and the connection between political and security tracks. The Mission has also strengthened its presence in eastern Libya. These changes acknowledge an old lesson: a mission cannot merely repeat a roadmap when the political conditions beneath it have changed.

The record may therefore be stated simply:

Objective	**Assessment**
Cease large-scale conflict	Partially achieved
Preserve the 2020 ceasefire	Largely achieved, but fragile
Remove foreign forces and mercenaries	Incomplete
Create a unified executive	Temporarily achieved, then fractured
Unify state institutions	Not achieved
Establish an electoral framework	Partially achieved
Hold national elections	Not achieved
Conduct municipal elections	Concrete progress
Strengthen electoral institutions	Substantial technical progress
Improve human-rights protection	Limited
Advance economic coordination	Some progress, without structural settlement
Reform UNSMIL itself	Under implementation

The larger judgment is therefore neither that UNSMIL has failed nor that it has succeeded. It has been more successful at containing conflict than at completing political transition. It has preserved dialogue where war might otherwise have prevailed, strengthened electoral and institutional capacity, and helped sustain the ceasefire. But it has not overcome the central fact of Libyan politics: those who possess power have repeatedly lacked the incentive to establish rules that might cause them to lose it.

Thus the enduring gap between roadmap and reality is not simply a defect of UN planning. It is the consequence of a mission designed to facilitate a Libyan settlement without possessing the authority to make Libya accept one. UNSMIL can open the road; it cannot make the travellers walk it. It has no authority, it is a facilitator.

Wider implications of semi-failure of the UNSMIL Roadmap

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) has repeatedly sought to address Libya's protracted political deadlock through a combination of electoral preparation, institutional unification, inclusive political dialogue and security-sector reform. The logic of this approach is sound: Libya requires legitimate political institutions, a functioning state and an electoral mechanism capable of renewing political authority. Yet the central weakness of the roadmap is that it can appear to treat **institutional reconstruction as the cause of political consolidation**, when in Libya the causal relationship often runs in the opposite direction. Institutions will remain fragile if the underlying distribution of political, military, economic and regional power remains unresolved.

The key problem is therefore not simply whether UNSMIL can design a technically credible electoral or constitutional process. It is whether the process can alter the incentives of actors who currently benefit from fragmentation. Libya's political order remains shaped by competing centres of authority, armed groups, regional identities, tribal and communal networks, informal economies and external patrons. As Kader Abderrahim argues in his analysis of Libya's geopolitics, the post-Gaddafi period exposed the persistence of local and tribal affiliations beneath the apparent centrality of the former regime, while militias, foreign sponsorship and geopolitical competition subsequently became intertwined with those domestic structures.

The roadmap therefore faces a fundamental **implementation gap**. Elections, institutional reunification and constitutional reform can produce formal legitimacy, but formal legitimacy will not automatically translate into effective authority. A government elected without credible security guarantees may remain dependent on armed actors; an institutionally unified state that does not resolve regional grievances may reproduce opposition; and a national electoral process that ignores local networks may generate winners who cannot govern outside the political centre.

I. The central problem: Libya has overlapping cleavages

The roadmap should begin from the recognition that Libya's divisions are not simply East versus West. Political, institutional, ideological, military, economic, regional and communal cleavages **overlap and reinforce one another**.

Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan represent different historical and geopolitical experiences of the Libyan state. Tripolitania contains the principal political institutions and much of the country's population and economic activity. Cyrenaica has developed powerful autonomous political and military structures and possesses a strong historical consciousness of eastern political distinctiveness. Fezzan has experienced persistent marginalization while occupying a strategically important position connecting Libya to Niger, Chad and the wider Sahel.

The three regions therefore need to be treated not as administrative units but as **political constituencies with different security and economic interests**.

This is reinforced by communal and tribal structures. The importance of groups such as the Warfalla, Magarha, Zintani, Misratan networks, Tuareg, Tebu and Amazigh cannot be reduced to the idea that Libya is simply a

"tribal society." Tribal affiliations overlap with cities, armed groups, ideological positions, economic networks and political organizations. They can facilitate mobilization, mediation and social protection, but they can also become channels through which national agreements are contested locally.

UNSMIL therefore needs to distinguish between **tribalism as a political identity, tribes as social institutions, and armed groups that happen to recruit through tribal or communal networks**. Treating all three as the same phenomenon would produce a distorted policy.

II. The missing question of regime survival

The roadmap also needs to address a basic question that is often hidden behind constitutional and electoral language: **what happens to political and military elites if they lose?**

In a conventional democracy, losing an election does not normally threaten the physical or economic survival of the losing side. In Libya, however, political defeat can potentially mean loss of access to state resources, patronage networks, armed protection and institutional influence. This creates a powerful incentive to reject electoral outcomes that threaten established interests.

The result is a classic **security dilemma of political transition**. Each actor has an incentive to retain armed capacity because it cannot be certain that its rivals will respect the rules after gaining power.

UNSMIL therefore needs to incorporate a credible **regime-survival guarantee into the transition**. This should not mean granting permanent immunity or preserving factional rule. It means establishing predictable rules under which political actors can lose office without becoming existentially vulnerable.

A transitional power-sharing mechanism could provide representation for the major political and regional constituencies while constitutional and electoral institutions are consolidated. Such arrangements should be explicitly temporary and accompanied by sunset clauses so that power-sharing does not permanently institutionalize factionalism.

The fundamental objective should be to transform the calculation from **"if I lose, I lose everything"** to **"I can lose political power and remain politically and physically secure."**

III. Tribal and regional representation

The roadmap's commitment to inclusivity is insufficient if inclusion remains primarily a matter of inviting actors to consultations. Libya requires **institutionalized inclusion**.

A standing Regional and Communal Advisory Council could therefore accompany the national political process. It should include representatives from Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan alongside major tribal, municipal, ethnic and minority constituencies.

Its role should not be to replace parliament or the elected government. Rather, it should provide a mechanism through which agreements reached at the national level can be tested against local political realities before implementation.

This is particularly important because Libya's social order cannot be understood exclusively through formal institutions. Fontaine, Bisson and Bisson's work on Libya emphasizes the country's geographical and social diversity, while Christiane Souriau's study of women's economies illustrates the importance of household, informal and social economic structures that are largely invisible in conventional state-centric analysis. These perspectives suggest that institutional reconstruction must be connected to the social structures through which Libyans actually organize economic and social life.

The objective should therefore be **not to replace national institutions with tribal structures, but to connect national institutions to locally legitimate structures**.

IV. Democracy must provide security as well as legitimacy

UNSMIL's emphasis on elections is understandable, but elections should not be treated as the automatic solution to Libya's legitimacy problem.

An election creates a winner and losers. In a deeply divided security environment, the crucial question is whether the losers will accept the result and whether the winner has sufficient institutional and coercive capacity to implement it.

Democracy therefore needs to be presented not merely as a procedural mechanism but as a **system of guarantees against domination**.

A Libyan democratic compact could combine electoral representation with regional safeguards, proportional representation and a second chamber representing the regions. This would allow the principle of "one citizen, one vote" to coexist with institutional protections for Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

The democratic narrative should also be culturally and historically grounded rather than presented as an external template. Concepts of consultation, consensus and **shura** can provide culturally resonant language for participation and political accountability. But this should complement rather than replace universal political rights and constitutional democracy.

The objective is to make democracy meaningful as **a mechanism through which different Libyan communities can participate without fearing permanent domination by another community or region**.

V. The sequencing problem: security cannot be postponed

The most serious weakness in the sequencing of political and security reform is the assumption that elections and institutional consolidation can advance while the coercive landscape remains fragmented.

The fundamental problem is simple: **who enforces the outcome?**

If rival armed groups retain autonomous command structures, an election can change political authority without changing coercive authority. A newly elected government may therefore remain dependent upon the very armed actors it is supposed to bring under state control.

This creates a dangerous mismatch between **constitutional authority and effective power**.

UNSMIL should therefore adopt a principle of **parallel sequencing** rather than simply "politics first" or "security first." Political negotiations and security-sector reform should advance simultaneously, with each stage of institutional consolidation linked to measurable security benchmarks.

These benchmarks could include verified ceasefire compliance, establishment of joint security mechanisms, registration and mapping of armed formations, agreement on command structures, weapons-control arrangements and progressive DDR.

Immediate nationwide disarmament would be unrealistic and potentially destabilizing. The objective should instead be gradual movement from **rival armed autonomy toward coordinated security structures and eventually unified civilian-controlled forces**.

VI. Military integration must not become militia integration

Security-sector reform requires particular caution. Simply incorporating entire armed groups into the national military risks transforming factional forces into officially sanctioned national institutions.

The principle should therefore be **individual integration rather than automatic factional integration**.

Combatants who meet professional standards could enter reformed military or police institutions. Others should receive credible civilian reintegration opportunities, including employment, vocational training and education.

At the same time, national forces need common training, unified doctrine, transparent promotion procedures and civilian oversight.

A Joint National Security Commission could provide an intermediate mechanism linking eastern, western and southern security structures. Initially, it could focus on deconfliction, border security, counterterrorism and protection of critical infrastructure. Over time, it could provide the institutional bridge toward a unified command structure.

VII. Economic power must be incorporated into the roadmap

Institutional unification cannot succeed while economic institutions remain instruments of political competition.

Oil revenues, public-sector employment, foreign currency, state contracts and control over infrastructure all provide resources through which political and military actors reproduce their power.

This is why economic governance should be treated as a **security and political issue**, not simply an economic reform programme.

The National Oil Corporation, Central Bank and other strategic institutions need governance arrangements that reduce factional capture. At the same time, regions must have credible guarantees that national resource distribution will not become a mechanism for permanent central domination.

A transparent revenue-sharing mechanism should provide predictable national funding while guaranteeing regional and municipal development allocations.

This is especially important for Fezzan, where grievances about marginalization intersect with control over oil fields, border routes and local economic networks.

VIII. Power-sharing as a mechanism to address Libya's overlapping cleavages

Power-sharing should be placed at the centre of any revised UNSMIL strategy because Libya's conflict cannot be reduced to a competition between two governments. The underlying conflict is produced by overlapping political, institutional, regional, communal, military and economic cleavages. A viable settlement therefore needs to distribute authority in a way that reduces the fear of domination while gradually transferring power from factions to legitimate national institutions.

The objective should not be to create a permanent system in which every institution is divided between rival factions. That would institutionalize fragmentation. Instead, Libya needs transitional power-sharing: temporary guarantees that make cooperation safer than continued conflict, followed by a gradual transition toward normal electoral competition.

Political cleavage: power-sharing to reduce winner-takes-all politics

The central political problem is the fear that control of the national government provides one faction with the ability to exclude its rivals from political, economic and security resources.

A transitional executive should therefore be constructed around cross-regional representation, with senior positions distributed between the principal political constituencies of western, eastern and southern Libya. The presidency should require broad cross-regional legitimacy, while the cabinet should reflect the country's territorial and political diversity.

Major decisions concerning constitutional reform, elections, national security, oil revenues and foreign military agreements should require a qualified majority rather than allowing a temporary political majority to impose decisions on the other regions.

This should be accompanied by a clear sunset clause. The purpose is to reassure actors that participation does not require surrendering their political existence, while ensuring that temporary power-sharing does not become permanent factional government.

Regional cleavage: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan

The regional cleavage requires more than symbolic representation. Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan need institutional guarantees that national unity will not become domination by one region.

A bicameral legislature could address this problem. A lower chamber would represent citizens according to population, while an upper chamber would represent the three regions on an equal or near-equal basis.

This would combine democratic equality with territorial protection.

Tripolitania would retain its role as the principal national political centre, but would not be able to monopolize national decision-making. Cyrenaica would receive guarantees against permanent western dominance. Fezzan would gain institutional protection against marginalization and a direct role in decisions concerning development, borders and resource distribution.

This model would redefine unity as shared sovereignty rather than centralized authority.

Communal and tribal cleavage: inclusion without tribalizing the state

Tribal and communal networks should be incorporated into the settlement without allowing them to become parallel sovereign institutions.

UNSMIL could establish a National Communal and Regional Council containing representatives of major tribal constituencies, municipalities, Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu communities, women, youth and civil society.

Its function should be consultative and mediating rather than legislative. It could review major political agreements, facilitate local reconciliation and provide early warning when national agreements risk rejection at the local level.

This is important because political agreements negotiated exclusively among national elites may lack implementation capacity outside the main urban centres.

The objective should therefore be:

national institutions + local legitimacy, rather than national institutions versus local structures.

Military cleavage: power-sharing must include security guarantees

The military cleavage is arguably the most important because political power cannot be separated from coercive power.

No political faction is likely to accept an electoral settlement if it believes that losing office will leave it militarily vulnerable. Conversely, no national government can become effective while major armed groups retain autonomous chains of command.

Power-sharing should therefore initially extend into the security sphere through a Joint National Security Council, incorporating senior representatives from the eastern, western and southern security establishments under civilian authority.

Its initial purpose would not be to create an immediate unified army. It would establish communication, prevent escalation, coordinate border security and protect critical infrastructure.

This should then develop into a phased process of professionalization, DDR and integration. Individuals who meet national professional standards could enter the armed forces or police, while others would receive civilian reintegration packages.

The principle should be integration of individuals, not automatic integration of militias as corporate entities.

Economic cleavage: share rents before expecting political trust

Political power-sharing will remain fragile if the economic foundations of power remain contested.

Oil revenues should therefore form part of the national compact. The principle should be that oil and other strategic resources are national assets, while their distribution must provide predictable benefits to all regions.

A transparent fiscal formula could guarantee national government funding while establishing regional and municipal transfers. Fezzan, in particular, requires meaningful development guarantees because political marginalization is closely connected to economic marginalization.

The Central Bank and National Oil Corporation should be protected from factional capture through transparent governance arrangements and cross-regional institutional safeguards.

Economic power-sharing would therefore reduce the incentive to capture national political institutions simply to control state rents.

Institutional cleavage: power-sharing across the state

Institutional fragmentation requires a gradual reunification rather than simply declaring that parallel institutions have ceased to exist.

The Central Bank, National Oil Corporation, judiciary, civil service and other national institutions should be progressively reunified through joint governance arrangements in which eastern, western and southern stakeholders have confidence.

This is particularly important because institutions themselves have become part of the conflict. Whoever controls an institution can influence public salaries, foreign exchange, oil revenues, contracts and state resources.

The objective should be to transform institutions from factional assets into nationally protected public goods.

Ideological cleavage: prevent identity competition from becoming existential

Ideological differences should not be allowed to become a proxy for political exclusion.

The settlement should guarantee political participation regardless of ideological orientation, provided actors accept constitutional rules and renounce violence.

Rather than constructing the political system around a single ideological identity, UNSMIL should emphasize a shared national framework based on sovereignty, citizenship, consultation, political participation and rule of law.

The concept of shura can be used as culturally resonant language for consultation, but it should complement—not replace—constitutional democracy and equal citizenship.

External cleavage: power-sharing must also manage foreign patrons

Libya's internal power-sharing cannot be separated from external power competition. Different Libyan actors have developed relationships with different foreign governments, and these relationships can provide security guarantees, weapons, financing and diplomatic support.

A domestic settlement should therefore be accompanied by an external guarantee mechanism.

Egypt, Türkiye, the UAE, Russia, European states and other influential actors should be encouraged to commit to non-interference in Libya's political transition, respect the electoral outcome and gradually shift military and economic relationships from individual factions toward national institutions.

The strategic objective is to change the structure of external involvement from:

foreign patron → Libyan faction → fragmented state

to:

foreign partner → legitimate Libyan institution → sovereign state.

The key principle: power-sharing should be transitional

The greatest danger is that power-sharing itself becomes the permanent political system.

If every ministry, security institution and public resource is permanently allocated according to region or faction, the settlement will reproduce the divisions it is intended to overcome.

The arrangement should therefore contain three stages.

The first stage should provide guaranteed inclusion so that the major actors feel sufficiently secure to participate.

The second should produce institutional convergence, progressively transferring authority from factional structures to national institutions.

The third should establish normal democratic competition, in which parties compete for power without representing permanently armed regional or tribal blocs.

The logic is therefore:

security guarantees → transitional power-sharing → institutional convergence → competitive democracy.

Overall strategic effect

This approach directly addresses Libya's overlapping cleavages rather than attempting to resolve them independently.

Political power-sharing reduces the fear of political extinction.

Regional power-sharing reassures Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan that unity does not mean domination.

Communal representation connects national institutions to local legitimacy.

Military power-sharing reduces the security dilemma.

Economic power-sharing reduces incentives to capture the state.

Institutional power-sharing builds confidence in national institutions.

External guarantees reduce the ability of foreign patrons to sustain competing centres of power.

The central principle for UNSMIL should therefore be:

Libya does not first need to eliminate its cleavages in order to become unified. It needs institutions capable of managing those cleavages without allowing them to become violent or permanently exclusionary.

The purpose of power-sharing is consequently not to freeze Libya's fragmentation, but to create the security and confidence necessary to move from fragmented power toward shared institutions and, ultimately, a unified democratic state.

The strategic shift should therefore be from:

foreign patron → Libyan faction

toward:

foreign partner → Libyan institution.

IX. Final recommendations for a Libya-led political transition

The recommendations of the advisory committee of 7th June 2026 for a Libya-owed end to a state of permanent transitionalism requires the distillment of the process into a more coherent political settlement than the sheer number of individual proposals suggests.[2]

First, establish one executive authority. Libya needs a single, nationally recognised executive with a clearly defined and strictly time-limited mandate. The central political problem is not simply the absence of elections but the existence of competing centres of authority that benefit from the continuation of the transitional order. The new authority should therefore be constituted specifically to **end the transition, not administer another transition**. UNSMIL's current roadmap likewise places a unified government at the centre of the sequence toward elections.

Second, make institutional unification the immediate political objective. The executive, legislature, central financial institutions, security institutions and other sovereign state bodies should operate under one national framework. Institutional unification should precede or accompany elections rather than be postponed indefinitely until after them. The Structured Dialogue explicitly connects unified institutions with credible elections.

Third, reform the electoral framework without allowing electoral-law disputes to become another permanent veto. The Advisory Committee recommended, among other things, separating presidential and parliamentary electoral outcomes, clarifying eligibility rules, strengthening electoral dispute resolution, reconstituting the High National Elections Commission (HNEC), and guaranteeing its financial independence.

Fourth, create an electoral sequence rather than an electoral fantasy. Presidential and legislative elections need not be treated as a single indivisible event. A sequential process could reduce the risk that disagreement over one election paralyses the entire transition. The Advisory Committee specifically identified sequential elections as a technically viable option.

Fifth, impose an absolute temporal limit on the transitional authority. The essential lesson of Libya since 2011 is that transitional institutions acquire interests in their own continuation. The new settlement therefore needs a legally enforceable sunset clause, explicit benchmarks and an international monitoring mechanism.

[2] https://unsmil.unmissions.org/en/document-library/structured-dialogue-final-report

The Structured Dialogue's governance recommendations reportedly envisage an 18–24-month transition without extension, while UNSMIL's broader roadmap envisages completion within approximately 12–18 months.

Sixth, separate government from candidacy. Transitional office-holders should not be able to convert control over state resources into an electoral advantage. This is particularly important because the credibility of the eventual elections depends on preventing the transitional executive from becoming an electoral machine.

Seventh, subordinate armed power to the state. Security-sector unification should proceed alongside political unification. The objective should not initially be an unrealistic overnight dissolution of every armed formation, but the progressive establishment of one national chain of command, unified security institutions, common standards and state control over coercive authority.

Eighth, establish economic unification as part of the political settlement. The parallel expenditure structures and fragmented control over public resources are not merely economic problems; they reproduce political division. A unified budget, transparent public-finance system, equitable allocation of oil revenues and independent oversight are therefore prerequisites for durable political settlement.

Ninth, embed reconciliation in the transition rather than treating it as a post-election issue. Reconciliation must address regional, communal, political and human-rights grievances while avoiding impunity for serious crimes. The Structured Dialogue deliberately treats reconciliation and human rights as one of the four pillars of the transition.

Tenth, make the transition socially rather than merely institutionally legitimate. Women, youth, civil society, cultural components and marginalised groups must participate meaningfully in the process. UNSMIL's mandate explicitly calls for their effective participation in the democratic transition.

The decisive recommendation

The most important conclusion, however, is **political rather than procedural**:

Libya should not negotiate another transition; it should negotiate the termination of the transition.

That means establishing a **single transitional authority with one mandate, one budget, one security framework and one electoral deadline**, after which its authority expires automatically.

The 7 June recommendations therefore provide the basis for moving from what might be called **"transition management" to "transition termination."** This is consistent with the fundamental demand identified by UNSMIL in its consultations: Libyans want legitimate leadership, one government, unified institutions and accountable governance rather than another indefinite interim arrangement.

The crucial political bargain should consequently be:

unified executive → institutional unification → electoral framework → security and economic guarantees → national elections → transfer of authority → permanent constitutional order.

The international community's role should be to **guarantee this sequence, not govern Libya through it**. UNSMIL should mediate, monitor and impose political costs on obstruction through the Security Council, while the actual settlement must remain Libyan-owned. Its current roadmap explicitly provides safeguards against actors attempting to delay or derail the process.

In that sense, 7 June 2026 should be treated as the beginning of the end of Libya's transitional era—not the beginning of another transition.

The UNSMIL roadmap should therefore be evaluated against measurable criteria across five dimensions of state consolidation: **political legitimacy, institutional capacity, security control, economic governance, and**

social cohesion. These dimensions should be assessed separately because progress in one does not necessarily imply progress in another, yet they remain interconnected because weakness in one can undermine gains elsewhere.

Dimension	Key evaluation criteria	Assessment
Political legitimacy	Agreement on constitutional and electoral rules; inclusive political participation; credible national elections; acceptance of electoral outcomes; reduction of competing claims to executive authority	**Weak**: electoral and political processes have advanced, but no durable settlement has resolved competing claims to legitimacy.
Institutional capacity	Functioning national institutions; cooperation between rival authorities; institutional unification; effective public administration; independence and continuity of key state bodies	**Limited**: some institutions have strengthened, but fragmentation continues to restrict the authority and effectiveness of the state.
Security control	Sustained ceasefire; unified security institutions; reduction of militia autonomy; control over territory and borders; withdrawal of foreign forces and mercenaries	**Mixed**: the 2020 ceasefire represents significant progress, but the state still lacks a unified monopoly over coercive power.
Economic governance	Unified fiscal and monetary institutions; transparent public expenditure; stable oil production; equitable distribution of revenues; reduction of parallel economic structures	**Limited**: coordination has improved in some areas, but oil revenues and public resources remain closely tied to political competition.
Social cohesion	National reconciliation; participation of marginalized groups; protection of civil society; reduced local and communal conflict; public confidence in national institutions	**Weak to moderate**: dialogue and local initiatives have produced some progress, but distrust, displacement, armed patronage, and regional divisions remain significant.

Political legitimacy should be measured not simply by whether elections are held, but by whether political actors accept the rules governing them. An election that takes place without agreement on constitutional authority or without acceptance of its result may reproduce rather than resolve the conflict. The relevant question is therefore whether the roadmap is creating a political order in which competing actors regard institutional competition as preferable to coercion.

Institutional capacity requires a different test. The existence of ministries, parliaments, commissions, and other formal bodies does not necessarily demonstrate effective state capacity. The stronger indicator is whether these institutions can exercise authority across Libya without depending on rival political centres or armed networks. On this measure, the roadmap has produced institutional processes but not yet institutional consolidation.

Security control provides perhaps the clearest distinction between containment and consolidation. The maintenance of the ceasefire is an important achievement, but a ceasefire is not equivalent to a unified security sector. The decisive indicators are whether armed groups accept civilian authority, whether security institutions operate under a common chain of command, and whether the state controls the use of force. Progress therefore remains incomplete.

Economic governance should be assessed by the extent to which Libya's considerable oil wealth is governed through unified and transparent institutions. Stable production alone is insufficient. A state may export oil while remaining politically fragmented. More meaningful indicators include unified fiscal management, transparent expenditure, predictable revenue distribution, and the reduction of opportunities for competing authorities to use public resources as instruments of political patronage.

Finally, **social cohesion** measures whether political and institutional reforms acquire legitimacy beyond elite negotiations. This includes reconciliation, inclusion of local communities and marginalized groups, protection of civil society, and public confidence in national institutions. This dimension is particularly important because an agreement among political elites may remain fragile if it does not generate broader social acceptance.

The value of this framework is that it prevents UNSMIL from being judged solely by whether it has delivered elections. **Elections are an instrument of political legitimacy, not the complete measure of state consolidation.** A Libya that holds elections but retains competing governments, autonomous armed groups, fragmented economic institutions, and weak social trust would have achieved procedural democracy without achieving durable consolidation.

Conversely, progress in security or institutional cooperation may constitute genuine achievements even before national elections occur. The 2020 ceasefire demonstrates this distinction: it did not resolve Libya's political conflict, but it materially changed the conditions under which a political settlement could be pursued.

The five dimensions should therefore be assessed both **individually and cumulatively**. Political legitimacy without security control is fragile; security without legitimacy risks entrenching coercive rule; institutional capacity without economic governance leaves the state vulnerable to capture; and economic coordination without social cohesion may merely redistribute existing patronage.

The ultimate test of the UNSMIL roadmap is consequently not whether each milestone has been formally completed, but whether the combined trajectory is moving Libya from **competitive fragmentation toward an accepted, capable, secure, and socially legitimate state**. On that broader measure, the roadmap has generated important processes and several tangible gains, but consolidation remains incomplete.

At the same time, the roadmap would be considerably stronger if its sequencing were revised around a principle of **security-enabled political consolidation**.

The initial phase should establish a credible ceasefire, local deconfliction mechanisms and guarantees of political survival.

The next phase should institutionalize regional and communal participation, establish joint security mechanisms and begin economic governance reforms.

The following phase should consolidate the constitutional and electoral framework while progressively reducing autonomous armed power.

Elections should then take place when there is sufficient political and security confidence that the result can be implemented and accepted.

The final phase should involve deeper security-sector integration, decentralization, constitutional consolidation and the transition from temporary power-sharing toward normal competitive politics.

This is different from postponing democracy until “security is solved.” Security and political reform should proceed **in parallel**, but neither should be allowed to move so far ahead of the other that it destabilizes the transition.

X. Recommended revised roadmap

The central recommendation is therefore to transform UNSMIL's roadmap from an **institution-centred transition** into an **incentive-centred state-building compact**.

Its political pillar should provide temporary power-sharing and credible guarantees against political extinction.

Its regional pillar should institutionalize representation for Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

Its communal pillar should establish structured mechanisms for tribal, municipal and minority participation.

Its security pillar should establish a phased transition from ceasefire to coordinated security structures and eventually unified civilian-controlled forces.

Its economic pillar should create transparent mechanisms for oil revenue distribution and regional development.

Its external pillar should convert foreign patronage relationships into state-to-state partnerships.

Its electoral pillar should establish genuinely competitive elections only when the political and security environment makes acceptance of results credible.

Overall assessment

The UNSMIL roadmap is **necessary but insufficient**.

Its institutional and electoral components address the visible symptoms of Libya's fragmentation, but its success ultimately depends on whether it addresses the deeper political economy of fragmentation: **regime survival, regional competition, tribal and communal structures, autonomous military power, control of resources and external patronage**.

The central lesson from Libya's history and the wider literature is that the country cannot be rebuilt simply by designing better institutions. Institutions must be embedded within the social and geopolitical realities of Libya.

The strategic objective should therefore not be simply **"one government, one army, one election."**

It should be:

One sovereign state, but with credible guarantees for Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan; one national political system, but with meaningful regional representation; one national security architecture, but with a gradual transition from rival armed structures; and one foreign policy, but without forcing Libya to sever legitimate external partnerships.

The ultimate test of UNSMIL's roadmap is consequently whether it can **change the incentives of Libyan and external actors**.

If fragmentation remains safer and more profitable than cooperation, elections and institutional mergers will remain fragile.

If UNSMIL can make cooperation safer, politically rewarding and institutionally credible, then elections can become the mechanism for consolidating the settlement rather than another trigger for competition.

The strategic challenge is therefore not merely to organize Libya's transition, but to make the unified Libyan state the most attractive political settlement available to its competing actors.

The Geopolitics of Libya: a country that must be understood from the inside out

Libya's geopolitical significance cannot be understood solely through the conventional categories of oil, migration, military bases and great-power competition. These are important, but they explain only the **external projection of power**. To understand why Libya has become so penetrable by external powers, one has to begin with the internal structure of the country: its regional identities, local loyalties, tribal and communal networks, social norms, economic practices, historical borders and the particular relationship between state and society.

This is precisely the contribution of Kader Abderrahim's *Géopolitique de la Libye*. His central insight is that the prominence of Gaddafi for more than four decades obscured underlying Libyan social and territorial structures. With his disappearance, tribal and local affiliations became more visible, while militias and foreign sponsorship became intertwined with these domestic divisions. Abderrahim consequently treats Libya not as an empty geopolitical space over which external powers compete, but as a society possessing its own internal networks that external powers enter, exploit and sometimes reinforce.

This is an important correction to conventional geopolitical analysis. Libya is not simply a weak state situated between Europe and Africa. It is a **socially differentiated space in which political authority has historically been mediated through locality, tribe, city, region and personal networks**. External actors acquire influence precisely because they can connect themselves to these existing structures.

Libya before Libya: the problem of national cohesion

Fontaine, Bisson and Bisson's *La Libye: À la découverte d'un pays* is useful here because it approaches Libya through identity, geography and society rather than beginning with the contemporary civil war. Their two-volume work treats Libyan identity and territorial itineraries while emphasizing the extraordinary contrast between the Mediterranean regions and the Saharan interior.

This perspective helps explain why the Tripolitania–Cyrenaica–Fezzan distinction should not be reduced to an administrative division. Geography has historically structured different economic orientations, social networks and relationships with neighbouring countries.

Tripolitania is connected to the Mediterranean and the political centre at Tripoli. Cyrenaica has its own historical relationship with Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean. Fezzan is oriented simultaneously toward the Mediterranean and the Saharan world, linking Libya to Niger, Chad and Sudan.

The contemporary East–West division therefore rests upon a deeper geographical reality. The post-2011 conflict did not create Libya's regional differences; it **politicized and militarized them**.

The human marketplace: when borders become economies

Contreras's *Libya: A Human Marketplace* adds another dimension that conventional geopolitical analysis often overlooks: the transformation of human mobility into an economic and security system.

The work documents how migrants, refugees and asylum seekers became vulnerable to detention, exploitation and trafficking in post-Gaddafi Libya. Its significance for geopolitics is deeper than the humanitarian dimension alone. It shows how the collapse of centralized authority can transform borders into **markets controlled by armed and local actors**.

This means that migration is not simply something happening *through* Libya. It can become part of Libya's political economy.

The border becomes a source of rent. Detention becomes a source of revenue. Smuggling routes become political assets. Armed groups gain leverage from controlling movement.

This helps explain why European attempts to “secure Libya's borders” encounter such resistance. Border control threatens not merely criminal activity but established local economic interests. Research on Libya's periphery similarly emphasizes that insecurity is embedded in local economic interests and cross-border livelihoods.

The geopolitical consequence is significant. **Europe sees a migration-security problem; Libyan local actors may see an economic and territorial resource; neighbouring states see a border-security problem; and armed groups may see an opportunity for rent extraction.** The same geographical space therefore has radically different strategic meanings for different actors.

Women and the hidden economy of Libya

Christiane Souriau's *Libye, l'économie des femmes* provides another corrective to state-centric geopolitics. Her study argues that women's economic activity cannot be understood simply through formal employment statistics. It examines the relationship between household production, market activity, marriage, property, women's work and systems of economic support.

This matters geopolitically because Libya's economy cannot be understood solely through oil.

The oil economy is the visible macroeconomic structure, but below it exists an extensive **social economy of households, kinship, informal exchange and local redistribution**. These networks influence how people survive periods of political instability and how communities reproduce themselves when formal institutions fail.

This helps explain why Libya can experience profound state fragmentation without complete social collapse. Society has alternative mechanisms of resilience.

It also complicates the assumption that political fragmentation automatically means social fragmentation. Libyans can simultaneously experience strong local and familial loyalties while maintaining a broader sense of national identity.

That distinction is essential for UNSMIL. **The weakness of the Libyan state should not be confused with the absence of Libyan society.**

Social mores and the limits of purely institutional analysis

Understanding Libya also requires attention to social norms, gender relations, family structures, honour, masculinity, religious expectations and local authority.

Souriau's work demonstrates how gender relations are embedded in economic structures, while the broader literature on Libyan society shows that the relationship between formal political institutions and social practices cannot be assumed to be straightforward.

This becomes particularly important when examining post-2011 politics. Political institutions may be designed according to liberal constitutional models, but political behaviour remains embedded in social relationships that predate those institutions.

The implication is that **institution-building cannot simply consist of importing institutional templates**. National institutions must be compatible with existing patterns of authority and legitimacy.

This is one reason why attempts to construct a centralized state without simultaneously negotiating with local networks have repeatedly encountered resistance.

Why did Libya rise in revolt?

The question of why Libya rebelled in 2011 also benefits from moving beyond the simplistic explanation of "the Arab Spring."

Bichara Khader's contemporary analysis is useful because he places Libya within the broader structural crisis of Arab authoritarianism: authoritarian government, predatory regimes, patronage, security-state hypertrophy, economic dysfunction and demands for dignity, freedom and employment. But he also stresses that Libya differed from Tunisia and Egypt because of its particular social, regional, tribal and institutional structures. (Ipemed)

The Libyan revolt was therefore simultaneously **a popular revolt against authoritarianism and a revolt mediated through particular regional and local structures**.

This helps explain its subsequent trajectory.

In Tunisia and Egypt, the existence of relatively coherent national institutions, particularly national military structures, provided mechanisms through which political transition could occur. Libya was different because the fall of Gaddafi simultaneously weakened the centre, liberated armed local actors and reopened regional and communal political competition.

The revolution therefore did not simply remove a dictator. It **removed the mechanism that had suppressed competing centres of authority without replacing it with a sufficiently legitimate national institutional order**.

This is one of the fundamental origins of today's fragmentation.

The Arab reading of Libya

There is also value in distinguishing Western and Arab interpretations of Libya. Contemporary Arab observers were often less inclined than some Western analysts to interpret Libya primarily through the lens of an imminent Islamist takeover. Research on eastern Libya, for example, notes that Arab observers emphasized the fragmented nature of Libya's Islamist movement and therefore viewed the prospect of a unified Islamist state as considerably less straightforward.

This difference matters because geopolitical analysis is itself shaped by **external interpretive frameworks**.

Western governments frequently approached Libya through categories such as democratization, terrorism, migration and humanitarian intervention. Arab observers were more likely to place greater weight on regime survival, tribal and regional structures, military power and the historical consequences of foreign intervention.

A more complete analysis needs to incorporate both perspectives without simply adopting either one.

The Chad–Libya border: Libya's southern geopolitical imagination

Bernard Lanne's *Tchad-Libye: la querelle des frontières* is particularly important because it demonstrates that Libya's southern frontier cannot be treated as a simple line on a map. The Chad–Libya border and the Aouzou dispute emerged from colonial boundary-making, competing territorial claims and postcolonial regional politics.

The Aouzou question became particularly important under Gaddafi, who challenged the existing border and intervened deeply in Chadian affairs. The dispute was eventually resolved in Chad's favour by the International Court of Justice in 1994, but its geopolitical legacy remains important.

The broader lesson is that **Fezzan cannot be understood purely as Libya's southern periphery**.

It is part of a larger Saharan geopolitical system in which borders are crossed by people, tribes, armed groups, commodities, migrants and informal economic networks.

This explains why instability in Libya can spill southward while instability in Chad, Niger or Sudan can simultaneously spill northward.

The Libyan–Chadian frontier is therefore less a barrier than a **zone of interaction**.

Libya as a Mediterranean–Saharan hinge

Olivier Pliez's *La nouvelle Libye: sociétés, espaces et géopolitique au lendemain de l'embargo* provides a particularly useful bridge between the social and geopolitical dimensions. The book explicitly challenges the image of Libya as merely a “rogue state” centred on its leader and instead presents Libya as a complex society

and geographical space occupying a pivotal position between Africa and the Mediterranean and between the Maghreb and Mashreq.

This is perhaps the best way to conceptualize Libya geopolitically.

Libya is simultaneously Mediterranean, Maghrebi, Arab, African and Saharan.

Its geopolitical orientation is therefore plural rather than singular.

Tripoli looks toward the Mediterranean and Europe. Cyrenaica has strong connections with Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean. Fezzan looks toward the Sahel and trans-Saharan networks. The national state attempts to contain all three orientations within a single political framework.

The geopolitical problem arises when the national state is too weak to mediate among them.

From domestic cleavage to external projection

This brings the analysis back to Kader Abderrahim's central argument. Foreign powers do not enter an empty space. They enter a **pre-existing network of local, regional, economic and social relationships**. (Fnac)

Türkiye's relationship with western Libya, Egypt's relationship with eastern Libya, Russia's relationship with Haftar's camp, European engagement with Tripoli and the oil sector, and Gulf involvement in the conflict all acquire their meaning through these domestic structures.

External powers therefore do not simply “intervene in Libya.”

They **attach themselves to existing Libyan cleavages**.

This is the crucial geopolitical mechanism.

A regional actor can support an eastern military structure because it shares security interests with that actor. Another power can support western institutions because it seeks political legitimacy, economic access or Mediterranean influence. European states can prioritize migration and energy. Russia can prioritize strategic access and relationships with African partners.

Each external actor therefore sees a different Libya.

The geopolitical economy of fragmentation

The deeper problem is that Libya's fragmentation can become materially advantageous to both domestic and external actors.

Domestic actors can obtain political leverage, economic rents and security autonomy from fragmentation. External actors can obtain privileged relationships with individual Libyan factions without having to negotiate with a powerful unified state.

This produces a dangerous convergence of interests.

Fragmentation weakens the Libyan state, but the weakness of the Libyan state creates opportunities for selective external influence; selective external influence then strengthens particular domestic actors, making national consolidation more difficult.

The result is a geopolitical equilibrium in which nobody necessarily has enough power to unify Libya, but several actors possess sufficient power to prevent others from dominating it.

That is why the Libyan status quo can persist for so long.

Implications for UNSMIL

This broader literature changes how UNSMIL should conceptualize the problem.

UNSMIL should not approach Libya simply as a failed state requiring institutional reconstruction. Nor should it treat the country merely as a conflict between two governments.

The task is to reconcile **multiple Libyas that coexist within the same state**.

The Tripolitanian Libya of the Mediterranean coast, the Cyrenaican Libya oriented toward the east, and the Fezzani Libya connected to the Sahara have different security, economic and geopolitical environments. Their interests cannot simply be subordinated to a single central government without generating resistance.

The objective should therefore be **political unity without social homogenization and national sovereignty without excessive centralization**.

This also means that UNSMIL should pay much greater attention to the social economy beneath formal institutions. Women's economic networks, family structures, local markets, migration economies, tribal mediation and cross-border commerce are not peripheral to state-building. They are part of the actual mechanisms through which Libyan society functions.

The same applies to external actors. UNSMIL cannot realistically demand the disappearance of foreign influence. Instead, it must seek to **transform external influence from factional patronage into institutional partnership**.

The objective should be for Türkiye, Egypt, Russia, European states and Gulf actors to have interests that are increasingly channelled through legitimate Libyan national institutions rather than through competing Libyan clients.

The central geopolitical conclusion

Taken together, Abderrahim, Fontaine and Bisson, Souriau, Contreras, Lanne and Pliez lead to a much deeper interpretation of Libya.

Libya is not simply a weak state with oil. It is a socially complex, territorially differentiated and historically constructed space whose internal fragmentation creates opportunities for external power projection.

Its geopolitics operates simultaneously at several levels: the Mediterranean, the Maghreb, the Arab world, the Sahara and the Sahel. Its political economy operates simultaneously through oil, state rents, informal markets, migration, smuggling, household economies and local patronage. Its social order operates simultaneously through formal institutions and informal networks of family, tribe, city, region and community.

The central geopolitical problem is therefore not simply that **foreign powers interfere in Libya**.

It is that **Libya's internal cleavages provide external powers with ready-made channels through which to project influence**.

And this is why the key relationship is:

internal fragmentation → external penetration → strengthened local actors → prolonged fragmentation → renewed external penetration.

Breaking that cycle requires more than a political agreement between Tripoli and Benghazi. It requires rebuilding a Libyan state that can accommodate **Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan; formal and informal**

economies; national and local identities; civilian and security institutions; and Libya's multiple Mediterranean, Arab, African and Saharan orientations.

That is ultimately the geopolitical challenge facing UNSMIL: **not simply to reunify Libya, but to make a unified Libya sufficiently inclusive and institutionally credible that Libyans—and external powers—have fewer incentives to organize their interests outside the national state.**

Strategic Challenges of Libya

Libya faces a multitude of political challenges that complicate efforts toward national unity and stable governance. The country is characterized by fragmented power centers, with competing governments, militias, and tribal factions all vying for influence, which severely hampers the establishment of a centralized authority. State institutions remain weak after years of conflict and political upheaval, resulting in pervasive governance deficits, corruption, and a profound lack of public trust. This institutional fragility is compounded by a security vacuum in which various armed groups operate with significant autonomy, often outside the control of the formal state apparatus, thereby undermining the rule of law and perpetuating instability. Furthermore, Libya's internal dynamics are heavily influenced by external interference, as regional and international powers support different factions, transforming the country into a proxy battleground and complicating peace efforts. Economic disparities also persist despite Libya's substantial oil wealth, as uneven distribution of resources fuels grievances among different regions and communities. Social divisions along tribal, regional, and ideological lines further hinder national cohesion and the ability to build broad consensus. Additionally, many Libyans lack political experience due to decades of authoritarian rule and ongoing conflict, which limits the capacity for democratic governance.

The imposition of Western political models in Libya presents significant pitfalls, particularly given the country's complex social fabric and unique political realities. Western democratic frameworks typically presuppose a politically mature society, characterized by well-established institutions and a political elite motivated by national interests. In Libya, however, the political elite often prioritize factional or personal gains over the collective national good, which undermines the effectiveness of externally imposed governance structures. Societal readiness for democratic processes is uneven, with limited experience in pluralistic politics and civil society participation. Consequently, Western models risk alienating key local actors and disrupting traditional power balances, especially among tribal and local leaders who wield considerable influence. Moreover, efforts to rapidly implement political reforms can create a disjunction between formal state institutions and the social realities on the ground, potentially exacerbating instability rather than fostering cohesion. Without tailoring governance models to the Libyan context, there is a significant risk of perpetuating external dependence and undermining local ownership of the political process.

Execution Plan to Address Libya's Strategic Political Challenges

Libya's path to national unity and stable governance requires a comprehensive, phased approach that tackles institutional fragmentation, security instability, external interference, economic disparity, and social divisions while fostering political maturity.

1. Consolidation of Central Authority

The first priority is to create a transitional unified government with an inclusive mandate representing Libya's diverse factions, tribes, and regions. This government must be empowered to assert control over fragmented power centers, integrating militias into national security frameworks or disarming them through negotiated processes. Establishing a strong, centralized authority is critical to restoring governance legitimacy and ending competing claims to power.

2. Strengthening State Institutions

Rebuilding Libya's institutions requires institutional reforms focused on transparency, anti-corruption measures, and capacity building. Key institutions such as the judiciary, electoral commission, and public

administration should be staffed with qualified professionals vetted for integrity. The process should be supported by international partners offering technical assistance, but always maintaining Libyan ownership to build public trust.

3. Security Sector Reform and Disarmament

A comprehensive security sector reform (SSR) program must integrate militias into unified national security forces or facilitate their disarmament and reintegration into civilian life. This requires a combination of incentives, including vocational training and social programs, alongside enforcement measures. SSR must be underpinned by civilian oversight to uphold accountability and prevent future fragmentation.

4. Countering External Interference

Libya's stability hinges on minimizing foreign meddling. Diplomatic efforts should focus on convening regional and global stakeholders to agree on non-interference principles, monitored through international mechanisms. Sanctions and incentives can be leveraged to discourage external actors from backing armed groups, thereby reducing proxy conflict dynamics.

5. Equitable Economic Management

Implement transparent, decentralized mechanisms for managing Libya's oil wealth to ensure equitable distribution across regions. This includes establishing oversight bodies with representatives from diverse communities to oversee resource revenues. Economic diversification initiatives should be promoted to reduce dependency on oil and create sustainable development opportunities.

6. National Reconciliation and Social Cohesion

Launch a national reconciliation process that acknowledges historical grievances, fosters dialogue among tribal and regional groups, and promotes restorative justice. Civic education campaigns should accompany reconciliation efforts to build a culture of tolerance and political engagement.

7. Capacity Building for Political Maturity

Invest in comprehensive civic education and leadership development programs to prepare Libyans for democratic participation. Support the growth of independent media and civil society organizations to enhance political awareness and accountability.

8. Phased and Inclusive Electoral Process

Instead of rushing into national elections, adopt a phased electoral approach beginning with local governance structures to build institutional capacity and public confidence. Electoral processes must be transparent, inclusive, and monitored by credible independent bodies to prevent manipulation.

9. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptive Governance

Establish a robust mechanism for continuous monitoring and evaluation of reforms, allowing for timely adjustments. Involve Libyan stakeholders at all levels to ensure accountability and adapt strategies in response to emerging challenges.

By implementing this executive plan with sustained political will, inclusive participation, and coordinated international support, Libya can gradually overcome its strategic challenges and lay the foundation for a peaceful, unified, and democratic state.

Libya's Political, Institutional, Ideological, Military and Economic Cleavages

Libya's conflict is best understood not as a single East–West divide, but as a set of overlapping cleavages ope-

rating simultaneously at the national, regional, local and institutional levels. The most important are political authority, institutional legitimacy, ideology, military control and economic resources. These cleavages frequently reinforce one another, making Libya's fragmentation particularly resilient.

Political cleavages: competing claims to national authority

The central political cleavage concerns who has the legitimate authority to govern Libya. Since 2014, Libya has repeatedly experienced competing political authorities. The western political camp has centered on Tripoli and successive internationally supported governments, most recently the Government of National Unity, while in the east the House of Representatives and authorities aligned with Khalifa Haftar have developed their own political and administrative structures.

The underlying dispute is therefore not simply over personalities or elections. It concerns who has the right to form a government, appoint senior state officials, control national institutions, determine the constitutional and electoral framework, and distribute political power between Libya's regions. This produces a persistent legitimacy cleavage in which rival elites claim to represent the Libyan state while simultaneously challenging the authority of their competitors.

A related cleavage concerns centralization versus decentralization. Eastern and southern constituencies have repeatedly argued that political and economic power is excessively concentrated in Tripoli. Regional demands for greater autonomy and representation therefore intersect with the broader struggle over national political authority.

Institutional cleavages: one state, competing institutions

Political fragmentation has become embedded within the state itself. Libya therefore suffers from institutional dualism: competing institutions claim authority over the same national functions. This has affected the legislature, executive, security sector, central banking and oil administration. Rather than simply having weak institutions, Libya has institutions whose authority, leadership and jurisdiction are contested.

This is particularly important because control of an institution provides access to public finances, appointments, foreign partnerships, oil revenues, state contracts and international recognition. Institutional competition consequently becomes a mechanism through which political and economic power can be converted into durable influence.

The struggle over the Central Bank illustrates this dynamic particularly well. Control over monetary and financial institutions can become a proxy for the broader struggle over political authority, while disputes over the oil sector similarly combine institutional, political and economic interests.

Ideological cleavages: Islamism, anti-Islamism and the legacy of 2011

Ideology matters, but it should not be treated as the primary explanation for Libya's fragmentation. One important cleavage emerged between forces associated with political Islam and forces advocating anti-Islamist, nationalist or more authoritarian forms of political order. This was especially prominent during the 2014 conflict.

A second ideological cleavage concerns competing interpretations of the 2011 revolution. Revolutionary forces emphasize the overthrow of Gaddafi and the political legitimacy of the revolution, while former-regime and counter-revolutionary constituencies tend to emphasize state authority, security and continuity. Other actors combine revolutionary credentials with increasingly conservative or authoritarian political positions.

There is therefore also a broader contest between pluralist and revolutionary politics on the one hand and centralized authoritarian order on the other. However, ideological identities are highly fluid. Actors frequently cooperate across ideological boundaries when their local, military or economic interests converge. Ideology therefore often provides political justification for alliances whose underlying drivers are territorial or material.

Military cleavages: fragmented coercive power

The military cleavage is perhaps the most consequential because Libya lacks a unified national monopoly over coercion. In the east, Haftar's Libyan Arab Armed Forces constitute the dominant military structure. In the west, power is distributed among government-affiliated forces, Tripoli-based armed groups, Misratan formations and other local militias.

The fundamental divide is therefore between centralized national security institutions and localized, factionalized armed power. Armed groups do not necessarily derive their authority from the central government. Their power frequently rests on control over territory, communities, economic networks and strategic infrastructure.

This creates a feedback loop in which political fragmentation produces military autonomy, military autonomy generates control over territory, territorial control provides access to economic resources, and economic resources generate greater political bargaining power. The persistence of armed autonomy consequently makes political settlement much harder because elites cannot simply negotiate a new government without also addressing who controls the coercive instruments of the state.

Economic cleavages: control of rents and distribution

Libya's economic cleavage is fundamentally a struggle over oil wealth and the distribution of state rents. Because the economy remains heavily dependent on hydrocarbons, control over oil production, export infrastructure, revenues and associated institutions translates directly into political power.

The resulting conflict concerns not only the distribution of oil revenues between regions but also control over the National Oil Corporation, the Central Bank, public expenditure, reconstruction contracts, fuel subsidies, foreign currency and informal economic networks. This produces an important centre–periphery economic cleavage. Regions that produce or host strategic resources have strong incentives to demand greater political influence or a larger share of national revenues.

Economic fragmentation also sustains armed actors. Control of border crossings, smuggling routes, ports, oil facilities and other economic nodes can provide armed groups with independent sources of power. Economic interests therefore reinforce both military fragmentation and political competition.

THE KEY POINT: THE CLEAVAGES OVERLAP

The most important analytical point is that Libya does not have five separate cleavages. The political, institutional, ideological, military and economic cleavages intersect and reinforce one another.

The East–West political divide, for example, is simultaneously a dispute over political legitimacy, competing state institutions, military organization, regional representation, oil revenues and the political legacy of the revolution. Likewise, control over an oil facility is not merely an economic issue. It can provide an armed actor with military leverage, which can then be converted into political bargaining power, institutional appointments and access to state resources.

Libya's fragmentation can therefore be understood as a mutually reinforcing system in which institutional fragmentation produces political competition, political competition empowers armed groups, armed groups obtain control over economic resources, economic resources sustain patronage networks, and these networks reproduce institutional fragmentation.

This is why Libya's fragmentation has proven so resistant to external mediation. Resolving one cleavage does not necessarily resolve the others. A political agreement between eastern and western elites, for example, does not automatically determine who controls armed groups, how oil revenues should be distributed, how institutions should be unified, or how regional and communal interests should be represented.

Cleavage	Core question
Political	Who should rule Libya?
Institutional	Which institutions are legitimate?
Ideological	What kind of Libya should emerge after Gaddafi?
Military	Who controls coercion and territory?
Economic	Who controls oil revenues and state rents?
Regional	Should power be concentrated in Tripoli or decentralized?
Communal	How should tribes, cities and minorities be represented?

So now we have been adopting a Socratic method at out desk, let us imagine how the three core regions differ.

Regional cleavages: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan

Tripolitania

Tripolitania, in western Libya and centered on Tripoli, is the country's main political and administrative centre. It contains the capital, most of the internationally recognized government institutions, and a dense network of political elites, municipalities and armed groups. The region's cleavage is therefore closely associated with the concentration of political authority and state resources in Tripoli.

Tripolitania is not politically unified, however. Tripoli, Misrata, Zawiya and other western localities have distinct political, economic and military interests. Competition among western armed groups and political networks means that the western camp should not be understood as a single bloc. Nevertheless, Tripolitania broadly represents the **western centre of political authority**, and its dominance is a major source of eastern and southern grievances.

Cyrenaica

Cyrenaica, in eastern Libya and centred historically on Benghazi and politically around Tobruk, represents the principal regional counterweight to Tripolitania. The region has a strong tradition of political autonomy and has frequently challenged what it perceives as the excessive concentration of power and resources in Tripoli.

Since the division that emerged after 2014, Cyrenaica has become closely associated with the House of Representatives and Khalifa Haftar's military-political system. Its cleavage with Tripolitania is therefore simultaneously **regional, political, institutional and military**.

Cyrenaica also possesses major strategic importance because of its proximity to Egypt and its access to important oil-producing areas and export infrastructure. Regional autonomy is consequently connected not only to questions of identity and representation but also to control over economic resources and external partnerships.

Fezzan

Fezzan, in southern Libya, constitutes a distinct centre–periphery cleavage. It is geographically vast but relatively sparsely populated and has historically been politically and economically marginalized by the northern centres of power.

Fezzan is particularly important because of its location along Libya's borders with **Niger, Chad and Algeria**, its proximity to important oil fields, and its role in trans-Saharan migration, trade and smuggling networks. The region is also socially diverse, with Arab, Tuareg and Tebu communities whose interests do not always coincide.

Consequently, Fezzan's marginalization is simultaneously **political, economic, security-related and communal**. Local actors have incentives to seek greater control over territory and resources, while national governments and external powers have incentives to secure the region because of its oil, borders and strategic position toward the Sahel.

Why the three regions matter

The Tripolitania–Cyrenaica–Fezzan division should not be understood as three completely separate political blocs. Rather, the three regions represent **different geographical concentrations of Libya's overlapping cleavages**.

Tripolitania concentrates political and institutional power; Cyrenaica provides the principal eastern political and military counterweight; and Fezzan represents the marginalized southern periphery where resource, border-security and communal cleavages intersect.

This makes Libya's territorial structure particularly important for understanding external power projection. **Tripolitania provides access to the political centre and Mediterranean institutions; Cyrenaica provides strategic depth toward Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean; and Fezzan provides access toward the Sahel and Libya's southern borders.** External powers can therefore pursue different strategic objectives by cultivating relationships with actors in each region.

Table

Cleavage	Tripolitania	Cyrenaica	Fezzan
Political	Competition over control of the national government and political institutions in Tripoli	Demand for greater eastern political influence and autonomy from Tripoli	Demand for greater political representation and inclusion in national decision-making
Institutional	Preference for unified national institutions centred in Tripoli	Parallel eastern institutions and demand for institutional autonomy or power-sharing	Demand for institutions that address southern marginalization and provide greater local authority
Ideological	Greater diversity among revolutionary, Islamist, liberal and nationalist currents	Stronger emphasis on anti-Islamism, order, security and centralized authority	More pragmatic and locally driven politics, with ideology often secondary to regional and communal interests
Military	Fragmented network of Tripoli-, Misrata- and other western armed groups	Dominance of Haftar's LAAF and associated eastern security structures	Local armed groups, tribal forces and competition over territory, borders and smuggling routes
Economic	Concentration of political and financial institutions; competition over control of state revenues	Demand for a greater share of oil wealth and control over eastern economic assets	Grievances over economic marginalization despite the presence of oil and strategic resources in the south
Regional	Defence of Tripoli's role as the national political centre, combined with competing western local interests	Strong preference for decentralization, regional autonomy or federal-type arrangements	Strong demand for decentralization because of historical political and economic marginalization
Communal	Urban, tribal and militia identities interact with national politics;	Tribal and local identities are important alongside	Strong interaction between Arab, Tebu and Tuareg identities, with communal representation closely

	particularly strong city-based identities	eastern regional identity	linked to territory and resources

Implications for External Power Projection

These overlapping cleavages are also what make Libya particularly attractive, and particularly difficult, for external power projection. External powers do not necessarily need to control Libya directly. They can project influence by inserting themselves into existing domestic cleavages.

Institutional fragmentation gives external actors multiple entry points into the Libyan state. Foreign powers can cultivate relationships with competing governments, political institutions and economic authorities, provide diplomatic recognition, negotiate bilateral agreements and influence political negotiations. The existence of competing authorities therefore allows external powers to develop relationships with several centres of power simultaneously.

Military fragmentation creates another channel for external influence. Because coercive power is distributed among rival Libyan actors, external states can develop influence through military assistance, training, intelligence cooperation, advisers, security agreements and support for particular armed formations. This can provide access to territory, strategic infrastructure, ports or airbases without requiring large-scale conventional deployment.

Economic fragmentation provides a further mechanism of influence. Libya's dependence on hydrocarbons makes oil production, export infrastructure, financial institutions and state revenues strategically important. Foreign governments and companies can therefore use energy partnerships, infrastructure investment, reconstruction contracts and financial relationships to develop long-term influence. Economic engagement can consequently acquire a geopolitical dimension.

Libya's geography magnifies these opportunities. Its position on the Mediterranean, its proximity to Europe, its location along major migration routes and its connections to the Sahel and trans-Saharan networks give influence in Libya significance beyond the country itself. Influence over Libyan actors can potentially generate leverage across the central Mediterranean, North Africa and the Sahel.

The most important consequence is that external powers can become embedded within Libya's domestic cleavages. Once an external actor supports a particular Libyan faction, that support can strengthen the faction's capacity to resist domestic rivals. The external actor consequently becomes part of the internal balance of power, while the Libyan actor becomes partially dependent on external backing.

This can produce a self-reinforcing dynamic: domestic cleavage creates an opportunity for external intervention; external intervention strengthens a local actor; the strengthened local actor alters the domestic balance of power; this deepens fragmentation; and deeper fragmentation creates further opportunities for external influence.

The result is therefore not simply foreign intervention in a weak state. It is a process of internationalized fragmentation, in which domestic competition and external competition increasingly become intertwined.

Strategic implication

Libya's fragmentation creates a fundamental paradox. Weak state institutions make Libya vulnerable to external penetration, but fragmentation also makes sustained external control extremely difficult. External powers can acquire influence without acquiring political control. They can support factions, secure economic interests, obtain military access and shape negotiations, but they cannot easily impose a stable national order while Libya's underlying cleavages remain unresolved.

Libya is therefore best understood as a case of contested sovereignty, where political, institutional, ideological, military and economic cleavages overlap internally and simultaneously provide entry points for external power

projection. The interaction between these domestic and international cleavages helps explain why Libya has remained fragmented despite repeated diplomatic efforts to reunify its political institutions.

Implications for National Unity, UNSMIL Success and Strategy

If the matrix is used to assess Libya's prospects for national unity, the probability of UNSMIL success, and the strategic implications for mediation, the central point is that UNSMIL is not confronting a single political dispute. It is confronting a **mutually reinforcing system of political, institutional, ideological, military, economic, regional and communal cleavages**.

Political cleavage

The political cleavage makes national unity difficult because rival elites continue to compete over control of the executive, legitimacy and access to state power. A unified government is therefore unlikely to be durable unless the principal political actors believe that compromise will protect their interests better than continued competition.

The probability of UNSMIL success is therefore **low to moderate** if success is defined as rapid political reunification. UNSMIL is more likely to succeed if it focuses on changing the incentives of political elites rather than simply brokering another power-sharing arrangement.

The strategic implication is that UNSMIL should pursue **incentive-based elite bargaining**, while maintaining sufficient neutrality to avoid being perceived as favouring either the western or eastern political camp.

Institutional cleavage

Institutional fragmentation makes national unity particularly difficult because creating a formally unified government does not necessarily produce a unified state. Competing institutions can continue to exercise authority, control resources and maintain separate relationships with domestic and international actors.

The probability of UNSMIL success is therefore **low if institutional unification is attempted too quickly**. Institutional convergence needs to be gradual and sequenced, beginning with areas where cooperation is politically less threatening and moving progressively toward the most contested institutions.

The strategic objective should therefore be **institutional convergence rather than immediate institutional merger**.

Ideological cleavage

Ideological divisions over Islamism, anti-Islamism, the legacy of the 2011 revolution and the role of authoritarianism create distrust but are not necessarily irreconcilable. Ideology frequently becomes less important when actors share political, economic or security interests.

The probability of UNSMIL success is therefore **moderate**, provided that mediation does not reproduce ideological polarization.

UNSMIL should avoid framing the settlement as a choice between competing ideological visions of Libya. A more effective approach is to emphasize **state functionality, security, political inclusion and institutional legitimacy**.

Military cleavage

The military cleavage represents one of the greatest obstacles to national unity because rival armed structures possess their own territorial, political and economic interests. A political agreement can therefore remain fragile if the distribution of coercive power remains unchanged.

The probability of UNSMIL achieving rapid military unification is **low**. Immediate disarmament or the creation of a single national military could itself generate conflict because the fundamental question would be who commands the unified force.

The strategic approach should therefore be **gradual security-sector convergence**, beginning with confidence-building, local security arrangements, professionalization and coordination before attempting deeper integration under a legitimate civilian authority.

Economic cleavage

Competition over oil revenues, public expenditure, foreign currency, state contracts and other rents provides powerful incentives for maintaining fragmentation. Economic resources allow political and military actors to sustain patronage networks and autonomous power bases.

The probability of UNSMIL success is therefore **low to moderate**, depending heavily on whether economic arrangements can create incentives for cooperation.

Economic governance should consequently become part of the peace process rather than being treated as a technical issue separate from political negotiations. Transparent revenue-sharing, credible fiscal arrangements and mechanisms preventing the weaponization of oil and public finance could become important **peace-building instruments**.

Regional cleavage

The division between Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan means that national unity cannot simply mean the restoration of centralized authority in Tripoli. The three regions have different experiences of political power, economic distribution and security.

Tripolitania is more closely associated with the political and institutional centre. Cyrenaica has strong demands for political autonomy, security guarantees and a greater share of national resources. Fezzan has particularly strong grievances concerning political marginalization, development, local security and control over its borders and resources.

The probability of UNSMIL success is therefore **moderate if unity is reconceptualized as shared sovereignty rather than excessive centralization**.

Strategically, UNSMIL should promote a formula of **one state with meaningful regional autonomy**, rather than attempting to recreate a highly centralized state.

Communal cleavage

Tribal, city-based and ethnic identities further complicate national integration. These identities are particularly important where state institutions are weak because local communities may provide alternative sources of political authority, security and social protection.

The probability of UNSMIL success is **moderate**, but only if local actors are incorporated into the political process rather than treated as peripheral to negotiations among national elites.

UNSMIL should therefore strengthen **local ownership and representation**, particularly in marginalized areas such as Fezzan, while ensuring that communal representation does not itself institutionalize permanent fragmentation.

Overall probability of UNSMIL success

The probability of **rapid, comprehensive and durable national unification is relatively low**. The central problem is that the cleavages are mutually reinforcing. Political fragmentation sustains institutional

fragmentation; institutional fragmentation protects competing economic interests; economic resources finance armed and political networks; armed groups preserve territorial fragmentation; and regional and communal grievances reinforce resistance to centralization.

This means that a political settlement can fail even when the principal elites sign an agreement because the underlying distribution of **coercion, resources and institutional authority** has not changed.

UNSMIL therefore has a greater probability of achieving **incremental or partial success** than of producing rapid national reunification.

Success should consequently be understood as a process of **managed convergence** rather than an immediate restoration of a fully centralized state.

Strategic implications for UNSMIL

The first strategic implication is that **sequencing matters**. UNSMIL should not assume that political unification must precede all other forms of integration. Local and regional confidence-building, economic coordination and institutional cooperation can create the conditions for a more durable political settlement, which can subsequently facilitate deeper security-sector integration.

The second implication is that **unity must be made compatible with decentralization**. Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan are unlikely to accept the same model of state authority. A sustainable settlement therefore needs to combine national sovereignty with meaningful regional and local authority.

The third implication is that **economic governance should be treated as a peace instrument**. The distribution of oil revenues and state resources is not merely an economic question. It is part of the political bargain. If actors believe that unity will deprive them of resources, they have incentives to preserve fragmentation. If unity provides credible and predictable access to national resources, the incentives can begin to change.

The fourth implication is that **military integration should be gradual rather than imposed**. The objective should initially be to reduce the incentives for armed competition and establish mechanisms of coordination before attempting full integration into a national security structure.

The fifth implication concerns **external power competition**. Libya's domestic cleavages provide entry points for external actors. Foreign powers can support different political authorities, armed groups, economic institutions and regional actors. UNSMIL therefore faces a two-level mediation problem: it must manage competition among Libyan actors while also encouraging external powers to support rather than obstruct institutional convergence.

Bottom line

Libya is unlikely to become unified by resolving each cleavage separately because **the cleavages overlap and reinforce one another**.

UNSMIL's most realistic strategy is therefore not to pursue an immediate "grand bargain" that attempts to solve everything simultaneously. It should progressively alter the incentives that make fragmentation attractive.

The strategic trajectory should be **from fragmented competition, to managed coexistence, to institutional convergence, and ultimately toward gradual national consolidation**.

The key measure of UNSMIL success should therefore be not simply whether it produces a single government, but whether it **reduces the political, military and economic benefits of maintaining Libya's fragmentation while making national unity compatible with regional autonomy, resource-sharing and security guarantees**.

The **economic and institutional cleavages reinforce the military and political ones**. For example, control of an institution such as the Central Bank or NOC is valuable precisely because it provides access to resources; resources can finance political networks and armed groups; armed groups then provide the coercive power needed to defend those political-economic interests.

So I would summarize Libya's conflict as a **multi-layered struggle over state authority and resource distribution**, rather than simply an ideological civil war or an East–West regional conflict.

A particularly useful causal chain is:

Weak post-Gaddafi institutions → regional/local fragmentation → competing governments → armed-group autonomy → competition for oil/state rents → institutional capture → continued political fragmentation

How to Establish Security in Libya under conditions of division ?

Establishing a sustainable security order in Libya amid the country's entrenched East–West division is one of the most difficult challenges facing the state. The security problem cannot be reduced to the presence of rival militias or the absence of a unified army. It is fundamentally a problem of **fragmented sovereignty** in which competing political authorities, parallel institutions, autonomous armed groups, regional identities, economic interests and external patrons reinforce one another. The security dilemma is therefore inseparable from Libya's wider political settlement: armed actors have incentives to retain their forces because control over coercion provides political leverage, access to resources and protection against rival factions. Any security strategy that attempts to impose military unification before addressing these underlying incentives risks provoking resistance rather than producing stability.

The first priority should therefore be the establishment of a **sustained, credible and verifiable ceasefire architecture**. A ceasefire should not be treated as an end in itself, but as the security foundation upon which political and institutional negotiations can proceed. Monitoring mechanisms under a United Nations mandate could provide independent verification of violations and reduce the risk that isolated incidents escalate into broader confrontation. However, international monitoring should be complemented by locally embedded mechanisms. Joint ceasefire committees involving representatives from western and eastern authorities, municipal leaders, community figures and relevant security actors could establish direct communication channels, investigate incidents and negotiate rapid local de-escalation. In strategically sensitive areas, coordinated patrols and liaison mechanisms could gradually create practical cooperation between forces that remain politically divided. The purpose would be to move from **non-aggression to communication, from communication to coordination, and eventually from coordination to institutional cooperation**.

Confidence-building must extend beyond national elites. Local communities are often the first to experience the consequences of armed confrontation and are therefore essential to preventing escalation. Municipal authorities, tribal and community leaders, civil society organizations and locally legitimate security actors can contribute to early-warning mechanisms, mediation and dispute resolution. Such arrangements are particularly important in areas where national institutions have limited legitimacy. Grassroots confidence-building should not substitute for national institutions, but should create the local conditions necessary for those institutions eventually to function. A durable ceasefire is unlikely to emerge simply from an agreement among political elites if local armed groups and communities perceive the settlement as threatening their security or interests.

Once a sufficiently stable ceasefire exists, Libya should move toward a **gradual and nationally owned security-sector integration process**. Immediate attempts to create a single army by simply merging rival forces would be premature and potentially destabilizing. The central issue is not merely how many fighters should be incorporated, but who will command them, under whose political authority they will operate, how resources will be distributed and what guarantees will protect former rivals from political retaliation. Security-sector reform should therefore proceed through a phased roadmap that distinguishes between political agreement, institutional restructuring, force professionalization, disarmament, demobilization and eventual integration.

A carefully designed **disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process** should provide realistic alternatives to militia membership rather than relying primarily on coercion. Former combatants should have access to vocational training, education, employment, pensions where appropriate and opportunities for integration into legitimate civilian institutions. Those who meet professional standards could be incorporated into reformed national armed forces or police structures, while others could transition into civilian employment. Political inclusion is also important because armed mobilization often reflects the absence of credible political channels. The objective should be to transform armed actors from autonomous political-security entrepreneurs into accountable components of a national security system.

Integration, however, must not simply reproduce existing factional structures inside a nominally national military. A force that is formally unified but remains organized according to factional loyalty would institutionalize rather than resolve Libya's security fragmentation. Integration should therefore be accompanied by common training standards, unified professional doctrine, transparent recruitment, nationally recognized command procedures and civilian oversight. The process should also ensure balanced regional representation so that neither Tripolitania nor Cyrenaica perceives the emerging security structure as an instrument of the other. For Fezzan, meaningful local representation and adequate resources are particularly important because the south faces distinct border-security, communal and territorial challenges.

The creation of **joint security commissions** could provide an intermediate institutional mechanism between rival security structures and a fully unified command. These commissions could include senior military and police representatives from the principal eastern and western security structures, alongside civilian oversight. Their initial responsibilities could include information exchange, border security coordination, management of sensitive areas, counterterrorism cooperation, organized-crime prevention and mechanisms for responding to security incidents. Over time, these arrangements could develop habits of cooperation and establish the institutional relationships required for eventual national command structures.

This approach is particularly important because Libya's security threats are not exclusively political. Terrorism, organized crime, trafficking, smuggling, border insecurity and competition over strategic infrastructure affect actors across the country. **Common threats can therefore provide an entry point for cooperation where political consensus remains impossible.** Security cooperation around clearly defined shared interests may be more achievable initially than agreement on the broader question of national political authority.

International involvement will remain necessary, but it must be carefully structured. External powers have significant influence over Libya's political and military actors, and their competing interests can either support or undermine security-sector reform. International actors should therefore be encouraged to support a common UN-led framework rather than cultivate competing security partnerships. The priority should be to reduce external military competition, prevent destabilizing arms transfers, support monitoring mechanisms and provide technical expertise for security-sector reform. International guarantees may also be necessary during transitional stages to reassure actors that participation in the security process will not leave them vulnerable to retaliation by former adversaries.

At the same time, international actors must recognize that **external pressure alone cannot manufacture Libyan security institutions**. A security architecture perceived as externally imposed is unlikely to acquire durable legitimacy. International support should therefore strengthen Libyan ownership rather than substitute for it. External actors can provide monitoring, technical assistance, training and guarantees, but the political legitimacy and ultimate authority of Libya's security institutions must come from a negotiated Libyan settlement.

Security reform must also be connected directly to the political settlement. The question of who controls the armed forces cannot be separated from the question of who governs Libya. Political negotiations therefore need to address the distribution of security authority, civilian oversight, regional representation and the institutional guarantees that will accompany military integration. If political actors believe that losing control over armed groups will leave them politically exposed, they will have strong incentives to resist security-sector

reform. Conversely, credible political guarantees can reduce the perceived need for autonomous armed protection.

This makes **decentralization** an important component of the security settlement. National unity does not necessarily require excessive centralization. Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan have different security environments and different historical experiences of state authority. A viable national security system could therefore combine national command and standards with meaningful regional and local responsibilities. Local authorities should have defined roles in policing, community security and local conflict prevention while remaining subject to national law and civilian oversight. Such an arrangement could reduce fears that national security institutions will become instruments of political domination by one region.

Economic incentives must also be incorporated into security reform. Armed groups are not sustained solely by ideology or political loyalty; many have developed interests in access to state salaries, contracts, border crossings, smuggling networks and strategic infrastructure. Attempting to dismantle these networks without providing credible economic alternatives could generate resistance and potentially encourage renewed violence. Security-sector reform should therefore be connected to broader economic governance, including transparent public-sector employment, reintegration programmes, regional development and credible mechanisms for distributing national revenues. **Reducing the economic benefits of fragmentation is essential to reducing the political incentives for maintaining armed autonomy.**

The role of local actors is particularly important in this process. Tribal leaders, municipal authorities, community organizations and locally legitimate security actors can provide mediation, early warning and localized dispute resolution. In Fezzan, for example, security cannot be separated from border management, communal relations and economic marginalization. In Cyrenaica, security arrangements must take account of the region's distinctive political and military structures. In Tripolitania, the fragmentation of armed groups within the western camp means that a simple East–West framework is insufficient. The security strategy must therefore operate simultaneously at the **national, regional and local levels**.

The greatest strategic danger is attempting to move too quickly toward a centralized security structure without first creating the political and institutional conditions that make such a structure legitimate. Forced or premature unification could cause armed actors to perceive reform as a threat to their survival and could transform a security-sector reform process into a new source of conflict. Conversely, indefinite coexistence of autonomous armed groups would institutionalize fragmentation and prevent the emergence of a functioning state monopoly over coercion. The challenge is therefore to find a middle path between **premature integration and permanent fragmentation**.

The most viable approach is consequently a **sequenced security transition**. The immediate objective should be to stabilize the security environment through a verifiable ceasefire and effective local de-escalation mechanisms. The subsequent objective should be to establish regular cooperation between eastern and western security institutions through joint commissions and shared operational mechanisms. Once sufficient trust and political guarantees exist, a broader security-sector reform process can begin, including professionalization, selective integration and DDR. Only at a later stage should Libya attempt comprehensive national military integration under legitimate civilian authority.

Ultimately, security in Libya cannot be built through military integration alone. It requires a political settlement that gives the principal regions and communities a credible stake in the state, institutional arrangements that distribute authority legitimately, economic mechanisms that reduce incentives for rent-seeking through armed fragmentation, and external guarantees that discourage renewed proxy competition. **The objective should not simply be to create one Libyan army, but to create a political and institutional environment in which Libyan actors no longer need autonomous armed structures to protect their interests.**

The central strategic principle is therefore **"security before consolidation, but consolidation through security."** A durable Libyan security order will emerge not from imposing unity from above, but from progressively changing the incentives that sustain fragmentation. The path toward national security should

move from ceasefire and confidence-building, through institutional cooperation and economic incentives, toward gradual security-sector integration and ultimately a legitimate national monopoly over coercion. This approach offers a more realistic route toward stability because it recognizes that Libya's security dilemma is fundamentally political, institutional and economic as well as military.

It is proposed to produce a road map for the unification of Libyan armed forces pending the establishment of security and the stabilisation of Libyan frontier security, something General Haftar respects.

Roadmap for the Unification of Libya's Military Institutions

1. Strategic Objective

The objective should be to establish one professional, nationally representative Libyan defence institution under unified civilian authority, with:

- one national military doctrine;
- one legal and institutional framework;
- unified civilian oversight;
- nationally agreed command arrangements;
- professional recruitment and promotion standards;
- state control over heavy weapons and military facilities;
- a structured process for integrating eligible personnel from existing formations;
- a parallel programme for demobilising, retiring or reintegrating personnel who do not enter the unified armed forces.

The process should not be based on one side absorbing the other. It should be an inclusive national settlement in which personnel are evaluated individually and institutions are rebuilt around common standards.

UNSMIL's 2026 Structured Dialogue has already identified the need for unified civilian authority, an expanded 5+5 JMC mandate, joint operations rooms, DDR, legal reform and civilian oversight.

Phase I — Political and Security Compact

Months 0–6

1. National political agreement

The political leadership should first agree on a National Military Unification Compact.

The agreement should establish five principles:

1. The armed forces serve the Libyan state, not individual political factions.
2. The military remains politically neutral.
3. No armed formation has an independent political mandate.
4. Senior appointments require nationally agreed procedures.

5. Disputes concerning military integration are resolved through agreed political and legal mechanisms, not force.

A unified civilian authority is particularly important because the UN's 2026 security dialogue concluded that political division is a fundamental driver of security-sector fragmentation.

2. Strengthen the 5+5 JMC

Transform the existing 5+5 JMC into the principal Military Unification Steering Commission.

Its responsibilities should include:

- supervising the unification programme;
- developing common military standards;
- overseeing personnel verification;
- supervising interim joint institutions;
- monitoring ceasefire compliance;
- coordinating DDR;
- reporting publicly on implementation.

The JMC should remain geographically and institutionally balanced so that neither eastern nor western actors perceive it as an instrument of the other side.

3. Immediate confidence-building measures

Before structural integration begins:

- maintain existing ceasefire arrangements;
- establish permanent communication channels between rival commands;
- expand joint operations rooms where politically feasible;
- conduct joint training in non-combat areas;
- establish mechanisms for resolving incidents between formations;
- prohibit recruitment into parallel armed structures.

The purpose is to create habitual cooperation before institutional merger.

Phase II — National Military Audit

Months 3–9

A credible unification process requires knowing exactly what is being unified.

Create an independent National Military Registration and Verification Authority, operating under civilian oversight and monitored by the JMC.

It should establish a confidential national register covering:

- personnel;
- rank and professional qualifications;
- institutional affiliation;
- years of service;
- training;
- age and retirement eligibility;
- administrative status;
- military equipment and facilities.

The principle should be:

Integrate individuals according to national standards, rather than automatically integrating entire militias as organisations.

This is essential to prevent existing armed groups from simply receiving official recognition under new names.

The 2020 ceasefire framework already envisaged identifying and categorising armed groups and developing conditions for individual reintegration into state institutions.

Phase III — Interim Joint Military Architecture

Months 6–18

Instead of immediately creating one command structure, establish a temporary joint architecture.

A. Joint Defence Council

A civilian-led body responsible for:

- defence policy;
- national security strategy;
- defence budget;
- senior appointments;
- parliamentary reporting.

B. Unified General Staff — Transitional

Create a transitional General Staff with balanced representation from Libya's major regions.

Its initial role should be coordination rather than operational domination.

C. Joint institutions

Gradually establish common institutions for:

- military education;

- personnel administration;
- logistics;
- medical services;
- military justice;
- procurement;
- communications;
- border-security coordination.

The emphasis should be on shared institutions before complete command integration.

Phase IV — Personnel Integration and DDR

Months 9–30

This should be the heart of the programme.

Every member of an armed formation should enter one of several pathways:

Path A — Integration

Personnel who meet professional and legal standards enter the unified armed forces.

Path B — Training and integration

Personnel with appropriate potential receive bridging training before entering the regular forces.

Path C — Retirement

Older or otherwise eligible personnel receive transparent retirement arrangements.

Path D — Civilian reintegration

Those who do not enter the armed forces receive support to transition into civilian employment, education or entrepreneurship.

Path E — Exclusion

Individuals who fail legal, professional or integrity requirements should not automatically receive military positions simply because they previously commanded an armed formation.

DDR should therefore be treated as an economic and social programme, not simply a weapons-collection exercise.

UNSMIL has explicitly linked military unification with DDR, security-sector reform and reintegration of armed-group members.

Figure



The roadmap unfolds through a cumulative logic in which each phase enables the next institutional leap. It begins with political alignment, the foundational cognitive tier where actors stabilise intentions and trust. This corresponds to the didactic level of recognition, establishing a shared learning environment. The next stage introduces systematic auditing, matching the didactic tier of comprehension. Joint structures emerge afterward, representing the didactic level of application through shared mechanisms. Integration and DDR deepen complexity, aligning with analysis as actors categorise, differentiate, and reorganise. Unified command and doctrine mark the tier of synthesis, combining elements into a coherent operational philosophy. State monopoly on force reflects evaluation, determining legitimacy and dissolving parallel formations. Democratic oversight becomes the meta-didactic tier of reflection, where the system monitors itself. The progression is intentionally non-reversible, reducing fragmentation at each step. Early stages are trust-building, middle stages are structure-building, and later stages are norm-building.

The didactic taxonomy is moving from basic knowledge to higher-order governance. Political compact becomes shared vocabulary; audit becomes shared data; joint architecture becomes shared procedures. DDR becomes behavioural re-patterning; doctrine becomes shared worldview; monopoly on force becomes shared enforcement. Oversight becomes shared accountability, the highest didactic tier. The roadmap is scaffolded, adding stability and reducing behavioural variance. It follows a temporal pedagogy, sequencing learning to avoid overload. The taxonomy is both vertical, increasing complexity, and horizontal, spanning political, military, and judicial domains. The final configuration is a self-correcting system, characteristic of advanced institutional learning. Overall, the roadmap forms a didactic staircase from recognition to reflection.

Phase V — Unified Command and Doctrine

Months 18–36

Once sufficient confidence has been established, Libya should move from coordination to genuine institutional unification.

1. National military doctrine

Adopt a single doctrine based on:

- defence of Libyan sovereignty;
- political neutrality;
- civilian control;
- constitutional legality;
- protection of civilians;
- territorial integrity;
- rejection of factional armed activity.

2. Unified command

Gradually establish a single national chain of command.

Senior leadership should be selected through transparent, legally defined procedures rather than a winner-takes-all political bargain.

A useful principle would be:

regional balance + professional competence + civilian approval.

3. Common military education

Officers and senior NCOs from east, west and south should increasingly attend common national institutions.

The long-term objective is to create a new professional identity:

Libyan officer first, regional/factional affiliation second.

Phase VI — State Monopoly over Armed Force

Months 24–42

Military unification cannot succeed if parallel armed structures remain permanently outside the state.

A parallel process should therefore address:

- armed formations outside state command;
- unauthorised weapons;
- military facilities controlled by non-state actors;
- illicit recruitment;
- private armed security structures;

- organised criminal networks with military capabilities.

The transition should be negotiated and sequenced rather than attempted through a single nationwide disarmament operation.

For each armed formation, establish a written transition agreement specifying:

1. personnel pathway;
2. weapons-management arrangements;
3. command transition;
4. facility transition;
5. financial arrangements;
6. civilian reintegration options;
7. verification mechanism.

The UN's current security dialogue has similarly highlighted the need to address parallel armed structures and establish the state's monopoly over legitimate force.

Phase VII — Consolidation and Democratic Oversight

Months 36–48

The final phase should make military unification irreversible.

Parliament

Create effective parliamentary oversight of:

- defence expenditure;
- senior appointments;
- military legislation;
- procurement;
- deployment decisions.

Judiciary

Strengthen independent military and civilian judicial mechanisms.

Inspector-General

Establish an independent military inspectorate responsible for:

- corruption investigations;
- professional standards;
- abuse allegations;

- procurement oversight;
- compliance with civilian authority.

National Security Strategy

Publish a national strategy defining the armed forces' role and separating:

- defence;
- policing;
- intelligence;
- border security;
- counterterrorism;
- local security.

This prevents the military from becoming the default institution for every internal security problem.

Cross-Cutting Track: International Support

International actors should support—not substitute for—Libyan decision-making.

A coordinated international mechanism should involve the UN, African Union and relevant international partners.

Its priorities should be:

- technical assistance;
- mediation;
- DDR expertise;
- professional military education;
- border-security assistance;
- mine action;
- financial transparency;
- monitoring of foreign interference;
- support for removal of foreign fighters and mercenaries.

The 2020 ceasefire already established the principle that foreign fighters and mercenaries should leave Libya, while the current UN framework continues to support the 5+5 process and confidence-building.

Proposed Governance Structure

Civilian Political Authority
↓
National Defence Council

↓
Unified General Staff
↓
Regional Commands
↓
Professional Military Units

Alongside this:

Parliamentary Oversight → budget, appointments, legislation
Military Inspectorate → accountability and integrity
Judiciary → legality and human-rights compliance
5+5 JMC / Unification Commission → transition monitoring
UN/AU partners → mediation, technical support and verification

Measurable Benchmarks

The roadmap should use objective indicators rather than political declarations.

Period	Key benchmark
0–6 months	National Military Unification Compact signed
0–6 months	Expanded 5+5/JMC mandate agreed
3–9 months	National personnel and institutional audit completed
6–12 months	Joint operations and coordination mechanisms functioning
9–18 months	Common personnel standards adopted
9–24 months	First major cohort of personnel integrated
12–30 months	DDR and civilian reintegration programmes operational
18–30 months	Common military education and doctrine established
24–36 months	Unified transitional command operational
30–42 months	Parallel armed structures progressively transferred, integrated or demobilised
36–48 months	Unified military institution operating under civilian oversight

The Elements of a National Military Compact

Here is an program on the *National Military Unification Compact*, with each article is expanded in conceptual depth, operational clarity, and institutional nuance, while keeping the structure coherent and progressive.

Strategic Mandate

The State affirms the creation of a single, unified, professional armed force under civilian authority. All parties recognise that military fragmentation is incompatible with sovereignty, territorial integrity, and democratic consolidation. This mandate supersedes factional command structures and establishes unification as a national priority with binding force.

Civilian Authority & Constitutional Control

Civilian institutions—parliament, executive, and judiciary—exercise exclusive authority over defence policy, appointments, budgets, promotions, and oversight. Military actors acknowledge constitutional supremacy and commit to non-interference in political processes. This article anchors the armed forces within a democratic governance framework.

Ceasefire, Security Guarantees & Non-Escalation

All signatories commit to an immediate cessation of offensive operations and adopt mutual security guarantees. Mechanisms for de-escalation, hotline communication, and incident management are established. This stabilises the environment required for audits, integration, and DDR.

Recognition of Existing Armed Formations

The State formally registers all armed formations, their leadership, territorial presence, and operational capacities. Recognition prevents exclusion-driven spoilers and provides the factual basis for audits, integration pathways, and command restructuring.

Personnel Integration Principles

Integration is conducted at the individual level, based on merit, vetting, professional standards, and national needs. Collective absorption of militias or factional blocs is prohibited. This article ensures that unification produces a professional force rather than a negotiated amalgam of factions.

Mandate for National Military Audit

A nationwide audit is authorised to verify personnel, units, equipment, facilities, and command structures. The audit produces the baseline dataset for integration, DDR, doctrine harmonisation, and budget planning. It is conducted jointly and monitored by neutral observers.

Interim Joint Command Architecture

A Joint Defence Council and Unified General Staff are established to coordinate operations during the transition. These bodies harmonise procedures, manage incidents, and prepare the institutional terrain for a single chain of command.

Doctrine Harmonisation & Professional Standards

The State commits to developing a unified national military doctrine, common training curricula, shared professional ethics, and standardised operational procedures. This article transforms disparate armed formations into a coherent military culture.

DDR & Reintegration Pathways

Structured pathways are defined for military integration, retirement, or civilian reintegration. DDR programmes include economic support, vocational training, and psychosocial assistance. This article ensures humane, sustainable transitions for personnel not entering the unified force.

Weapons, Facilities & Strategic Asset Control

Heavy weapons, ammunition depots, airbases, ports, and strategic facilities are registered, secured, and progressively transferred to state authority. This article establishes the material foundations of the state monopoly on force.

Militia Demobilisation Roadmap

Parallel armed formations are dissolved or transformed according to a sequenced roadmap linked to political guarantees, joint command functionality, and DDR readiness. Demobilisation is monitored and verified to prevent re-fragmentation.

Oversight, Accountability & Rule of Law

Parliamentary oversight, inspector-general functions, judicial review, and human-rights compliance mechanisms are institutionalised. This article ensures that the unified force is subject to democratic scrutiny and legal accountability.

Verification, Monitoring & International Support

The UN, AU, or other partners support monitoring, verification, DDR, training, and confidence-building. Their role is advisory and technical, reinforcing national ownership while ensuring transparency and compliance.

Dispute Resolution & Non-Collapse Mechanisms

A structured mechanism resolves disputes, violations, or delays without collapsing the compact. Mediation panels, escalation ladders, and corrective measures ensure continuity even under stress.

Sequencing, Benchmarks & Transition Timeline

The compact defines a phased timeline linking political agreement, confidence-building, audits, joint institutions, integration, doctrine, unified command, and democratic oversight. Benchmarks are measurable, time-bound, and publicly reported.

Three Critical Safeguards

1. Do not make unification dependent on one political faction winning

A military merger perceived as a victory for either east or west is unlikely to survive.

2. Do not integrate militias wholesale

Individual professional integration is preferable to granting entire armed organisations permanent institutional autonomy.

3. Do not attempt full disarmament before political guarantees exist

Weapons reduction should accompany political agreements, economic alternatives and credible security guarantees.

End State

The desired outcome by approximately 2030 should be:

One Libyan state → one civilian defence authority → one military doctrine → one personnel system → one professional chain of command → one national defence budget → one accountable armed force.

The key sequencing principle is:

Political agreement → confidence-building → verification → joint institutions → personnel integration → DDR → unified command → state monopoly of force → democratic consolidation.

This sequencing is consistent with the direction of the current UN-supported process, which links military unification to the broader political transition rather than treating it as an isolated military exercise.

Figure



The governance hierarchy begins with the Civilian Political Authority, which exercises supreme oversight and policy direction. Beneath it stands the National Defence Council, responsible for strategic coordination and defence planning. The Unified General Staff follows, managing operational command and professional standards. Below this, Regional Commands—Western, Southern, and Eastern—execute decentralised operations under a unified doctrine, leading ultimately to Professional Military Units, disciplined and nationally representative.

Alongside this structure, Parliamentary Oversight ensures control over the defence budget, appointments, and legislation. The Military Inspectorate upholds accountability and integrity, while the Judiciary guarantees legality and compliance with human rights. The 5+5 Joint Military Commission (JMC) and Unification Commission monitor the transition process, supported by UN and African Union partners providing mediation, technical assistance, and verification.

The roadmap's progress should be measured through objective indicators rather than political declarations. Within the first six months, the National Military Unification Compact should be signed and the expanded 5+5/JMC mandate agreed. By nine months, a national personnel and institutional audit must be completed. Between six and twelve months, joint operations and coordination mechanisms should be functioning. By eighteen months, common personnel standards should be adopted, and within twenty-four months, the first major cohort of personnel integrated. Between twelve and thirty months, DDR and civilian reintegration programmes should be operational. By thirty months, common military education and doctrine should be established, followed by a unified transitional command between twenty-four and thirty-six months. By forty-two months, parallel armed structures should be progressively transferred, integrated, or demobilised, culminating in a unified military institution operating under civilian oversight by forty-eight months.

Three safeguards are essential. Unification must not depend on one political faction's victory; a merger perceived as triumph for either east or west will not endure. Militias should not be integrated wholesale; individual professional integration is preferable to granting entire armed organisations permanent autonomy. Full disarmament should not precede credible political guarantees; weapons reduction must accompany political agreements, economic alternatives, and security assurances.

By approximately 2030, Libya should achieve one state, one civilian defence authority, one military doctrine, one personnel system, one professional chain of command, one national defence budget, and one accountable armed force. The sequencing principle—political agreement, confidence-building, verification, joint institutions, personnel integration, DDR, unified command, state monopoly of force, and democratic consolidation—aligns with the UN-supported process linking military unification to Libya's broader political transition.

POWER SHARING MODEL

A workable Libyan power-sharing model should not simply divide offices between East and West. That would reproduce the very fragmentation it is supposed to overcome. It should instead address the four underlying drivers of insecurity you identify: regime survival, tribal and regional structures, military power, and the historical consequences of foreign intervention.

A Libyan power-sharing compact

The objective should be inclusive national government without recreating excessive centralization. Libya needs a state strong enough to control national resources, foreign policy and the armed forces, but decentralized enough that Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan do not perceive national institutions as instruments of domination.

Regime survival

The first problem is the fear of political extinction. Libya's major factions have repeatedly resisted political settlements because losing office can mean losing access to money, security networks and protection from rivals.

A power-sharing arrangement should therefore provide credible guarantees of political survival during the transition. The principal eastern and western political constituencies should be guaranteed representation in the executive, legislature and key national institutions for a defined transitional period.

But this should not mean permanent allocation of offices according to faction. The transitional arrangement should contain a clear sunset clause and progressively shift from factional representation toward electoral representation.

A particularly important principle would be no winner-takes-all executive. The presidency or collective head of state should require cross-regional legitimacy, while the government should include ministers from the major regions. Major decisions concerning security, oil, constitutional arrangements and foreign policy should require broader consensus rather than a simple western or eastern majority.

At the same time, there should be carefully designed guarantees against political revenge. Actors who relinquish armed or political power need credible assurance that participation in the settlement will not automatically expose them to arbitrary prosecution, confiscation or exclusion. This does not mean blanket immunity for serious international crimes; rather, it means creating a predictable transitional justice process rather than allowing justice to become a weapon in factional competition.

The objective is to change the calculation of Libya's elites from "if I lose, I may lose everything" to "I can lose an election without losing my security, political rights or access to legitimate institutions."

Tribal and regional structures

The second pillar should recognize that Libya's political geography cannot simply be erased through centralization.

Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan should receive constitutionally protected representation and meaningful authority over matters that are primarily regional or local. This could take the form of asymmetric decentralization: national institutions would retain sovereignty over defence, foreign affairs, monetary policy and strategic natural resources, while regions and municipalities would exercise substantial authority over local administration, policing, infrastructure and development.

A regional chamber could provide Cyrenaica and Fezzan, in particular, with protection against permanent domination by population-weighted institutions centred in Tripoli. Major constitutional, resource and territorial decisions could require approval from both the population-based national chamber and a chamber representing the regions.

This would address a central fear in Cyrenaica: that “national unity” could simply mean the restoration of western political dominance.

For Fezzan, decentralization would need to be accompanied by fiscal guarantees. Political representation without resources would not resolve southern marginalization. A defined share of national development expenditure should therefore be allocated to the southern region, with transparent mechanisms for infrastructure, health, education and border communities.

Tribal structures should likewise be recognized as social and mediation structures rather than alternative sovereign authorities. Tribal and community leaders could participate in local reconciliation councils, dispute-resolution mechanisms and security dialogues, but the formal state should remain the ultimate source of legal authority.

This distinction is essential: the objective is not to tribalize the Libyan state, but to connect the formal state to the social structures through which legitimacy operates locally.

Military power

Military power is the most difficult element because Libya's armed groups are not simply security organizations. They are also political and economic actors.

The mistake would be to demand immediate disarmament. Armed groups are unlikely to surrender their weapons while they remain uncertain about who will ultimately control the state.

The first stage should therefore be mutual security guarantees. Eastern and western military authorities would commit to non-aggression, transparent force dispositions, communication channels and joint monitoring. The objective would be to reduce the security dilemma before attempting full integration.

A Joint National Security Council could bring together senior eastern, western and southern security representatives under civilian authority. Initially, it would coordinate rather than command. Its responsibilities could include border security, counterterrorism, protection of critical infrastructure and prevention of renewed armed confrontation.

The second stage would involve professionalization and selective integration. Fighters who meet nationally agreed professional criteria could enter reformed national military or police institutions. Others should be offered civilian reintegration, vocational training and employment.

Crucially, integration should not mean placing entire militias into the army under their existing commanders. That would simply turn factional forces into federalized militias inside the state.

The long-term objective should be a single national chain of command, civilian control and common professional standards.

The sequencing should therefore be:

ceasefire → confidence-building → joint security mechanisms → professionalization → selective integration → unified command.

The legacy of foreign intervention

The fourth pillar must address the historical consequences of foreign intervention.

Libyans have experienced repeated external intervention, from colonial boundary-making and the Chad conflict to the 2011 intervention and the subsequent involvement of regional and global powers. These experiences have contributed to a widespread concern that external actors can manipulate Libya's internal divisions for their own strategic purposes.

A new settlement should therefore contain an explicit non-interference compact.

External states should commit to respecting Libya's political process, ending military support for competing factions, limiting arms transfers and channelling security assistance through agreed national institutions.

But this should not be based solely on appeals to sovereignty. External powers need incentives to comply.

Türkiye, Egypt, European states, Gulf countries, Russia and the United States all have different interests in Libya. A successful settlement should therefore give each actor legitimate channels through which those interests can be pursued without maintaining rival Libyan clients.

For example, security cooperation should increasingly be conducted through national institutions rather than individual commanders. Energy agreements should be concluded through transparent national institutions rather than factional authorities. Reconstruction and investment should be linked to national and regional development plans.

The objective is to transform the relationship from:

external patron → Libyan faction

toward:

external partner → Libyan state institutions.

The economic dimension

Power-sharing will not survive if the underlying rent distribution remains unchanged.

Oil revenues should therefore be placed at the centre of the compact. The principle should be that oil belongs to all Libyans, while regions producing or hosting strategic infrastructure receive predictable development benefits.

A transparent national revenue mechanism could allocate funds through three channels: national government expenditure, regional transfers and equalized municipal development funding.

The Central Bank and National Oil Corporation should be insulated as far as possible from factional capture, while their governance should include safeguards ensuring that neither region can monopolize national economic institutions.

This is particularly important because economic inequality can otherwise reproduce the same political conflict under a different form.

A constitutional bargain

The entire arrangement should ultimately be embedded in a constitutional framework.

The basic bargain could be summarized as:

One sovereign Libya, decentralized governance, regional guarantees, shared national institutions, unified civilian control of the military, equitable resource distribution and non-interference by foreign powers.

Tripolitania would retain the role of national political centre without possessing a monopoly over national authority.

Cyrenaica would receive institutional guarantees against western domination, meaningful regional representation and protection of its economic and political interests.

Fezzan would receive guaranteed political representation, development resources, local administrative authority and a meaningful role in border and security policy.

The national government would retain control over defence, foreign affairs, monetary policy, national energy policy and strategic infrastructure.

Why this model is more viable

The strength of this model is that it addresses regime survival and national consolidation simultaneously.

The eastern and western elites receive enough security and institutional guarantees to make compromise less threatening. Regional actors receive meaningful autonomy without being granted sovereign status. Tribal and communal structures are incorporated into mediation without replacing the state. Armed actors receive a pathway out of autonomous militarization without being expected to surrender immediately. External powers retain legitimate interests but lose incentives to maintain competing proxy structures.

The most important principle is therefore:

Power-sharing should not freeze Libya's cleavages; it should use power-sharing to make those cleavages polit-

ically manageable while gradually transferring authority from factions to institutions.

That makes the model fundamentally different from a simple East–West division of ministries.

The end-state should be not permanent consociationalism, but transitional consociationalism: temporary guarantees are used to overcome the fear of domination, while institutions are gradually redesigned so that political competition eventually occurs between parties and programmes rather than between regions, militias and foreign patrons.

This is probably the most important strategic lesson from Libya's history: a viable settlement must make national unity safer for the factions than continued fragmentation.

Public Policy on Tribes and the Design of a Tribal Shura

A credible Libyan transition should recognize tribes as social and political networks with real local influence, while avoiding the creation of a tribal state. The appropriate objective is therefore not to empower tribes at the expense of citizenship, but to institutionalize their consultative and mediating functions within a constitutional state.

1. Policy objective

The policy should pursue five objectives: prevent tribal competition from becoming armed competition; incorporate locally legitimate actors into national reconciliation; provide early warning of conflict; connect national agreements to local implementation; and gradually shift political legitimacy from armed or personal networks toward constitutional institutions.

The governing principle should be:

Recognize tribes as stakeholders and mediators, not as sovereign political authorities.

This distinction is essential. Tribes should not receive independent control over territory, taxation, natural resources or armed forces. Their role should be consultative, mediating and socially representative.

2. Establish a National Tribal Shura

UNSMIL and the future Libyan constitutional authorities could support the creation of a National Tribal Shura as a permanent consultative institution.

The Shura should represent the principal tribal and communal constituencies across Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan, while also including municipalities and communities that do not organize primarily through tribal structures.

Its purpose would be to provide a channel between formal state institutions and Libya's social networks.

It should have no independent executive authority and should not be able to veto legislation simply because a tribal representative disagrees with it. Its legitimacy should derive from consultation, mediation and representation, not coercive power.

3. Composition

The composition should avoid creating a simple list of “largest tribes,” because that would reproduce demographic competition and potentially exclude smaller communities.

Representation should therefore combine regional, tribal, municipal and communal principles.

The Shura could contain representatives from:

Tripolitania, including major tribal and municipal constituencies and communities surrounding the capital and western coastal areas.

Cyrenaica, including major eastern tribal networks, municipalities and social constituencies associated with Benghazi, Derna, Ajdabiya and the wider eastern region.

Fezzan, with particularly strong representation for Tuareg, Tebu and Arab communities, given the region's distinctive social and cross-border dynamics.

Amazigh communities, whose political representation should not depend on their being incorporated into Arab tribal structures.

Women and youth, with guaranteed seats rather than optional participation.

Municipalities and civil society, ensuring that the Shura does not become an exclusively male tribal-elite institution.

The principle should be broad social representation rather than tribal arithmetic.

4. Leadership structure

The Shura should have a rotating presidency, with the chairmanship moving between Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan.

This would have considerable symbolic importance.

No region should be able to claim permanent ownership of the institution, and rotation would demonstrate that the Shura belongs to Libya as a whole.

A three-person presidency, with one representative from each region, could manage the institution collectively.

5. Functions of the Tribal Shura

The Shura should have six principal functions.

First, mediation. It should mediate disputes between communities, municipalities and political actors before they escalate into armed confrontation.

Second, early warning. It should monitor local tensions, displacement, militia mobilization, resource disputes and communal grievances and communicate emerging risks to national authorities and UNSMIL.

Third, reconciliation. It should facilitate local reconciliation agreements and help implement national political settlements at the community level.

Fourth, consultation. Major constitutional, electoral, decentralization and security reforms affecting regional or communal interests should be submitted to the Shura for consultation.

Fifth, social legitimacy. The Shura should help explain national agreements to local communities and identify where agreements are likely to encounter resistance.

Sixth, confidence-building. It should provide a continuous communication channel between rival eastern, western and southern constituencies.

6. What the Shura should not do

This is just as important as defining its powers.

The Tribal Shura should not command armed groups.

It should not control oil revenues.

It should not appoint ministers or military commanders.

It should not replace parliament.

It should not possess an independent veto over elected institutions.

It should not become a mechanism for distributing state jobs according to tribal affiliation.

It should not give tribal identity priority over citizenship.

These restrictions prevent the Shura from becoming another parallel institution competing with the state.

7. Relationship with parliament and the executive

The Shura should be constitutionally defined as a consultative institution, with formal channels into the

political system.

For major national legislation affecting decentralization, security arrangements, natural-resource distribution, constitutional reform and local government, parliament should be required to receive and publicly consider a Shura opinion.

The executive should also be required to consult the Shura on major national reconciliation and security initiatives.

However, the final decision should remain with constitutionally legitimate state institutions.

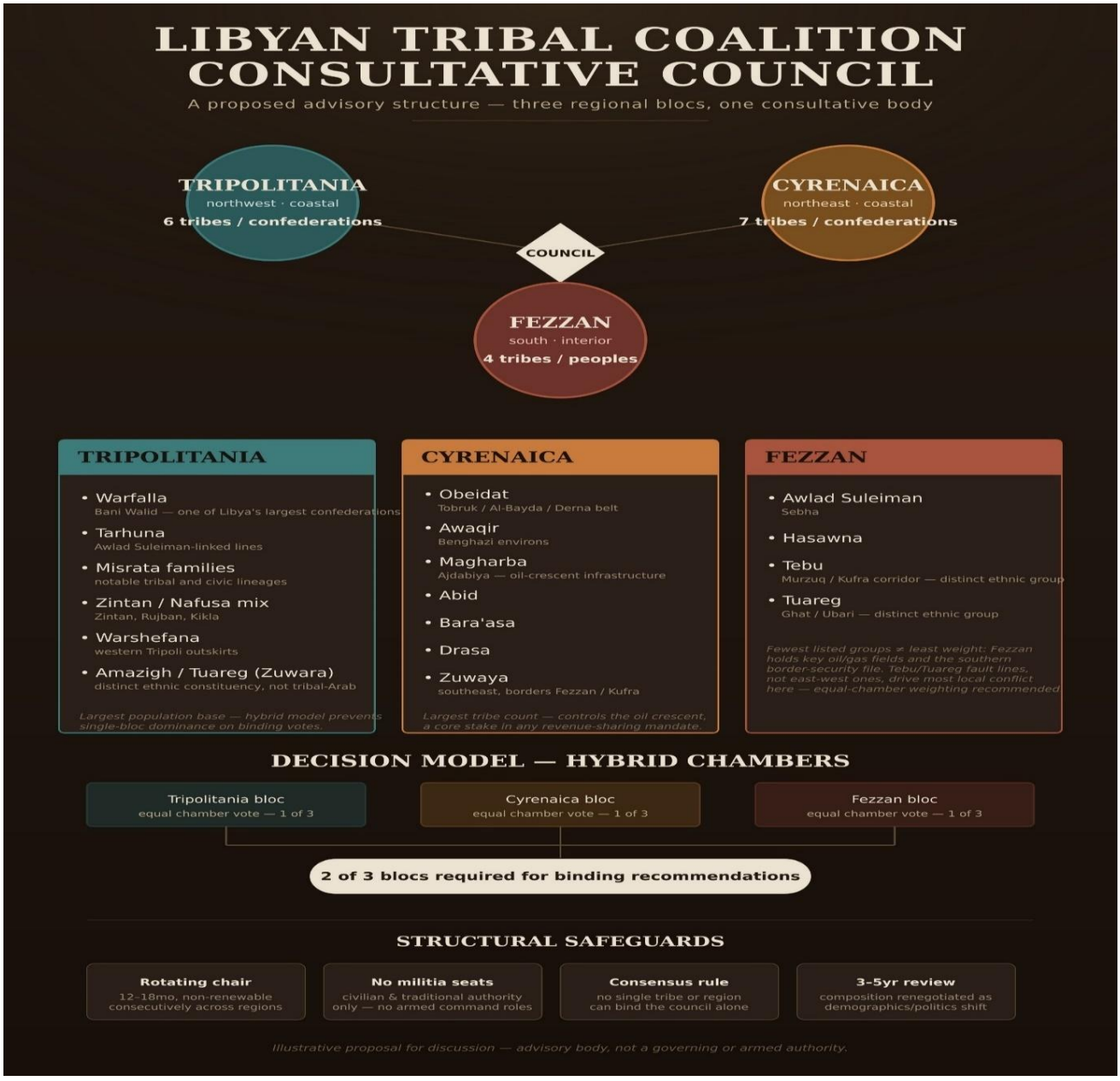
This creates a useful division:

Parliament decides.

Government implements.

Tribal Shura consults, mediates and warns.

Figure



The hybrid model is the right call — a Fezzan with only 4 named groups but equal veto weight avoids the trap of treating "fewer tribes" as "less stake," which is exactly where oil and border-security leverage sit. The 2-of-3 consensus threshold protects against Tripolitania's raw demographic weight while still letting decisions get made, rather than deadlocking on unanimity. The "no militia seats" rule is the single most load-bearing safeguard — every failed tribal-reconciliation body in Libya since 2011 blurred civilian tribal authority with armed factions, and that's what turned advisory bodies into rival power centers. Treating Amazigh, Tebu, and Tuareg as separate ethnic constituencies rather than folding them into regional Arab-tribal blocs is defensible but will draw pushback from Arab-tribe representatives who see it as diluting their bloc's vote share.

Excluding Qadhadhfa keeps the council clean of old-regime rehabilitation optics, but it leaves no formal channel into Sirte-area reconciliation, which may need a separate track. The rotating, non-consecutive chairmanship is a good check against any one region capturing the institution's public face over time. The weakest link is enforceability: nothing here compels the GNU, HoR, or armed actors to actually honor the council's recommendations, so its authority rests entirely on moral legitimacy and UN/international backing, not any built-in mechanism. Overall it's a coherent design for what a council *should* look like — the harder problem, as with most of these proposals, is getting real power-holders to cede any actual leverage to it.

8. Link the Shura to local reconciliation

The national Shura should not become an institution located exclusively in Tripoli.

It should establish regional shura councils in Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan, linked to municipal-level mediation mechanisms.

This creates a vertical structure:

National Tribal Shura → Regional Shura → Municipal/community mediation councils.

The advantage is that national agreements can be tested and implemented locally rather than remaining agreements among national elites.

This directly addresses one of the major weaknesses of externally mediated political settlements: an agreement signed in the capital does not necessarily constitute an agreement accepted in the communities where armed actors and social networks actually operate.

9. Tribal Shura and security

The Shura should have an important but carefully limited security role.

It could facilitate local ceasefires, negotiate access to contested areas, establish communication channels between communities and identify potential escalation.

It could also participate in local security agreements concerning border communities, critical infrastructure and communal disputes.

But it should never become an alternative military command.

The principle should be:

Tribes can help produce security; only legitimate state institutions should exercise sovereign coercive authority.

10. Tribal Shura and DDR

The Shura could also support disarmament, demobilization and reintegration by providing community guarantees.

A fighter considering leaving an armed group may fear retaliation, unemployment or social exclusion. Local tribal and community structures can help guarantee reintegration and provide social acceptance.

The Shura could therefore assist with:

community-level reconciliation;

return of displaced persons;

reintegration of former combatants;

local employment initiatives;

settlement of property disputes;

and monitoring of local ceasefire commitments.

This makes DDR a social process rather than merely a technical security programme.

11. Women and the danger of reproducing patriarchal structures

A traditional tribal council would risk reproducing male-dominated political structures.

The Tribal Shura should therefore be deliberately redesigned to include women as political stakeholders rather than symbolic participants.

Women should have guaranteed representation in national and regional Shura bodies, particularly because household economies, displacement, reconciliation and community welfare are areas in which women often possess substantial social knowledge.

This is consistent with the broader insight from Christiane Souriau's work on women's economic roles in Libya: understanding Libyan society requires looking beyond formal political institutions to the social and economic networks through which communities function.

12. The Shura and democracy

The Shura should complement democratic institutions rather than substitute for them.

The concept can be framed through the idea of consultation, consensus and mediation, making the institution culturally intelligible while maintaining constitutional principles of citizenship and equal rights.

The important distinction is:

Shura is a mechanism of consultation; democracy is the constitutional mechanism of political authorization.

The two can therefore coexist.

13. Safeguards against tribal capture

The policy should include explicit safeguards.

Representatives should have fixed terms.

No representative should simultaneously exercise senior command over an armed group while holding a formal Shura leadership position.

Financial interests should be disclosed.

The Shura's budget should be publicly audited.

Representation should be periodically reviewed.

Women, minorities, municipalities and non-tribal constituencies should have protected participation.

These safeguards would prevent the institution from becoming a mechanism for wealthy or militarily powerful tribes to capture the national political process.

14. Strategic rationale

The value of the Tribal Shura is ultimately not that tribes are inherently more legitimate than political parties or state institutions.

Its value is that Libya's formal institutions currently do not fully capture the country's actual networks of authority.

A national political agreement that ignores those networks risks remaining an elite agreement without local enforcement.

A Shura creates an institutional bridge:

local legitimacy → national consultation → political agreement → local implementation.

It also provides UNSMIL with an early-warning mechanism that is considerably more socially embedded than a purely diplomatic monitoring structure.

15. The core design principle

The most important point is to avoid two opposite mistakes.

The first is tribal romanticism: assuming that tribes are inherently peaceful, representative or legitimate.

The second is institutional denial: pretending that tribal and communal structures have no political relevance.

The appropriate policy lies between the two.

The Libyan state should neither suppress tribal structures nor surrender authority to them. It should incorporate their legitimate consultative and mediating functions into a constitutional framework while progressively transferring coercive, fiscal and political authority to accountable national and local institutions.

The Tribal Shura should therefore be understood as a bridge institution for transition, not as a permanent alternative to the Libyan state.

Its ultimate success would be measured not by how powerful the Shura becomes, but by whether it helps make the national state more legitimate, more inclusive and more capable of managing Libya's overlapping regional, tribal, political and security cleavages.

Regional Variation and State Consolidation

The effectiveness of the UNSMIL roadmap could also be assessed against Libya’s pronounced regional variation. Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan differ in their political structures, grievances, economic resources, and security environments. Treating Libya as a single political arena therefore risks obscuring the local conditions that determine whether national agreements can actually be implemented. A regional comparison demonstrates that state consolidation requires both a national political settlement and mechanisms capable of accommodating distinct regional interests.

Tripolitania is the principal centre of Libya's formal political and administrative institutions, with Tripoli serving as the seat of the internationally recognized executive and many national institutions. Yet formal authority does not translate automatically into effective control. Political elites, municipalities, armed groups, business networks, and civil society actors compete for influence, and their interests frequently diverge. The principal grievances concern political exclusion, competition over state resources, insecurity, and the concentration of authority within national institutions located in the west. UNSMIL's challenge in Tripolitania is therefore not simply to strengthen the central government, but to ensure that state institutions acquire legitimacy beyond the political and armed networks that currently sustain them.

Cyrenaica presents a different institutional and security configuration. Eastern Libya has long articulated grievances concerning political marginalization, uneven development, and the concentration of national institutions in Tripoli. These grievances contributed to the emergence of a distinct eastern political and military order under Khalifa Haftar. Yet Cyrenaica should not be reduced to Haftar or the Libyan National Army. Municipal authorities, tribal networks, economic actors, civil society organizations, and political figures possess different interests and degrees of dependence on eastern institutions. Support for the eastern order may therefore reflect security preferences, regional identity, economic interests, or pragmatic accommodation rather than ideological commitment. For UNSMIL, the challenge is to incorporate eastern actors into national institutions without simply legitimizing parallel structures.

Fezzan differs from both coastal regions because of its geographical isolation, weak state presence, porous southern borders, and competition over strategic routes and resources. Tuareg, Tebu, Arab, and other local communities have developed political and security networks that often substitute for absent state institutions. Competition over borders, smuggling routes, public employment, and resource access can intersect with national political disputes, making local conflicts vulnerable to external manipulation. Yet Fezzan should not be viewed solely as a security problem. Local reconciliation initiatives demonstrate that negotiated arrangements are possible when communities receive meaningful political representation and economic incentives. The roadmap therefore needs to address both security provision and the structural grievances that make alternative forms of authority attractive.

These differences also demonstrate why tribal and communal actors cannot be treated as homogeneous blocs. Tribes are networks rather than unified political parties. Leadership may be contested, younger members may hold different political preferences, and individual communities may cooperate with opposing national actors depending on circumstances. The same applies to municipal and communal organizations. Their positions are shaped by local security, economic interests, historical grievances, and relationships with national institutions. Assuming that a single tribal leader represents an entire community can therefore produce an inaccurate assessment of local legitimacy.

The distribution of resources reinforces these regional differences. Oil fields, ports, border crossings, transport corridors, and public-sector employment provide material sources of political leverage. Control over these resources can strengthen local actors and allow them to bargain with national institutions. Consequently, economic governance cannot be separated from regional politics. A national agreement that does not address perceptions of unequal resource distribution may simply reproduce the incentives underlying institutional fragmentation.

Security dynamics likewise vary across regions. Tripolitania is characterized primarily by competition among urban armed groups and security formations; Cyrenaica has experienced greater consolidation under a dominant military structure; and Fezzan remains particularly exposed to border insecurity, trafficking networks, and competition among local armed communities. These differences make a uniform security policy problematic. The objective should not simply be to impose a single model immediately, but to establish common civilian authority while recognizing different local security conditions.

This regional perspective has direct implications for evaluating the UNSMIL roadmap. Political legitimacy should be measured partly by the extent to which national arrangements are accepted across the three regions. Institutional capacity should be assessed by whether national institutions can operate beyond their strongest territorial bases. Security control should be measured by whether armed structures are gradually brought under

legitimate national authority. Economic governance should include the fairness and transparency of resource distribution. Social cohesion should be evaluated through reconciliation, local participation, and the reduction of regional grievances.

The comparison also exposes a central weakness in a purely elite-centred peace process. Agreements between the House of Representatives, the High Council of State, and executive authorities may resolve formal questions at the national level without changing the incentives of local actors. Conversely, purely local agreements may stabilize individual communities without creating national institutions capable of coordinating them. UNSMIL therefore faces a dual task: national political settlement must be accompanied by locally grounded mechanisms of implementation.

For the European Union, the same distinction is important. Engagement with national authorities is necessary for diplomacy, migration management, and economic cooperation, but European policy should avoid assuming that national institutions automatically represent local interests. Development assistance, municipal support, border management, and reconciliation programmes can provide complementary channels through which regional grievances are addressed without empowering competing national centres of authority.

The regional comparison ultimately suggests that Libya's fragmentation is not simply a struggle between east and west. It is a layered system of political, economic, communal, and security relationships in which alliances frequently cross regional boundaries. Regional identity matters, but it does not determine political behaviour. The more accurate unit of analysis is therefore the network of actors operating within and across each region.

This has an important consequence for the UNSMIL roadmap. Its success should not be measured solely by whether national elites sign an agreement or whether elections are eventually held. It should also be measured by whether national institutions become capable of incorporating regional interests without institutionalizing permanent territorial divisions. The decisive test is whether Libya can move from negotiated coexistence among competing centres of power toward a political order in which regional interests are represented within common institutions rather than through parallel institutions.

The regional dimension therefore strengthens the broader state-consolidation framework. Libya's political legitimacy, institutional capacity, security control, economic governance, and social cohesion cannot be built identically across the country. They must be constructed through a national framework that is sufficiently strong to unify the state, but sufficiently flexible to recognize the different realities of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan. UNSMIL's central challenge is consequently not merely to negotiate a national agreement, but to make that agreement politically meaningful at the local level where authority is actually exercised.

Dimension	Tripolitania	Cyrenaica	Fezzan	Implication for UNSMIL
Key stakeholders	Executive authorities, municipalities, armed groups, business networks, civil society	Haftar/LNA, eastern authorities, municipalities, tribal and economic networks	Tuareg, Tebu and Arab communities, municipalities, armed groups, border actors	Avoid treating Libya as a single political arena
Main grievances	Political competition, insecurity, distribution of state resources	Perceived marginalization, unequal development, political exclusion	Underdevelopment, weak state presence, marginalization, insecurity	Address regional grievances alongside national bargaining
Strategic resources	Tripoli institutions, ports, commercial networks, public-sector resources	Oil infrastructure, territory, military assets, eastern institutions	Border crossings, trade routes, oil fields, local resources	Link economic governance to political settlement
Security dynamics	Competition among urban armed groups	Greater military consolidation under	Fragmented local security networks	Use differentiated rather than

		Haftar	and porous borders	uniform security policies
Political structure	Strongest concentration of national institutions	Parallel political and military structures	Weak central presence and stronger local networks	Promote national institutions without ignoring local authority
Social dynamics	Urban and municipal divisions	Regional identity combined with political and military loyalties	Communal, tribal and ethnic networks	Treat communities as heterogeneous rather than unified blocs
Principal risk	Armed competition within the capital	Permanent institutional dualism	Local conflict and cross-border insecurity	Prevent regional arrangements from becoming permanent fragmentation
UNSMIL priority	Strengthen legitimate civilian institutions	Integrate eastern actors into national structures	Support reconciliation, development and security governance	Combine national settlement with locally grounded implementation
Success indicator	National institutions exercise effective civilian authority	Parallel institutions gradually converge	Local actors participate in national institutions	Regional interests are represented within, rather than outside, the state

The regional comparison has several important implications for the UNSMIL roadmap. First, national agreements between Libya's main political elites are unlikely to be sufficient unless they are accepted and implemented at the local level. UNSMIL should therefore connect national negotiations with municipal and regional mechanisms of implementation.

Second, a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to work. Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan face different political, economic, and security conditions, meaning that institution-building, reconciliation, and security reform need to be adapted to regional realities while remaining part of a single national framework.

Third, UNSMIL should engage a broader range of actors. Municipal authorities, community leaders, tribal networks, civil society, and local economic actors can provide forms of legitimacy and influence that national political institutions do not possess. However, tribal and communal actors should not be treated as unified blocs, since their interests and loyalties are often internally divided.

Fourth, economic governance must be treated as part of the political settlement. Oil facilities, ports, border crossings, public employment, and access to state revenues create powerful incentives for regional competition. More equitable and transparent resource distribution could therefore reduce some of the incentives for maintaining parallel structures.

Fifth, security reform must reflect regional differences. Armed-group competition in Tripolitania, military consolidation in Cyrenaica, and fragmented border security in Fezzan cannot be addressed through an identical policy. UNSMIL should pursue gradual security-sector integration while maintaining the long-term objective of unified civilian control.

Finally, recognizing regional differences should not mean accepting permanent fragmentation. The central objective should remain the creation of common national institutions capable of representing regional interests. The success of the UNSMIL roadmap should therefore be measured not simply by whether elites reach an agreement or elections are held, but by whether regional actors increasingly pursue their interests through

national institutions rather than through competing governments, armed groups, or parallel economic structures.

A Practical Approach to Establishing an International Support Committee on Libya

The establishment of an international contact group on Libya has the potential to enhance coordination among domestic, regional, and international actors while supporting ongoing efforts to achieve political stability, economic recovery, and sustainable peace. However, the effectiveness of such a mechanism would depend largely on its design, mandate, and relationship with existing diplomatic initiatives. To avoid becoming another forum for discussion without meaningful outcomes, the contact group should be structured around clear objectives, inclusive participation, operational efficiency, and close alignment with established peace building frameworks.

1. Define a Clear and Focused Mandate

The first requirement for an effective contact group is the establishment of a precise and realistic mandate. International efforts in Libya have often been hindered by overlapping initiatives, competing priorities, and differing interpretations of success. A contact group should therefore articulate from the outset what it seeks to achieve and within what timeframe.

Its mandate could encompass several interconnected areas:

- Supporting and facilitating political dialogue among Libyan actors.
- Strengthening implementation of ceasefire and security arrangements.
- Promoting economic governance, transparency, and equitable resource management.
- Coordinating international support for humanitarian and development priorities.
- Encouraging compliance with international commitments and relevant United Nations resolutions.

The mandate should prioritize practical outcomes rather than broad declarations. For example, instead of generally supporting political reconciliation, the group could focus on facilitating consensus around electoral frameworks, constitutional arrangements, or confidence-building measures between rival political institutions. Clearly defined objectives would help establish accountability, guide resource allocation, and provide a basis for evaluating progress.

A written terms-of-reference document should specify the scope of activities, expected deliverables, timelines, and criteria for success. This would reduce ambiguity among participants and help prevent the expansion of responsibilities beyond the group's capacity.

2. Ensure Inclusive and Balanced Representation

The legitimacy and effectiveness of any contact group depend on the credibility of its membership. Libya’s conflict and political fragmentation involve a complex network of domestic, regional, and international stakeholders whose interests often overlap or compete. A successful contact group must therefore balance inclusivity with manageability.

Libyan Stakeholders

Libyan ownership should remain at the center of the process. The contact group should include representatives from key political institutions, local authorities, and relevant national bodies. Consideration should also be given to including representatives from civil society organizations, women's groups, youth organizations, tribal and community leaders, and economic institutions. Broad participation can help ensure that discussions reflect diverse perspectives and reduce perceptions that solutions are being imposed from outside.

Figure



Neighboring States

Libya's stability has direct implications for neighboring countries through migration flows, border security concerns, arms trafficking, and economic interdependence. States such as Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Chad, and Niger possess important regional perspectives and can contribute to confidence-building efforts and regional cooperation mechanisms. Their inclusion would also help address transnational challenges that cannot be resolved through domestic initiatives alone.

International and Regional Organizations

Multilateral organizations provide institutional legitimacy, technical expertise, and continuity. The United Nations should play a central role, alongside regional organizations such as the African Union (AU), the League of Arab States (LAS), and relevant European institutions. These organizations can facilitate dialogue, provide mediation support, and help align international engagement with agreed norms and frameworks.

Key International Partners

Major international actors with diplomatic, economic, or security interests in Libya should also be represented. Their participation is critical because external involvement has historically influenced developments on the ground. Bringing these actors into a coordinated forum can reduce policy fragmentation, encourage transparency, and create opportunities for collective action in support of Libyan-led solutions.

To preserve effectiveness, membership should be structured in a way that prevents the group from becoming excessively large or cumbersome. Core members may be complemented by observer status for additional stakeholders and technical experts when necessary.

3. Establish Specialized Working Groups

Given the complexity of Libya's challenges, a single plenary forum is unlikely to address all issues effectively. The contact group should therefore establish specialized working groups responsible for developing recommendations, monitoring developments, and coordinating implementation within specific sectors.

Political Working Group

The political working group would focus on supporting dialogue among Libyan institutions and stakeholders. Its responsibilities could include:

- Facilitating consensus-building efforts.
- Supporting constitutional and electoral processes.
- Encouraging political reconciliation initiatives.
- Monitoring implementation of political agreements.
- Identifying obstacles to political transition.

This group would provide a structured environment for addressing governance challenges while helping to maintain momentum in political negotiations.

Security Working Group

Security remains one of Libya's most significant challenges. The security working group could focus on:

- Supporting ceasefire monitoring mechanisms.
- Strengthening security sector reform initiatives.
- Encouraging disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts.
- Addressing the presence of foreign fighters and mercenaries.
- Promoting border security cooperation.

By bringing together security experts and relevant stakeholders, the group could help translate political commitments into practical security arrangements.

Economic Working Group

Economic disputes have often fueled political tensions in Libya. An economic working group could contribute to stability by addressing issues such as:

- Public financial management.
- Transparency in oil revenue distribution.
- Institutional reform of economic governance structures.
- Investment and economic recovery strategies.
- Anti-corruption initiatives.

Improved economic governance can reduce incentives for conflict and strengthen public confidence in state institutions.

Humanitarian and Development Working Group

Humanitarian challenges continue to affect vulnerable populations throughout Libya. This working group could focus on:

- Coordinating humanitarian assistance.
- Supporting internally displaced persons and migrants.
- Improving access to essential services.
- Strengthening resilience and development programs.
- Promoting protection of human rights.

The integration of humanitarian and development perspectives would help bridge the gap between immediate assistance and long-term stabilization.

4. Coordinate Closely with the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL)

The contact group should not operate independently of existing UN efforts. Instead, close coordination with the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) is essential for maintaining coherence and legitimacy.

UNSMIL possesses extensive institutional knowledge, established relationships with Libyan stakeholders, and a mandate from the UN Security Council to support Libya's political process. The contact group should therefore function as a complementary mechanism that reinforces, rather than replaces, UNSMIL's work.

Practical measures for coordination could include:

- Regular briefings between UNSMIL and contact group members.
- Shared strategic planning processes.
- Joint monitoring and assessment mechanisms.
- Information-sharing protocols.
- Alignment of public messaging and diplomatic engagement.

Such coordination would reduce duplication, strengthen consistency, and increase the overall effectiveness of international support.

5. Develop Robust Governance, Decision-Making, and Accountability Mechanisms

A contact group can only be effective if it possesses clear operational procedures and accountability structures. Participants should agree on decision-making processes from the outset to avoid procedural disputes that could undermine progress.

Possible arrangements include:

- Consensus-based decision-making for major strategic issues.
- Qualified majority voting for procedural matters.

- Rotating chairmanship arrangements.
- Permanent secretariat support for coordination and administration.
- Scheduled review and evaluation meetings.

Transparency should be supported through regular reporting mechanisms. Progress reports should summarize achievements, challenges, and recommended actions. These reports could be shared with participating governments, international organizations, and relevant Libyan stakeholders.

Equally important is the establishment of measurable objectives and performance indicators. Examples might include:

- Progress toward agreed electoral milestones.
- Implementation rates of political agreements.
- Reduction in ceasefire violations.
- Improvements in economic transparency indicators.
- Increased humanitarian access and service delivery.

Monitoring these indicators would allow the group to evaluate whether its activities are producing meaningful results and adjust strategies accordingly.

6. Avoid Duplication and Strengthen Existing Frameworks

One of the most important lessons from previous international engagement in Libya is that the proliferation of

diplomatic initiatives can create confusion and dilute effectiveness. The contact group should therefore be designed to complement existing mechanisms rather than compete with them.

Particular attention should be given to coordination with frameworks such as:

- The Berlin Process.
- UNSMIL-led political initiatives.
- African Union mediation efforts.
- Regional diplomatic mechanisms.
- Existing donor coordination platforms.

Before launching new activities, the group should conduct a mapping exercise to identify ongoing initiatives, institutional responsibilities, and areas where gaps remain. This would help ensure that resources are directed toward unmet needs rather than duplicating work already being undertaken elsewhere.

The contact group's comparative advantage should lie in its ability to improve coordination, mobilize political support, and facilitate implementation of commitments that have already been agreed upon. Success is more likely when the group serves as a bridge between existing efforts rather than as a separate diplomatic track.

An international contact group on Libya could serve as a valuable mechanism for improving coordination among domestic, regional, and international actors. Its success, however, would depend on careful institutional design and a commitment to complementing existing peace and stabilization efforts. By establishing a clear mandate, ensuring inclusive representation, creating specialized working groups, coordinating closely with

UNSMIL, implementing robust governance arrangements, and avoiding duplication with existing frameworks, the contact group can contribute to a more coherent and effective international approach to Libya. Ultimately, its purpose should be to support Libyan-led solutions, strengthen existing diplomatic processes, and create practical pathways toward long-term peace, stability, and development.

The Libyan Constitution and transitional management

As discussed above following the transfer of authority from Libya's National Transitional Council (NTC) to the General National Congress (GNC) in August 2011-12, the country continued to face a series of unresolved security, constitutional, and political conflicts that complicated the transition from revolutionary governance to a stable constitutional order.

The most immediate challenge was security. Although the NTC formally handed over power, the state had not established effective control over the use of force. Revolutionary militias that had emerged during the uprising retained their weapons, territorial influence, and independent command structures. Many resisted integration into the national army or police, while state security institutions remained weak and underdeveloped. Competition among armed groups for influence over strategic locations, including borders, oil facilities, and major cities, undermined the authority of the central government and created an environment in which political actors were frequently subject to coercion and intimidation.

At the constitutional level, there was no consensus regarding the fundamental character of the future Libyan state. Disagreements persisted over whether Libya should adopt a centralized or federal system, how power and resources should be distributed among the historic regions of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan, and what role Islamic law should play within the constitutional framework. Questions concerning the protection of minority communities, including the Amazigh, Tuareg, and Tebu populations, remained unresolved. Equally contentious were debates over the design of executive authority and the balance of power between national institutions. A particularly significant dispute concerned the method by which the constitution-drafting body itself should be constituted, with competing views favoring either appointment by the GNC or direct election by the Libyan people.

Political divisions further complicated the transition. Disagreements emerged over the participation of former regime officials in public life, the implementation of political isolation measures, and the relationship between Islamist and non-Islamist political forces. Questions regarding the legitimacy, powers, and duration of transitional institutions generated additional tensions, while regional grievances concerning representation and the allocation of state resources contributed to growing polarization. These unresolved political conflicts gradually eroded confidence in the transitional process and intensified instability.

The Constitutional Declaration envisioned a dedicated Constitutional Drafting Assembly responsible for preparing Libya's permanent constitution. The original transitional framework required the GNC, following its inauguration, to establish the procedures for selecting a sixty-member constitutional body modeled on the historic "Committee of Sixty" that drafted Libya's 1951 Constitution. Initially, the process was expected to move rapidly, with the assembly being organized shortly after the GNC assumed office.

However, prolonged disputes over the composition and selection of the assembly delayed implementation of the constitutional roadmap. After extensive political debate, it was ultimately decided that the Constitutional Drafting Assembly would be directly elected rather than appointed. The body was designed to include equal representation from Libya's three historic regions, reflecting concerns about regional balance and national inclusion.

Under the original timetable, the Constitutional Drafting Assembly was expected to begin its work soon after its establishment and complete a draft constitution within 120 days of its first meeting, after which the proposed constitution would be submitted to a national referendum. In practice, political disagreements and institutional delays prevented adherence to this schedule. Elections for the Constitutional Drafting Assembly were not held until February 2014, significantly postponing the constitutional transition envisioned at the time of the NTC–GNC handover.

As a result, the transfer of power in 2012 marked an important milestone in Libya's transition, but it did not resolve the underlying **security, constitutional, and political disputes that continued to shape the country's trajectory in the years that followed.**

For a constitutional assembly in post-NTC Libya, the most useful approach is to distinguish between positions (what actors publicly demand), interests (what they are actually trying to protect or obtain), and possible political compromises (what could realistically bridge the differences). The Constitutional Drafting Assembly was intended to have 60 members, with a two-thirds-plus-one decision threshold, and the constitutional framework specifically required attention to Libya's Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu communities.

Cross-tabulation: Positions, interests and possible compromises

Constitutional / political issue	Main positions	Underlying interests	Possible political compromise	Questions for the Constitutional Assembly
Centralization vs. federalism	Centralist position: one strong national state and unified institutions. Federalist/decentralist position: substantial autonomy for the historic regions, particularly Cyrenaica.	Centralists seek territorial unity and fear fragmentation. Federalists seek protection from domination by Tripoli and greater regional control over resources and administration.	A decentralized unitary state with constitutionally protected regional and municipal powers, rather than full federalism. Regional authorities could receive defined administrative and fiscal competencies while sovereignty remains national.	How much political, administrative and fiscal authority should regions possess? Which powers must remain exclusively national? How should disputes between the centre and regions be resolved?
Regional representation	Equal regional representation versus representation according to population.	Eastern and southern actors fear permanent political marginalization; larger population centres want representation reflecting demographic weight.	A bicameral legislature: one chamber based broadly on population and a second chamber giving meaningful representation to regions. This type of institutional balancing was subsequently reflected in CDA proposals for a legislature with two chambers.	Should representation be based on population, territory, or both? Should regions have equal representation in one chamber? What decisions should require regional consent?
Distribution of oil and natural-resource revenues	National control versus substantial regional/local control over revenues.	Regions producing or hosting oil infrastructure seek a fair share and protection against exploitation by the centre. The national government	Establish a national resource-ownership principle combined with transparent revenue-sharing and equalization mechanisms. A constitutional formula could guarantee producing regions and municipalities a	Who owns Libya's natural resources? Who controls concessions? How should revenues be divided between the national government, regions and municipalities?

		seeks fiscal redistribution and national economic management.	defined share while preserving national redistribution.	
Militias and armed groups	Immediate disarmament and integration versus gradual integration while preserving revolutionary forces.	State institutions want a monopoly over legitimate force. Militias want security, recognition, employment, political influence and protection against former-regime actors.	A security-sector integration pact: registration and vetting of combatants, phased disarmament, integration into professional national forces or civilian employment, and guarantees against collective retaliation.	Who controls the armed forces? Can armed groups retain independent command structures? How will fighters be vetted and integrated? What guarantees will be offered to former revolutionaries who surrender weapons?
Civilian control of the military	Strong civilian authority versus substantial military autonomy.	Politicians seek democratic accountability; military actors seek institutional security and operational autonomy.	Constitutional recognition of a professional national military under civilian political authority, with clearly defined emergency and command powers.	Who appoints the commander-in-chief? Who controls military deployments? What parliamentary approval is required for war and emergency powers?
Political isolation / former regime officials	Exclude former Gaddafi officials from political life versus reintegrate individuals who did not commit serious crimes.	Revolutionaries seek justice and protection from a return of the old regime; others seek reconciliation, expertise and an end to collective exclusion.	Replace broad political exclusion with individualized accountability, judicial review and transitional-justice mechanisms.	Should political exclusion be based on position or individual conduct? Who determines eligibility for public office? How can justice and reconciliation coexist?
Islam and the state	Strong role for Sharia versus constitutional religious neutrality or a civil state.	Islamist actors seek recognition of Libya's Islamic identity; secular and minority actors seek protection of individual rights and fear religious domination.	Recognize Islam as an important source of national identity while constitutionally protecting freedom of religion, equality and fundamental rights. The compromise must specify whether Sharia is a source, the source, or a guiding principle of legislation.	What does "Islamic state" or "Sharia" mean constitutionally? Who interprets Islamic principles? Can legislation be invalidated on religious grounds? How are minority and individual rights protected?

Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu rights	National civic identity versus explicit constitutional recognition of linguistic and cultural communities.	Minority communities seek recognition, language rights, political participation and protection against assimilation.	Explicit constitutional guarantees for cultural, linguistic and political rights, together with mechanisms for participation in decisions affecting those communities. The transitional constitutional framework already required attention to these communities and consensus on provisions concerning them.	Should Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu languages receive official or protected status? What institutional guarantees should exist? What constitutes "consent" of a cultural or linguistic community?
Executive system	Strong president versus parliamentary government.	Presidential supporters seek stability and decisive leadership; parliamentary supporters fear concentration of power and authoritarian restoration.	A balanced semi-presidential or parliamentary system, with clear separation of powers, legislative oversight and limits on executive authority.	Who should elect the president? What powers should the president possess? Who controls the government? Can the legislature remove the government?
Checks and balances	Strong executive versus strong legislature.	Each side fears domination by the other and the return of authoritarian rule.	Constitutional separation of powers, judicial review, parliamentary oversight, and clearly defined procedures for impeachment, confidence votes and emergency powers. The CDA's later proposals explicitly emphasized balance and oversight between legislative, executive and judicial authorities. (Libya - DCAF Legal Databases)	Which institution has the final authority in a constitutional dispute? How is executive abuse prevented? What happens during institutional deadlock?
Judicial independence	Strong independent judiciary versus political control of judicial appointments.	Courts need autonomy and legitimacy; political actors may seek influence over appointments and prosecution.	Independent judicial council, transparent appointments and security of tenure, combined with democratic accountability.	Who appoints judges? Who appoints the prosecutor? How can judicial independence be protected from political and armed-group

				pressure?
Local government	Strong central administration versus empowered municipalities.	Local communities want control over services and development; central authorities want national coherence.	Constitutional municipal autonomy with defined responsibilities and guaranteed fiscal transfers.	Which services belong to municipalities? How are municipalities financed? Can local authorities raise revenue?
Human rights and transitional justice	Prioritize revolutionary justice versus universal rights and due process.	Victims seek accountability; former regime members seek protection from arbitrary punishment.	Establish constitutional rights alongside a transitional-justice framework covering truth, accountability, reparations and reconciliation.	Which rights are non-derogable? How should crimes committed during the revolution be prosecuted? What happens to detainees held without trial?
Political participation and elections	Rapid elections versus constitutional/institutional consolidation first.	Political forces seek legitimacy and power; others fear elections occurring before security and constitutional rules are settled.	Agree on a sequenced transition: constitutional settlement → electoral legislation → elections, with interim institutions subject to clear time limits.	Should elections precede or follow the constitution? What institutions must exist before elections can be considered legitimate?
Constitutional amendment	Flexible constitution versus highly entrenched constitution.	Flexibility allows adaptation; entrenchment protects minorities and prevents majoritarian abuse.	Require ordinary majorities for routine amendments but qualified majorities and/or referendum approval for fundamental provisions.	Which provisions should be unamendable? What majority should be required? Should regions or minorities have a veto over provisions directly affecting them?
Referendum and constitutional legitimacy	Assembly-driven constitution versus direct popular approval.	Assembly members seek deliberative space; citizens and political forces seek direct democratic legitimacy.	Assembly drafts the constitution, followed by a national referendum, with clear rules concerning turnout and approval thresholds. The transitional framework contemplated a referendum after completion of the draft.	What threshold constitutes approval? What happens if the constitution is rejected? Can the Assembly revise and resubmit it?

The central political compromises

The deeper point is that the Assembly would not simply be negotiating constitutional text. It would be negotiating the distribution of power, security, resources and recognition among competing groups.

The first major bargain would therefore be a centre–region bargain: a unified Libyan state in exchange for meaningful decentralization, regional representation and a fair system for distributing national resources. This could potentially address the central concern of the east and other regions without formally breaking Libya into federal units.

The second would be a state–militia bargain: armed groups would relinquish independent military authority in return for security guarantees, political inclusion, integration into legitimate institutions and individualized rather than collective treatment of former combatants. Without such a bargain, constitutional provisions on the military could remain largely symbolic.

The third would be a revolution–reconciliation bargain. Revolutionary actors would need assurances that the old regime could not simply return to power, while former regime supporters would need protection from collective political exclusion and arbitrary punishment. The constitutional principle could therefore be accountability for individual acts rather than permanent exclusion based solely on affiliation.

The fourth would be an identity–rights bargain. Libya could constitutionally affirm its Islamic and Arab identity while simultaneously recognizing Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu communities and guaranteeing equal citizenship, cultural rights and linguistic protections. This is particularly important because the transitional framework itself required special attention to these communities.

Finally, there would need to be a strong government–strong safeguards bargain. Libya required an executive capable of governing, but the experience of authoritarian rule made concentration of power politically dangerous. The compromise would therefore be an effective executive combined with enforceable checks and balances, judicial independence, legislative oversight, term limits and constitutional protection of fundamental rights. Later CDA proposals themselves framed the relationship among the legislative, executive and judicial branches around principles of balance and oversight.

The **implications of these constitutional issues for assembly/convention strategizing**, the key point is that each issue represents a potential **bargaining arena, coalition-building opportunity, or source of deadlock**. For a constitutional assembly, conveners should avoid treating them as isolated provisions and instead organize negotiations around the relationships among them.

Issue	Implications for assembly strategizing by conveners
Centralization vs. federalism	Likely the overarching territorial bargain. Conveners should establish whether the process is aiming for a centralized, federal, or hybrid model before negotiating other issues, because oil revenues, local government, regional representation, and security all depend on it.
Regional representation	Design representation so major regions and marginalized communities see the assembly as legitimate. Consider population, territory, and minority protections rather than relying on population alone.
Oil and natural-resource revenues	A major driver of center–periphery conflict. Conveners should facilitate an early agreement on principles for ownership, management, revenue sharing, and transparency, rather than leaving resource allocation until the end.
Militias and armed groups	Constitutional design cannot succeed if armed actors remain outside the political settlement. Conveners should create a parallel security dialogue addressing disarmament, integration,

	command structures, and civilian oversight.
Civilian control of the military	Establish this as a foundational constitutional principle. The assembly should clarify military roles, parliamentary oversight, appointment powers, budgets, and restrictions on political intervention.
Political isolation / former regime officials	Requires a balance between accountability and political inclusion. Conveners should push participants toward clearly defined, individualized criteria rather than broad exclusion that could create incentives for spoilers.
Islam and the state	Highly sensitive identity issue. It should be approached through broad consultation and rights-based principles, especially regarding freedom of religion, equality, and the role of religious law.
Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu rights	Minority and indigenous representation should be built into the process, not treated as an afterthought. Conveners should consider cultural, linguistic, political, and territorial rights and ensure meaningful participation in drafting.
Executive system	A presidential, parliamentary, or semi-presidential system should be evaluated in light of Libya's institutional fragmentation. Conveners should prioritize preventing excessive concentration of power.
Checks and balances	Central to preventing another concentration of authority. Negotiations should cover legislative oversight, executive accountability, judicial review, emergency powers, and independent institutions.
Judicial independence	Should be protected from executive, legislative, military, and partisan interference. Conveners need to address judicial appointments, tenure, budgets, and constitutional review.
Local government	Decentralization can reduce competition over the national government and allow regions to manage local affairs. Conveners should define competencies and funding rather than simply declaring decentralization.
Human rights and transitional justice	Should provide the common normative framework for the constitution. Conveners should distinguish accountability for serious crimes from blanket political exclusion and incorporate protections for victims.
Political participation and elections	Electoral rules can either encourage coalition-building or intensify regional/identity divisions. Conveners should consider representation, electoral districts, party rules, women's participation, and independent election administration together.
Constitutional amendment	The amendment threshold must balance stability with adaptability. Conveners should avoid both easy amendment—which risks manipulation—and excessively rigid rules—which can delegitimize the constitution.
Referendum and constitutional legitimacy	A referendum can provide popular legitimacy but can also turn the constitution into a winner-take-all contest. Conveners should determine beforehand what constitutes approval and how minority/regional concerns will be protected.

Strategic implications for conveners

The issues can be grouped into **five negotiation packages**:

1. **Territorial bargain:** federalism/centralization + regional representation + natural-resource revenues + local government.
2. **Security bargain:** militias + military role + civilian control + transitional justice.
3. **Identity and inclusion bargain:** Islam and the state + Amazigh/Tuareg/Tebu rights + political participation + human rights.
4. **Institutional bargain:** executive system + checks and balances + judiciary + amendment procedures.
5. **Legitimacy bargain:** elections + referendum + constitutional adoption and implementation.

The main strategic lesson is that **conveners should not seek consensus on every provision simultaneously**. They should identify the issues that are *structurally linked*, build cross-regional coalitions around packages, and use sequencing to prevent one disagreement—especially over territory, resources, or security—from blocking the entire constitutional process.

For Libya specifically, a useful sequencing principle would be: **inclusion and representation → territorial/resource bargain → security bargain → institutional design → ratification and amendment rules**. This gives actors confidence that constitutional institutions will address the underlying distribution of power rather than merely formalize existing divisions.

The key questions the Constitutional Assembly should put on the table: From Post Gaddafi Desert Mirage to New Political Contract

Rather than beginning with detailed constitutional language, the Assembly could structure its deliberations around a sequence of foundational questions:

Who is Libya's sovereign? Is sovereignty exercised through a centralized national government, through regions and municipalities, or through a combination of national and territorial institutions?

How should power be divided? Which powers belong exclusively to the national government, which belong to regions, and which belong to municipalities?

How should Libya's wealth be shared? Who owns oil and other natural resources, and what mechanism ensures that producing regions, municipalities and the population as a whole benefit fairly?

Who controls legitimate force? How are militias transformed into a unified security sector, and what guarantees can persuade armed groups to surrender independent authority?

How should the past be dealt with? Should Libya prioritize punishment, reconciliation, institutional reform, or some combination of all three?

What does Libya's Islamic identity mean constitutionally? What is the relationship between Sharia, legislation, individual rights and judicial interpretation?

Who belongs to the constitutional nation? How should Arab, Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu identities be reconciled within a common conception of Libyan citizenship?

What prevents a new authoritarianism? What institutional mechanisms ensure that neither a president, parliament, military commander nor regional authority can accumulate unchecked power?

What happens when institutions disagree? Who resolves conflicts between the president and parliament, between the national government and regions, or between elected institutions and the judiciary?

What makes the constitution legitimate? How should the Assembly reach agreement, what issues require super

majorities or minority consent, and what should happen if the final constitutional draft is rejected in a referendum?

This is particularly important because the transitional framework already required two-thirds plus one for CDA decisions, while also requiring agreement with the distinct linguistic and cultural communities on provisions concerning them. Thus, the constitutional process was structurally designed to require negotiation and compromise rather than simple majoritarian rule.

Table

Constitutional question	**NFA / liberal-civic forces**	**Justice & Construction / Islamist forces**	**Federalist & Cyrenaican actors**	**Tripoli / western centralists**	**Misrata & revolutionary forces**	**Amazigh, Tuareg & Tebu actors**	**Former-regime / reconciliation constituencies**
Who is Libya's sovereign?	NFA / liberal-civic forces	Justice & Construction / Islamist forces	Federalist & Cyrenaican actors	Tripoli / western centralists	Misrata & revolutionary forces	Amazigh, Tuareg & Tebu actors	Former-regime / reconciliation constituencies
How should power be divided?	Popular sovereignty within one unified Libyan state. Strong preference for national citizenship rather than regional sovereignty.	Popular sovereignty, but with an explicitly Islamic conception of the state and legislation.	Sovereignty ultimately belongs to the Libyan people, but regions should exercise constitutionally protected authority rather than being subordinate administrative units.	Strong preference for a single sovereign national state and avoidance of institutional fragmentation.	National sovereignty, but with substantial recognition of revolutionary/local authority and protection against domination by the centre.	National sovereignty combined with recognition that cultural communities have constitutionally protected collective interests.	Preference for citizenship-based sovereignty and restoration of political participation, rather than revolutionary legitimacy being the sole source of political authority.
How should Libya's wealth be shared?	Decentralized unitary state: strong national institutions but meaningful municipalities and regions.	National institutions should retain major powers, with decentralization where it improves governance.	Strongest decentralist/federalist preference: regional governments should possess constitutionally guaranteed legislative, administrative and fiscal powers.	Strong centre; regional governments primarily administrative.	Significant local autonomy, particularly for cities that carried the revolution, but not necessarily formal federalism.	Territorial and cultural autonomy where necessary to protect minority communities.	Strong national institutions to prevent armed/local actors from exercising arbitrary authority.
Who controls legitimate force?	Oil belongs to the Libyan people as a whole; revenues should be managed nationally and redistributed fairly.	National ownership and redistribution, with emphasis on social justice and equitable development.	Greatest demand for regional participation in oil revenues, particularly for Cyrenaica as an oil-producing region.	National control over oil and revenue distribution; concern that regional control could encourage separatism.	Fair regional/local distribution, especially to communities that bore the costs of the revolution.	Guaranteed development and fiscal transfers to historically neglected areas.	National resource ownership and predictable fiscal administration, with concern that regionalization could weaken state authority.
How should the past be dealt with?	National state monopoly on force, civilian control,	State monopoly, but integration should recognize revolutionary	A national military, but with strong regional security interests and	Centralized national security institutions;	More reluctant to surrender revolutionary autonomy	Local security guarantees particularly important	Strong professional national security

	integration of militias into army/police.	fighters and avoid empowering remnants of the old regime.	suspicion of domination by western institutions.	concern about autonomous eastern or local armed forces.	immediately; fighters wanted guarantees, recognition and protection before disarmament.	where communities feared domination by larger armed groups.	institutions and equal application of law; opposition to revolutionary groups exercising extrajudicial power.
What does Libya's Islamic identity mean?	Justice + reconciliation + institutional reform, with individual accountability rather than permanent exclusion.	Transitional justice and accountability, particularly for Gaddafi-era abuses; stronger revolutionary legitimacy.	Justice for regime crimes but also concern that western revolutionary forces could monopolize transitional justice.	Strong transitional justice but with concern about destabilization and revenge.	Punishment/accountability initially stronger, especially for senior regime figures; later reconciliation possible with guarantees.	Justice should include crimes committed against marginalized communities, not only the major revolutionary fronts.	Reconciliation and reintegration; opposition to indefinite political exclusion of people solely because of former regime affiliation.
Who belongs to the constitutional nation?	Islam is part of national identity, but the constitution should establish a civil democratic state and individual rights.	Islamic identity should have substantial constitutional consequences; Sharia should guide legislation while remaining compatible with political participation and rights.	Generally compatible with Islam as state identity but resistant to using religious questions to justify centralized political authority.	Broadly conservative social identity but politically diverse; preference for avoiding a constitutional formula that intensifies ideological polarization.	Religious identity important, but revolutionary/local politics often more important than a single ideological model.	Protection of cultural/religious pluralism and individual rights; concern that religious majoritarianism could compound minority marginalization.	Generally supportive of religious identity but concerned about exclusion or ideological political monopolization.
What prevents a new authoritarianism?	Equal Libyan citizenship as the central principle.	Equal citizenship combined with an Arab-Islamic national identity.	Libyan citizenship plus recognition of regional identity and historical Cyrenaican distinctiveness.	Strong Libyan national identity; regional identities should not become competing sovereignties.	Libyan citizenship combined with recognition of revolutionary cities and communities.	Plural conception of Libyan identity: Arab, Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu communities should be explicitly protected. The Constitutional Declaration already guaranteed cultural rights and recognized societal languages as national languages. (Libya - DCAF Legal Databases)	Citizenship should not be permanently divided between "revolutionaries" and "former regime" citizens; emphasis on reintegration.
What happens when institutions disagree?	Strongest emphasis on institutional checks and balances, independent judiciary,	Constitutional limits are necessary, but executive authority must also be capable of maintaining order	Prevent concentration of power in Tripoli through regional constitutional checks.	Strong national institutions but constitutional safeguards against	Prevent domination by a new central elite; revolutionary participation and local checks are important safeguards.	Constitutional minority protections and guarantees against majoritarian	Strong separation of powers, judicial review and legal protections

	parliament, term limits and civilian control.	and implementing policy.		another Gaddafi-style presidency.		domination.	against arbitrary political exclusion.
What makes the constitution legitimate?	Independent constitutional court + parliament + defined judicial review.	Constitutional/judicial mechanisms, but interpretation of Islamic provisions would be particularly important.	A dispute mechanism in which regions have standing against the central government.	Final authority should remain with national constitutional institutions.	Political negotiation and local representation should precede coercive central intervention.	Constitutional court or negotiated mechanism protecting community rights.	Independent courts capable of resolving disputes without revolutionary or executive interference.
	Popular referendum + broad Assembly consensus; constitutional rights should be entrenched.	Popular referendum, but with strong consensus around Libya's Islamic identity.	Regional consent is essential, particularly on provisions affecting territorial organization and resource distribution.	National referendum and national institutions should determine legitimacy; rejection of regional vetoes.	Legitimacy requires recognition of the revolution and participation of revolutionary constituencies.	No constitutional settlement should be legitimate if fundamental minority rights are imposed without meaningful consent.	Popular referendum and equal citizenship, rather than revolutionary credentials, should provide legitimacy.

The constitutional issues identified have important implications for how conveners should strategize the assembly process. Conveners should prioritize broad inclusion and representation because disagreements over centralization versus federalism, regional representation, and the distribution of oil and natural-resource revenues are likely to shape the overall political settlement. Particular attention should be given to the representation and rights of Amazigh, Tuareg, and Tebu communities to ensure that the constitution is perceived as legitimate across different regions and groups. Security-related questions, including the role of militias and armed groups and civilian control of the military, should be addressed alongside constitutional design because political agreements will remain fragile without a credible security settlement. Similarly, the question of political isolation and the participation of former regime officials requires a balance between accountability, transitional justice, reconciliation, and political inclusion.

Conveners should also recognize that debates over Islam and the state, human rights, and minority rights are closely connected to the broader question of constitutional identity. At the institutional level, decisions concerning the executive system, checks and balances, judicial independence, and local government should be negotiated as an interconnected package designed to prevent excessive concentration of power. Finally, political participation and elections, constitutional amendment procedures, and the use of a referendum are crucial to establishing constitutional legitimacy. Therefore, conveners should adopt a **sequenced and consensus-oriented strategy**, building coalitions across regions and political groups, addressing the most sensitive distributional issues early, and ensuring that the final constitutional framework has sufficient participation, safeguards, and public legitimacy to be sustainable.

More specifically, conveners should avoid allowing the assembly to become a simple competition between competing regional or ideological blocs. They should create opportunities for **cross-cutting coalitions**, so that actors from different regions and political backgrounds have incentives to cooperate on individual constitutional questions. The distribution of natural-resource revenues, for example, could be linked to guarantees for local government development and transparent national institutions rather than treated solely as a dispute between the center and regions. Similarly, federalism should not be framed as synonymous with territorial division, but examined in relation to administrative decentralization, fiscal responsibility, and national unity. Conveners should also distinguish between issues requiring broad consensus and those that can legitimately be resolved through majority decision-making.

The process should provide sufficient space for **informal negotiation and confidence-building**, particularly where formal positions are initially incompatible. On security issues, armed groups and military actors may

need to be engaged without allowing them to dominate or veto the constitutional process. Transitional justice should likewise be designed to prevent both impunity and indiscriminate exclusion. Conveners should pay attention to the sequencing of decisions, because premature agreement on institutional structures could lock in unresolved disputes over representation, resources, or security. Finally, constitutional legitimacy should be understood as more than approval through a referendum: it should depend on meaningful participation, procedural fairness, protection of minorities, and the capacity of institutions to implement the agreed rules. This suggests that conveners should prioritize **ownership of the process as well as agreement on the final text**, since a formally valid constitution may remain politically ineffective if important constituencies do not regard it as their own.

Cross-tabulation of principal actors and constitutional preferences

For the **2012–14 constitutional process**, I would cross-tab the actors somewhat differently from the previous table. The important distinction is between **organized political actors**, **regional actors**, and **armed/revolutionary constituencies**. Their preferences were not always coherent, and many actors were internally divided. The table below therefore identifies their **general tendency**, rather than claiming that every member of a group held the same position.

The starting point is important: the 2011 Constitutional Declaration already defined Libya as a democratic state in which **the people are the source of authority**, while also affirming Islam as the state religion and Sharia as the principal source of legislation. It also committed the state to national unity, territorial integrity, political pluralism, and equitable distribution of national wealth. (Libya - DCAF Legal Databases)

The **National Forces Alliance (NFA)** and the **Justice and Construction Party (JCP)** were among the principal organized political forces emerging from the 2012 elections; the NFA was broadly associated with a liberal/civic conception of the state, while JCP was associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and an Islamic-democratic orientation.

Where the real bargaining space existed

The most interesting feature of this cross-tab is that the actors were **not divided neatly into ten separate camps**. There were several possible coalitions.

On **sovereignty**, there was actually considerable common ground. Most actors could accept the proposition that **the Libyan people are sovereign**. The dispute was really about *where sovereignty should be exercised*: through one powerful national government or through a national government combined with constitutionally protected regional and municipal institutions.

That distinction is crucial. A possible compromise would therefore have been:

One sovereign Libyan state + constitutionally guaranteed decentralization + meaningful regional representation.

This would give the federalists something substantial without requiring the centralists to accept formal federal sovereignty.

On **distribution of power**, the bargaining zone was between the NFA's likely preference for a decentralized

but unified state and the Cyrenaican federalist demand for much stronger regional powers. A particularly plausible compromise would have been **asymmetrical decentralization**: national sovereignty and foreign policy, defence, monetary policy and natural-resource ownership remain national, while regions and municipalities receive constitutionally protected authority over education, health, local infrastructure, policing, culture and local development.

On **oil**, the conflict was even more distributive. The central government had a strong incentive to preserve nati-

onal control because oil revenues financed the state as a whole. Eastern actors had an equally strong incentive to demand a mechanism preventing Tripoli from monopolizing the benefits of resources located in or exported through their region. The Constitutional Declaration itself already provided that the state should ensure a fair distribution of national wealth among citizens and different cities and regions.

The potential compromise was therefore **national ownership but constitutionally guaranteed revenue-sharing**. That is substantially different from either complete centralization or regional ownership of oil.

The most difficult bargain: legitimate force

The security question probably represented the hardest constitutional bargain because the issue was not simply institutional. **The people who possessed weapons also possessed bargaining power.**

The NFA-style position would be: *there can only be one legitimate military and police structure.*

The revolutionary position would be: *we defeated Gaddafi; why should we surrender our weapons to institutions that may be captured by former-regime elements or rival factions?*

The eastern position would be: *we need guarantees that a national army will not become an instrument of western political domination.*

The minority-community position would be: *we need local security guarantees because a national force may not protect us.*

A credible constitutional compromise therefore required more than the sentence "the state shall have a monopoly of force." It needed a **security bargain**: registration of armed groups, individual vetting, phased integration, salaries and employment alternatives, civilian oversight, regional representation within national security institutions, and guarantees against collective retaliation.

The identity bargain

The constitutional question concerning Islam had a similar structure. The 2011 Constitutional Declaration had already settled part of the issue by declaring **Islam the religion of the state and Sharia the principal source of legislation**, while simultaneously guaranteeing cultural rights and freedom of religious practice for non-Muslims.

Consequently, the Assembly would not necessarily have been negotiating whether Islam existed in the constitutional order at all. The more difficult questions were:

How far does Sharia constrain legislation? Who interprets it? Can legislation be reviewed for conformity with Sharia? What happens if a religious interpretation conflicts with an individual constitutional right?

This is where an Islamist–liberal compromise would have been essential.

The minority question is actually a sovereignty question

The Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu issue should not be treated merely as a cultural-rights issue. It goes directly to the question **"Who is the Libyan sovereign?"**

If sovereignty is defined purely through a homogeneous Arab-Islamic national identity, minority communities have an incentive to seek territorial or institutional autonomy.

If sovereignty is defined through **equal citizenship within a plural Libyan nation**, there is less pressure for territorial separation.

The compromise could therefore have been:

One Libyan citizenship, one sovereign state, but constitutionally entrenched cultural, linguistic and political rights for distinct communities.

That approach is broadly compatible with the transitional declaration, which already recognized cultural rights of all components of Libyan society and treated their languages as national languages.

The fundamental constitutional bargain

The entire negotiation can ultimately be reduced to **five grand bargains**:

Fundamental bargain	Actor giving something	Actor receiving something
Unity ↔ Decentralization	Federalists accept one sovereign Libya	Centralists accept constitutionally protected regional authority
National oil ownership ↔ Regional revenue guarantees	Producing regions accept national ownership	Centre accepts predictable regional/fiscal redistribution
Disarmament ↔ Security and political guarantees	Militias surrender independent force	State guarantees integration, employment and protection
Islamic identity ↔ Individual and minority rights	Liberals/minorities accept Islamic constitutional identity	Islamists accept enforceable rights and pluralism
Revolutionary justice ↔ Reconciliation	Revolutionaries accept individualized rather than permanent exclusion	Former-regime constituencies accept accountability and transitional justice

This makes the constitutional assembly less a question of **"Which constitutional model is best?"** and more a question of **"What exchange of guarantees could persuade each actor to accept a constitutional order that is less than its maximum preference?"**

That is probably the most useful framework for analyzing the Assembly: **identify each actor's red lines, identify what they are willing to trade, and then design constitutional institutions that make the compromise credible.**

LIBYAS FOREIGN POLICY POTENTIAL

Several enduring constants have shaped Libyan foreign policy across different regimes and political upheavals, providing continuity amid change. Foremost among these is Libya's strategic geographic position at the crossroads of Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean. This location has consistently influenced its foreign relations, positioning Libya as a gateway for migration flows, trade routes, and security dynamics linking these regions.

Another key constant is Libya's dependence on its vast oil wealth. The country's abundant energy resources have remained the cornerstone of its economy and a significant factor shaping its international interactions and leverage. Libya's foreign policy has often reflected pragmatic considerations aimed at maximizing the benefits of this economic asset while navigating complex geopolitical interests.

Throughout its modern history, Libya has exhibited a degree of non-alignment and pragmatism in its diplomatic engagements, seeking to balance relationships with various global powers without forming rigid alliances. This approach has allowed Libya to maintain a level of autonomy in international affairs despite external pressures.

Libya has also consistently aspired to exert regional influence, particularly within the Arab world and Africa. The country's efforts to assert political weight in these spheres have been driven by a combination of its resource wealth, strategic location, and historical ties. Alongside these ambitions, a strong emphasis on national sovereignty and resistance to external interference has been a persistent theme in Libyan foreign policy, even as the country has often found itself vulnerable to foreign involvement.

Security concerns related to its extensive and porous borders have also remained central. Libya's foreign policy has regularly prioritized managing these borders to combat cross-border smuggling, terrorism, and uncontrolled migration, which pose threats both internally and to neighboring states.

Finally, Libya's relations with its neighbors have been complex but stable constants, marked by a balance of cooperation and rivalry shaped by shared histories, economic interests, and security concerns. Countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Sudan continue to play significant roles in Libya's foreign calculus.

These enduring factors collectively continue to underpin Libya's foreign policy, informing its current diplomatic posture despite ongoing internal challenges.

The enduring factors that have historically shaped Libya's foreign policy provide both opportunities and constraints as the country seeks to define a constructive role in the future, especially given the current leadership's level of ambitions and orientation.

Libya's strategic geographic position remains a critical asset, offering the potential to become a vital regional hub linking Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. This position can be leveraged to foster greater economic integration, facilitate trade, and promote regional security cooperation. A unified Libya could thus play a pivotal role in managing migration flows, combating transnational threats such as terrorism and human trafficking, and serving as a bridge between diverse political and economic blocs.

The country's oil wealth, while historically a source of both strength and internal competition, continues to offer significant leverage in international relations. Future Libyan leadership, if committed to transparency and equitable resource management, could use this wealth to attract foreign investment, support reconstruction and development, and position Libya as a reliable energy supplier in the Mediterranean and beyond. This would enhance Libya's economic influence and regional standing.

Libya's tradition of pragmatic, non-aligned foreign policy provides a foundation for flexible diplomacy. In a future constructive role, Libyan leaders could pursue balanced relations with global powers, avoiding entanglement in great power rivalries while maximizing diplomatic and economic benefits. Such a stance would align with Libya's interests in safeguarding sovereignty and fostering peaceful coexistence.

The aspiration for regional influence and the emphasis on sovereignty suggest that Libya's future leadership is likely to seek a role as a respected regional actor, particularly within the Arab and African spheres. This could involve active participation in regional organizations such as the African Union and the Arab League, and serving as a mediator or facilitator in regional conflicts. However, these ambitions will need to be tempered by the realities of Libya's internal challenges and the need for genuine national reconciliation.

Security concerns, especially relating to border management and internal stability, will shape Libya's constructive engagement in regional security architecture. Effective collaboration with neighboring states on border control, counterterrorism, and migration management will be essential. A unified Libya could become a stabilizing force in North Africa, contributing to broader efforts to enhance regional security.

Lastly, Libya's complex but enduring relationships with its neighbors will continue to influence its foreign policy orientation. Constructive leadership will seek to build cooperative and mutually beneficial partnerships, resolving lingering disputes while promoting economic and security collaboration.

In summary, these enduring factors offer a framework within which Libya's future leadership can craft a foreign policy that balances ambition with pragmatism, sovereignty with cooperation, and economic potential

with security imperatives. The success of such a role depends on achieving national unity, effective governance, and a clear strategic vision aligned with Libya's socio-political realities.

Tunesia-Libya

Libya and Tunisia have one of the closest relationships in the Maghreb, shaped by geography, family ties, migration and trade. The two countries share a border of about 460 km, and many families have relatives on both sides. Historically, the regions of southern Tunisia and western Libya have been economically and culturally interconnected for centuries. The relationship has gone through periods of both cooperation and tension. During the 1950s and 1960s relations were generally friendly. Under Muammar Gaddafi, however, relations became more unpredictable. In 1974, Libya and Tunisia even briefly announced a political union through the **Djerba Agreement**, but Tunisia withdrew after only a couple of days. Later, disputes, expulsions of Tunisian workers from Libya, and accusations of Libyan interference created recurring tensions.

Economically, Libya became extremely important for Tunisia. Hundreds of thousands of Tunisians worked in Libya at various times, and cross-border trade became vital for southern Tunisia. The Ras Jedir crossing emerged as one of the busiest borders in North Africa. Formal and informal trade networks connected the two economies very closely. After the Libyan revolution of 2011 and the fall of Gaddafi, Tunisia generally adopted a policy of **neutrality** toward Libya's competing political factions. At the same time, Tunisia received large numbers of Libyan refugees, patients, students and businesspeople. In some years, millions of Libyan crossings into Tunisia were recorded. Security has become a major issue since 2011. Tunisia strengthened border controls and built defensive barriers and surveillance systems along parts of the frontier because of concerns about militant groups, smuggling and instability spilling over from Libya. Today, relations are generally cooperative. The two governments continue to work on border management, migration, consular issues and trade. In 2025, they held joint consular meetings to improve movement across the border and coordinate on migration and citizen services. One interesting aspect is that, despite periodic political disagreements, **the relationship between ordinary Tunisians and Libyans has often remained strong**. Cross-border families, business links and shared cultural traditions have helped maintain connections even during periods when relations between governments were strained. To **leverage Libya–Tunisia relations** for regional development, economic integration, or cultural diplomacy, several opportunities stand out. First, the two countries could build on their already extensive **cross-border trade networks**. The Ras Jedir border region has long functioned as an economic space linking western Libya and southern Tunisia. Formalizing trade, improving customs procedures and developing border economic zones could transform what is often informal commerce into a stronger engine of regional growth. Second, Libya and Tunisia could position themselves as a **joint gateway to Africa**. Recent bilateral discussions have emphasized cooperation directed toward African markets through frameworks such as COMESA and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Rather than competing, the two countries could market themselves as a combined logistics and business platform connecting Europe, the Maghreb and sub-Saharan Africa. Third, there is significant potential in **healthcare and education**. For years, many Libyans have travelled to Tunisia for medical treatment, education and professional services. Expanding joint medical facilities, vocational training centres and university partnerships could strengthen both economies. Fourth, cultural and heritage cooperation is underused. Libya and Tunisia share centuries of common Mediterranean, Arab, Amazigh and Ottoman history. Joint tourism routes linking sites such as Carthage, El Jem Amphitheatre, Leptis Magna and Sabratha could create a powerful shared Mediterranean heritage narrative. Finally, from a policy perspective, one of the biggest opportunities is to move beyond viewing the border purely as a security issue. Recent analyses have argued that combining **security cooperation with economic development in border regions** is likely to be more effective than focusing on security measures alone. For someone interested in heritage and regional identity, perhaps the most interesting idea is to present Libya and Tunisia not as two separate peripheries, but as parts of a **single western Mediterranean cultural zone**—a perspective that also fits well with initiatives such as the 5+5 Dialogue. This could support cooperation in tourism, heritage conservation, education and cultural exchange alongside economic integration.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Libya's Future Foreign Policy role

Based on the enduring factors shaping Libya's foreign policy and the aspirations for a constructive future role, here are concrete policy recommendations and strategic priorities for Libya's future foreign policy:

1. Prioritize National Unity and Institutional Strengthening

Before effectively projecting influence abroad, Libya must consolidate national unity and build robust state institutions capable of managing foreign relations consistently. This requires inclusive political dialogue, reconciliation efforts, and reforms to strengthen diplomatic institutions and the security sector, ensuring a unified and credible voice internationally.

2. Leverage Strategic Geography for Regional Integration

Libya should position itself as a central hub facilitating trade, energy transit, and migration management between Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Actively engaging in regional infrastructure projects, transport corridors, and economic partnerships will enhance Libya's regional connectivity and economic clout.

3. Manage and Transparently Utilize Oil Wealth

Implementing transparent and equitable management of Libya's hydrocarbon resources is essential. Libya should pursue partnerships that foster investment and technology transfer, while ensuring revenues support national reconstruction and social development. This will enhance Libya's reliability as an energy supplier and increase its economic leverage.

4. Adopt a Balanced and Pragmatic Diplomatic Posture

Libya's foreign policy should maintain strategic autonomy by balancing relations among global powers without becoming a proxy battleground. This means fostering pragmatic ties with major actors like the US, Russia, China, the EU, and regional powers while safeguarding national sovereignty and avoiding entanglement in external rivalries.

5. Engage Actively in Regional Organizations

Reinvigorating Libya's participation in bodies such as the African Union and the Arab League will help the country assert a leadership role in regional affairs. Libya can contribute to conflict resolution, economic integration, and security cooperation in North Africa and the broader Arab world, enhancing its diplomatic profile.

6. Strengthen Border Security and Regional Security Cooperation

Addressing security challenges requires bilateral and multilateral cooperation with neighboring states on border management, counterterrorism, and migration control. Libya should work to integrate its security apparatus with regional initiatives, contributing to stability and countering illicit networks.

7. Foster Economic Diversification and International Investment

Beyond oil, Libya should develop other sectors—such as agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing—to build a resilient economy. Creating an investment-friendly environment with clear legal frameworks will attract foreign direct investment and international development assistance.

8. Promote Good Governance and Rule of Law

Building transparent institutions and combating corruption will enhance Libya's credibility abroad and impr-

ove relations with international partners. Strong governance structures underpin sustainable foreign relations and economic development.

9. Support Civil Society and Inclusive Diplomacy

Incorporating voices from civil society, women, youth, and minority groups in foreign policy consultations will broaden legitimacy and reflect Libya's diverse society. This inclusive approach can also support Libya's soft power and international image.

10. Develop Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy

Libya should invest in effective communication strategies to project a positive national narrative internationally, dispel negative stereotypes, and attract tourism, investment, and diplomatic goodwill.

In sum, a future constructive Libyan foreign policy must be rooted in domestic stability and institutional capacity, while pursuing pragmatic, balanced diplomacy and regional integration. This strategic approach will enable Libya to harness its enduring strengths, overcome constraints, and assert itself as a responsible regional and international actor.

Establishing Shared Understanding Among Key International Stakeholders

Ensuring a shared understanding and coordinated action among the diverse international and regional actors involved in Libya—namely the UN, AU, EU, LAS, Russia, Libya itself, Egypt, Turkey, the EU, and the UAE—requires a carefully designed governance framework that fosters inclusive dialogue, clear communication, and mutual accountability. This is essential to align their interests and avoid contradictory approaches that have historically undermined peace efforts. Below is a proposed governance setup and approach for forging the next Libyan roadmap:

A critical first step is creating a **multilateral coordination platform** that brings all relevant actors together regularly to share information, align objectives, and coordinate strategies. This platform should be convened under the auspices of a neutral and respected facilitator, ideally the United Nations, given its broad legitimacy and experience in Libya. The platform would include senior representatives from the UN, African Union (AU), European Union (EU), League of Arab States (LAS), Russia, Libya's recognized government, and regional powers such as Egypt, Turkey, and the UAE.

To build trust and foster collaboration, this platform must operate transparently with clear rules of engagement. It should focus on developing a **common political framework** that respects Libya's sovereignty and the diverse interests of stakeholders while emphasizing shared goals: stability, sovereignty, unity, and development.

Regular joint assessments and shared reporting mechanisms would help synchronize efforts on security, political processes, humanitarian aid, and reconstruction. The inclusion of conflict-sensitive analysis and local Libyan perspectives must be prioritized to ensure policies are contextually grounded.

Governance Structure for Forging the Next Roadmap

To formalize this cooperation and ensure actionable outcomes, the following governance setup is recommended:

International Steering Committee (ISC):

This high-level body would comprise representatives from the UN, AU, EU, LAS, Russia, Egypt, Turkey, UAE , and Libya's recognized authorities. The ISC's mandate would be to provide strategic guidance, approve key decisions, resolve disputes among stakeholders, and ensure accountability.

Technical Working Groups:

Under the ISC, specialized working groups focused on security, political dialogue, economic recovery, and humanitarian issues would develop detailed proposals and implementation plans. These groups would include experts from member states and international organizations, supported by Libyan civil society representatives and technical advisors.

Libyan National Advisory Council:

To ensure local ownership and legitimacy, a Libyan-led advisory body representing major social groups—including tribal leaders, women, youth, political parties, and civil society—should be established. This council would provide input to the ISC and working groups, ensuring the roadmap reflects the aspirations and realities on the ground.

Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism:

An independent monitoring body would track progress against benchmarks, identify obstacles, and recommend course corrections. This mechanism would report directly to the ISC and publicly disclose findings to enhance transparency.

Key Principles for Success

- **Inclusivity and Respect for Sovereignty:** All actors must recognize Libya's sovereignty and prioritize inclusive engagement that embraces the country's social and political diversity.
- **Transparency and Accountability:** Regular reporting, open communication channels, and mechanisms to address grievances are essential to maintain trust.
- **Conflict Sensitivity:** Strategies must be informed by nuanced understanding of Libya's divisions and avoid actions that exacerbate tensions.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The governance setup should allow for adjustments in response to evolving circumstances and lessons learned.
- **Shared Incentives:** Aligning the interests of external actors through mutual incentives—such as regional stability, economic benefits, and counterterrorism cooperation—will increase commitment to the process.

By establishing such a governance framework, the international community and Libyan stakeholders can better coordinate their efforts, build consensus, and create a realistic, inclusive roadmap that addresses Libya's complex challenges while fostering sustainable peace and development.

Figure



ELEMENTS OF NATIONAL POLICY ROAD-MAP

1. Clear Vision and Defined Objectives

A national roadmap must begin with a **shared vision** addressing:

- **What Libya seeks to achieve:** Stability, national unity, democracy, and economic recovery.
- **When:** Defined timelines and transition phases.

Key Components:

- Clearly articulated end goals: unified government, permanent constitution, credible elections.

- Milestones with measurable and transparent targets.
- Realistic and phased timeframes.

2. Inclusive Political Dialogue and Governance

Libya's fragmented political landscape requires an inclusive, legitimate governance framework.

Key Components:

- Unified political framework endorsed by all major stakeholders.
- Broad engagement across all regions: Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, Fezzan.
- Inclusion of marginalized groups: women, youth, civil society, minorities.
- Mechanisms for reconciliation and transitional justice.

Success Factors:

- Neutral facilitation (e.g., UN-led, Libyan-owned process).
- Trust-building initiatives between rival factions.
- Commitment to non-violence and political compromise.

3. Security Sector Reform (SSR) and Disarmament

Sustainable peace depends on a unified, accountable security apparatus.

Key Components:

- Effective ceasefire monitoring and enforcement.
- Comprehensive DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration) of militias.
- Unified military command under civilian oversight.
- Strengthened border security and counterterrorism strategies.

Success Factors:

- Incentivizing armed groups' integration.
- Regional support to prevent proxy conflicts and external interference.

4. Constitutional and Legal Framework

A legitimate and functioning state demands a robust legal foundation.

Key Components:

- Adoption of a permanent constitution via national referendum.
- Rule of law reforms emphasizing judicial independence and human rights.
- Electoral laws ensuring fair and inclusive representation.

Success Factors:

- Transparency and broad public consultation throughout the process.
- International legal support and election observation.

5. Economic Stabilization and Reconstruction

Libya's vast oil wealth must be harnessed transparently to rebuild the economy.

Key Components:

- Transparent management and equitable distribution of oil revenues.
- Economic diversification beyond hydrocarbons.
- Reconstruction of critical infrastructure and public services.
- Strong anti-corruption and financial accountability mechanisms.

Success Factors:

- Institutional reforms of key bodies (Central Bank, National Oil Corporation).
- Encouragement of public-private partnerships and donor coordination.
- Empowerment of local governance and entrepreneurship.

6. National Reconciliation and Social Cohesion

Addressing social divisions is fundamental for durable peace.

Key Components:

- Transitional justice for conflict victims.
- Community-level reconciliation initiatives.
- Educational and cultural programs promoting unity.

Success Factors:

- Local ownership of reconciliation efforts.
- Engagement of religious, tribal, and community leaders.

7. International and Regional Cooperation

Libya's trajectory depends on constructive external partnerships.

Key Components:

- Coordinated international engagement under UN leadership.
- Respect for Libya's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- Non-interference by foreign powers.

- Regional cooperation on security, migration, and economic integration.

Success Factors:

- Unified stance among key international actors (UN, AU, EU, Arab League).
- Effective sanctions and diplomatic pressure on spoilers.

8. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Adaptation

Progress requires continuous oversight and flexibility.

Key Components:

- Independent monitoring bodies to assess implementation.
- Transparent public reporting mechanisms.
- Adaptive management to respond to evolving conditions.

Success Factors:

- Strong accountability frameworks for government and stakeholders.
- Regular reviews and recalibration of roadmap objectives.

Summary of Critical Success Factors

Pillar	Key Success Factors
Political	Inclusive dialogue, unified political institutions
Security	Effective DDR, professionalized security forces
Legal	Legitimate constitution, fair and transparent elections
Economic	Transparency, equitable resource distribution
Social	National reconciliation, community ownership
International	Coordinated support, respect for sovereignty
Implementation	Rigorous monitoring, adaptability, accountability

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Endorse a **nationally owned and inclusive roadmap** with clearly defined goals and timelines.
- Support UN facilitation to promote trust and political consensus.
- Prioritize SSR and DDR to stabilize security conditions.
- Promote transparent economic reforms with international oversight.
- Invest in reconciliation and social cohesion initiatives to build lasting peace.
- Coordinate international and regional actors to ensure non-interference and constructive support.

- Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to guide implementation and ensure accountability.

For further discussion and next steps, please advise on convening a stakeholder workshop to operationalize the roadmap, once a mechanism for consultation on a stable tribal coalition has been identified by the Libyan government to be coopted into the steering group of the Constitutional Assembly subsequently.

Will the 2020 Cease-fire Hold ?

The October 2020 Libyan ceasefire agreement was designed first and foremost to stop a war that neither side could decisively win. After Khalifa Haftar's forces failed to capture Tripoli, while Turkey's intervention strengthened the western camp, both sides had powerful reasons to step back from further escalation. The agreement therefore froze the military confrontation rather than resolving the political conflict that had produced it. Its central bargain was simple: the fighting would stop, front-line forces would withdraw, and the opposing camps would create mechanisms to prevent the conflict from reigniting.

The parties agreed to move military units and armed formations away from the front lines and return them to designated camps. They also committed themselves to removing foreign fighters and mercenaries from Libya, recognizing that the country's civil war had become deeply entangled with competing foreign interventions. The creation of the 5+5 Joint Military Commission was particularly important because five representatives from each side were given a direct channel through which military disputes could be managed. This mechanism allowed commanders who remained politically opposed to cooperate on the narrower question of preventing renewed warfare.

UNSMIL then provided monitoring, mediation and institutional support, giving the ceasefire an external framework and making violations less likely to escalate immediately into open war.The agreement also envisioned the eventual disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of armed groups and the reunification of Libya's divided security institutions. That was the crucial ambition behind the ceasefire, because Libya could not become a stable state indefinitely if rival governments continued to possess rival armies and militias. In practice, however, the agreement succeeded much more clearly in stopping large-scale fighting than in dismantling the military structures that had made the fighting possible. The front lines became quieter, but the underlying balance of armed power remained largely intact.

Foreign forces and fighters were not completely removed, militias were not comprehensively disarmed, and Libya did not acquire a single unified military chain of command. The political process that was supposed to accompany the ceasefire also failed to produce a durable settlement between the country's rival institutions. This created the paradox at the heart of Libya's post-2020 stability: the country achieved an effective ceasefire without achieving a genuine peace.

For several years that arrangement nevertheless held because the principal factions understood the enormous costs of returning to the devastating war of 2019 and 2020.

Neither side had a reliable path to outright victory, while external powers also had reasons to avoid another full-scale confrontation. The 5+5 mechanism further helped preserve this equilibrium by giving the military establishments a way to communicate even when the political leadership remained deeply divided. What emerged, therefore, was less a settlement than an armed equilibrium in which everyone retained enough power to defend their interests but had strong incentives not to restart the national war. The problem was that the political disputes over government legitimacy, elections, oil revenues, state institutions and control of the security apparatus never disappeared.

Instead, they gradually accumulated beneath the surface of the ceasefire, much like pressure building beneath a sealed vessel.

The danger became particularly apparent when rival armed groups in western Libya began confronting one another over political influence, territory, resources and control of state institutions. The violence around

Tripoli in 2025 demonstrated that the absence of nationwide warfare did not mean that Libya had overcome its fragmented security order.

More recently, disputes surrounding economic institutions and attacks on critical infrastructure have provided further evidence that political competition can once again acquire a military dimension. This does not necessarily mean that the October 2020 ceasefire has simply collapsed, because its central prohibition on a return to nationwide war has proved remarkably resilient.

What is weakening is the political and security equilibrium that made that ceasefire sustainable in the first place.
The fundamental unfinished task is therefore not merely to preserve the ceasefire, but to transform it into a genuine political settlement backed by unified national institutions.

Without a single legitimate government, unified security forces, accountable economic institutions and a credible political process, the ceasefire can only continue to manage the conflict rather than resolve it. Libya's present danger is consequently not that one forgotten clause of the 2020 agreement suddenly failed, but that the unresolved struggles beneath the agreement are once again becoming powerful enough to challenge the fragile equilibrium that kept the country from returning to war.

The central question that the ceasefire never truly answered was not simply how to stop the fighting, but **who controls Libya**. Beneath the ceasefire remained unresolved disputes over political legitimacy, elections, control of the military and police, oil revenues, the Central Bank, government appointments, foreign alliances, territorial authority, militia integration and the constitutional framework. The agreement therefore placed a lid on Libya's pressure cooker without removing the pressure inside it. The UN-backed political process was supposed to use the ceasefire to produce elections, reunification and a legitimate national government, but that transition repeatedly stalled. Libya consequently returned to a system of rival eastern and western institutions, while its security structures remained fragmented. Six years after the ceasefire, the UN is still calling for unified national security and military institutions operating under a single state authority and legal framework, which shows that the central military problem of 2020 was never actually resolved. This is why the recent deterioration should not be understood simply as the sudden collapse of the ceasefire itself, but as the weakening of the political and security equilibrium that had allowed it to survive. The ceasefire largely continued to hold even as the security situation in Tripoli deteriorated severely in May 2025, when the killing of the head of the Stability Support Apparatus triggered armed clashes and protests before a fragile truce was reached.

The episode demonstrated how quickly local armed competition could become political confrontation, street violence and eventually organized fighting. The danger is particularly acute in western Libya because the forces nominally aligned with the Tripoli government do not form a single coherent military hierarchy. Government ministries, security institutions, armed formations, local commanders and economic networks often cooperate when their interests coincide, but they do not necessarily answer to one unified chain of command. This means that a government may formally control Tripoli while individual armed groups retain effective control over particular districts, facilities, routes or economic networks. The original ceasefire was supposed to produce a very different sequence in which the fighting stopped, forces withdrew, foreign fighters departed, armed groups were identified, disarmament and reintegration began, security institutions were unified and Libya eventually acquired one national military under one state. Instead, the front lines quieted while armed groups remained, rival institutions survived, the political transition stalled, economic competition intensified and security competition gradually returned.

The ceasefire can therefore be understood simultaneously as a remarkable success because it prevented a return to nationwide war and as an incomplete failure because it never produced the political settlement required to make that peace permanent. The economic dimension makes this particularly dangerous because Libya's political struggle is also a struggle over who controls oil production, export terminals, the National Oil Corporation, the Central Bank, government expenditure and access to foreign currency. When control over money becomes intertwined with control over armed groups, political disputes can quickly acquire a military dimension, as demonstrated by previous confrontations over the Central Bank and oil production. The recent

attacks on critical infrastructure, including the August 2026 drone strikes around the Zawiya oil complex, are therefore worrying not merely because of the immediate damage but because they show how political and economic competition can once again become connected to physical force. What held the ceasefire together for years was essentially a mutually acceptable military equilibrium in which nobody had won, nobody had been forced to surrender and everyone understood that returning to the 2019–20 war would be enormously costly.

The 5+5 Joint Military Commission, UNSMIL's monitoring and mediation, and the continued involvement of foreign powers all helped preserve that equilibrium, producing a situation in which there was no genuine peace but also no compelling alternative to continued restraint. That equilibrium is now under greater pressure because political actors increasingly have incentives to improve their positions without formally declaring a return to civil war, producing a dangerous progression from militia pressure to political confrontation, armed mobilization, localized clashes, economic coercion and potentially wider violence. The fundamental distinction, therefore, is between a ceasefire and a peace: Libya achieved the former in 2020 but never fully achieved the latter, because the country never agreed on who should govern, who should control the armed forces and who should control the state's enormous economic resources. The UN's current focus on unified security institutions, security-sector reform, conflict prevention, elections, accountability and a professional national security structure is essentially an attempt to complete the unfinished second half of the 2020 agreement. In that sense, the ceasefire did not fail because it stopped working; it succeeded in freezing the war, but the political settlement that was supposed to follow never arrived, and the unresolved struggle over **who controls Libya** is now beginning to put that fragile equilibrium under serious strain.

Comparative Framework: State–Society Relations and Regional Cooperation in the Maghreb

The analysis compares **Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya** through the state–society–security nexus, focusing on how differences in political authority, social organization, state capacity, and perceptions of insecurity shape both domestic governance and regional cooperation. The central premise is that security challenges cannot be understood separately from the political and social structures through which they are experienced and managed. Terrorism, migration, border insecurity, political instability, economic vulnerability, territorial disputes, and foreign intervention may affect all four countries, but their political meaning and policy consequences differ according to the relationship between state institutions and society. The comparison therefore focuses on state capacity, legitimacy, territorial control, state–society incorporation, coercion, social fragmentation, political participation, and the distribution of authority. It also examines how governments define priorities, how social actors respond to state policies, and how domestic configurations influence the ability of states to cooperate regionally.

Table

Dimension	**Morocco**	**Algeria**	**Tunisia**	**Libya**
State capacity	High	High	Medium	Low / fragmented
State legitimacy	Monarchical and national legitimacy	Nationalist and historical legitimacy	More contested	Highly contested
Territorial control	High	High	Relatively high	Fragmented
State–society incorporation	Managed incorporation	Strong state incorporation	More pluralistic and contested	Local, tribal, municipal and armed-group mediation
Coercion/repression	Significant and institutionalized	Strong security apparatus	More contested and variable	Multiple coercive centres
Social fragmentation	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate/high	Very high
Political participation	Controlled and institutionalized	Limited and state-centred	More pluralistic but contested	Fragmented and localized

Main security actors	Executive, monarchy, security institutions	Executive, military, security institutions	Executive, political parties, security institutions and civil society	Governments, militias, municipalities and local actors
Main referent concerns	State, monarchy, territory, national identity	State, national unity, territory	State, political order, society	Communities, territory and competing authorities
Main security issues	Western Sahara, terrorism, migration	Terrorism, stability, borders	Terrorism, instability, migration	Conflict, fragmentation, migration, foreign intervention
Overall nexus	**Strong state → managed society**	**Strong security state → incorporated society**	**Contested state ↔ plural society**	**Fragmented state ↔ fragmented society**

The four cases therefore represent different models of the state–society relationship. **Morocco** can be characterized by relatively strong state capacity and managed social incorporation, allowing the political system to maintain comparatively coherent authority over security and territorial issues. **Algeria** combines strong state institutions with a particularly important security establishment and a political culture strongly influenced by the experience of past internal violence. **Tunisia** represents a more contested relationship between state institutions and society, with greater political pluralism and stronger competition over the definition of political priorities. **Libya** represents the most fragmented configuration, where competing governments, armed groups, municipalities, tribal and local networks, and external actors share or contest political and security authority. These differences mean that similar challenges can generate very different policy responses and different forms of cooperation with neighbouring states.

The domestic comparison has direct implications for regional integration. The central issue is not simply whether Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya face common problems, but whether they possess sufficiently compatible political and security priorities to manage those problems collectively. Shared geography, historical connections, economic interests, migration routes, border problems, and transnational security challenges create strong incentives for cooperation. At the same time, differences in sovereignty concerns, territorial disputes, regime priorities, political legitimacy, state capacity, and relations with external powers constrain the development of common policies.

The **Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA)** is therefore affected directly by the different state–society configurations of its members. The weakness of Maghrebi integration cannot be explained only by institutional shortcomings or diplomatic disagreements. It also reflects divergent understandings of sovereignty, territorial integrity, political stability, regional leadership, and legitimate security practices. Morocco and Algeria possess strong state capacities but have different strategic priorities and regional visions. Tunisia has significant incentives to cooperate but faces greater domestic political and economic constraints. Libya presents a more fundamental challenge because fragmented political and security authority makes conventional intergovernmental cooperation difficult. The UMA consequently faces a problem of **security and political convergence**: its members share many challenges but do not necessarily agree on how those challenges should be defined or managed.

Table

Regional dimension	**Morocco**	**Algeria**	**Tunisia**	**Libya**	**Regional implication**
Regional	Territorial	Sovereignty,	Border security,	Conflict	Different threat

security priority	integrity, migration, terrorism	borders, terrorism, regional stability	terrorism, economic and political stability	containment, territorial fragmentation, armed groups	priorities complicate common regional strategies
Security cooperation	Selective and strategically controlled	Selective and sovereignty-sensitive	Generally supportive of multilateral cooperation	Constrained by fragmented authority	Unequal willingness and capacity for cooperation
Border security	Strong state control	Strong state control	Strong dependence on neighbours	Highly fragmented	Borders become both national and regional concerns
Migration	Origin, transit and destination concerns	Primarily border and security concern	Transit and socio-economic concern	Major transit corridor and displacement issue	Common problem, different national priorities
Terrorism	Strongly institutionalized counterterrorism	Central security concern	Major concern since 2011	Connected to armed-group fragmentation	Potential area of cooperation but unequal capacity
Political instability	Primarily linked to state and regime stability	Strongly linked to national stability	Highly contested political issue	Structural feature of the political order	Different meanings of "stability" hinder common policies
External actors	Strong European, Gulf and US links	Greater emphasis on strategic autonomy	Strong European and regional dependence	Extensive foreign involvement	External partnerships further differentiate national strategies
UMA implications	Supports cooperation where compatible with sovereignty	Cooperation constrained by strategic rivalry	Strong potential beneficiary	Requires stabilization before deeper integration	Divergent national security logics weaken Maghrebi integration
League of Arab States	Useful diplomatic framework	Sovereignty-sensitive participation	Supports multilateral mechanisms	Important for mediation and conflict management	Stronger for diplomacy than domestic state–society problems
UfM implications	Important partner on migration and development	Selective engagement	Strong potential for economic/development cooperation	Constrained by instability	Better suited to functional cooperation than hard security
Overall regional effect	**Managed regional engagement**	**Sovereignty-centred engagement**	**Cooperative but vulnerable**	**Fragmented and externally dependent**	**Regional institutions face divergent national political and security logics**

The **League of Arab States** operates at a broader level than the UMA and provides a framework for Arab diplomatic coordination, political consultation, and conflict management. Its limitation is that many contemporary security challenges are rooted not simply in relations between sovereign states but within states and within relationships between governments and societies. Libya illustrates this particularly clearly because the central problem is not merely disagreement between states but the fragmentation of political and security

authority within the country. The League can support mediation and diplomatic coordination, but it cannot substitute for the domestic institutions required to establish legitimate and effective authority.

The **Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)** addresses a different dimension of regional insecurity. Its focus on development, employment, migration, infrastructure, energy, climate, education, and economic cooperation provides mechanisms for addressing some of the structural conditions associated with instability. This creates an important distinction between security cooperation and cooperation that addresses the **underlying conditions of insecurity**. Economic marginalization, unemployment, migration pressures, environmental stress, and weak infrastructure can become politically destabilizing, but cooperation in these areas does not necessarily require treating them exclusively as security problems. The effectiveness of such cooperation, however, remains dependent on domestic state capacity and political stability. A regional development initiative therefore has very different prospects in a highly institutionalized state such as Morocco than in a fragmented political environment such as Libya.

The three regional institutions should consequently be understood as **complementary rather than interchangeable**. The **UMA** is the most directly relevant framework for Maghrebi integration and regional security cooperation. The **League of Arab States** provides a wider Arab political and diplomatic framework. The **UfM** connects the Maghreb to broader Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in economic, social, environmental, migration, and development fields. Their effectiveness is nevertheless conditioned by the domestic political structures of the participating states.

The key comparative finding is that **regional cooperation cannot be separated from domestic state–society relations**. Strong state capacity may facilitate regional cooperation, but it does not automatically produce it. Morocco and Algeria demonstrate that relatively strong states can nevertheless have divergent strategic priorities. Tunisia demonstrates that greater political pluralism can increase contestation while also creating incentives for multilateral cooperation. Libya demonstrates that fragmented authority can severely restrict the capacity for conventional regional cooperation even when regional engagement is essential.

The four countries can therefore be summarized as four different state–society configurations: **Morocco as managed incorporation, Algeria as security-centred incorporation, Tunisia as contested state–society relations, and Libya as fragmented state–society authority**. These configurations shape how governments perceive insecurity, how societies respond to state policies, how political authority is exercised, and how each country approaches regional institutions.

The broader implication is that **common threats do not automatically produce common regional strategies**. Effective cooperation requires some degree of convergence in political priorities, state capacity, perceptions of insecurity, and understandings of sovereignty. The most important comparative question is therefore not simply *what threats do Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya face?* but **why do similar challenges produce different state–society responses, and how do these differences facilitate or constrain cooperation through the UMA, the League of Arab States, and the Union for the Mediterranean?**

Key takeaways

The first takeaway is that **the state–society nexus is the central link between domestic governance and regional cooperation**. The second is that **state capacity, legitimacy, territorial control, coercion, and social fragmentation produce different patterns of political and security governance**. The third is that **Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya should be treated as distinct configurations rather than as variations of a single Maghrebi model**.

The fourth takeaway is that **security challenges acquire different political meanings in different national contexts**. Migration, terrorism, borders, political instability, and territorial disputes cannot be analyzed independently of the institutions and societies through which they are interpreted. The fifth is that **Libya provides the strongest contrast**, demonstrating how fragmented sovereignty fundamentally alters both domestic security governance and the possibilities for regional cooperation.

The sixth takeaway concerns the **UMA**: its weakness reflects not only institutional failure but also insufficient convergence among its members in relation to sovereignty, territorial disputes, political stability, and regional strategy. The seventh concerns the **League of Arab States**: it remains important for diplomatic coordination but is less equipped to address security problems generated by fragmented domestic authority. The eighth concerns the **UfM**: its functional focus on development, migration, employment, environment, and economic cooperation provides an alternative route for addressing some sources of insecurity without relying exclusively on security institutions.

The final takeaway is that **regionalism in the Maghreb should be understood as the outcome of interaction between domestic political configurations and regional institutions**. The prospects for cooperation depend not merely on whether countries share threats or interests, but on whether their states and societies possess sufficiently compatible understandings of authority, stability, sovereignty, and legitimate political action. This makes the comparison of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya useful not only for understanding the Maghreb but also for explaining why broader Arab and Euro-Mediterranean regional cooperation has developed unevenly.

The Evolution of EU–Libya Relations and the Prospects for a Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement

EU–Libya relations have followed a distinct trajectory compared with those of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. While the other Maghreb countries progressively integrated into the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership through Association Agreements, Libya remained largely outside the EU's contractual framework for most of the post-Cold War period. Historically, relations were constrained by international sanctions, political isolation, and the unconventional foreign policy orientation of the Gaddafi regime. Libya only obtained observer status in the Barcelona Process in 1999 and was invited to move toward fuller participation once it accepted the principles and acquis of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

A gradual rapprochement emerged during the 2000s. Following Libya's reintegration into the international community and the normalization of relations with Western states, the European Union sought to develop a more structured partnership. In 2007–2008, negotiations formally began on an EU–Libya Framework Agreement intended to create the basis for political dialogue, economic cooperation, trade liberalization, migration management, energy cooperation, and broader institutional engagement. The objective was to move Libya closer to the model already established with other Southern Mediterranean partners.

This process was interrupted by the 2011 uprising and subsequent civil conflict. The negotiations were suspended in February 2011 and have never resumed. Since then, the absence of a unified and stable Libyan state has prevented the establishment of a contractual relationship comparable to the Association Agreements concluded with Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. Today Libya remains the only Southern Mediterranean partner, alongside Syria, without an Association Agreement with the European Union.

Since 2011, EU policy has shifted from integration and economic cooperation toward stabilization, conflict management, institution-building, humanitarian assistance, migration governance, and support for UN-led peace initiatives. The European Union has become heavily involved in supporting political dialogue, electoral preparation, border management, local governance, and migration-related programmes while simultaneously supporting the Berlin Process as the principal international framework for resolving the Libyan conflict.

Despite the absence of a formal agreement, Libya remains strategically important for the European Union. The EU is Libya's largest trading partner and the principal destination for Libyan exports, particularly hydrocarbons. Nevertheless, trade relations continue to operate without the legal and institutional framework that governs EU relations with most Mediterranean partners. The lack of political settlement therefore remains the principal obstacle to deeper economic integration.

The comparison developed earlier provides a useful explanation for why Libya followed a different path from Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. The central issue is not simply the absence of negotiations or technical disagreements. Rather, Libya's fragmented state–society configuration has prevented the emergence of a stable

counterpart capable of negotiating, implementing, and sustaining a comprehensive agreement with the European Union. Association Agreements require functioning institutions, territorial control, regulatory capacity, and a degree of political predictability. These conditions are substantially more developed in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia than in Libya.

From this perspective, the future of EU–Libya relations depends on the reconstruction of state authority and political legitimacy within Libya. Economic cooperation alone cannot substitute for institutional consolidation. Any future Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement would therefore need to be preceded by progress in political stabilization, institutional unification, territorial governance, and security-sector consolidation. Without these foundations, implementation would remain extremely difficult regardless of the formal content of the agreement.

The broader regional implication is that Libya occupies an anomalous position within the Maghreb. Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia are integrated into the Euro-Mediterranean framework through established contractual relationships with the EU, whereas Libya remains linked primarily through stabilization, humanitarian, migration, and security cooperation mechanisms. This asymmetry limits not only Libya's integration with Europe but also the prospects for deeper Maghrebi economic integration through the UMA, since one of the region's major states remains outside the institutional architecture that structures EU–Maghreb relations.

Consequently, the long-term objective of an EU–Libya Association Agreement should not be viewed merely as a trade or diplomatic instrument. It should be understood as the culmination of a broader process of state reconstruction and regional integration. A future agreement would signal not only closer EU–Libya relations but also Libya's fuller reintegration into the political, economic, and institutional structures of the Mediterranean region.

Table

Period	Main Characteristics	EU Approach	Implications
1990s–1999	Political isolation and sanctions	Limited engagement	Libya remained outside Euro-Mediterranean structures
1999–2007	Progressive normalization	Inclusion in Barcelona Process as observer	Opening of dialogue and conditional engagement
2008–2010	Framework Agreement negotiations	Preparation for deeper political and economic integration	Potential pathway toward Euro-Mediterranean integration
2011–2014	Revolution and state collapse	Crisis management and political transition support	Suspension of Framework Agreement negotiations
2014–2020	Civil conflict and institutional fragmentation	Stabilization, humanitarian assistance, migration management	Shift from integration to conflict management
2021–Present	Continued political fragmentation but international engagement	Support for UN process, governance, migration, and reconstruction initiatives	Association Agreement remains conditional on political stabilization
Future Scenario	State consolidation and institutional reunification	Resumption of negotiations toward contractual integration	Potential pathway to Association Agreement and deeper Mediterranean integration

The principal conclusion is that an EU–Libya Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement cannot realistically serve as the starting point for political stabilization; rather, it is more likely to emerge as the outcome of successful state consolidation, institutional reunification, and the gradual reconstruction of effective state–society relations within Libya. Experience across the Euro-Mediterranean region demonstrates that Association

Agreements function most effectively when they are supported by functioning institutions, coherent governance structures, predictable regulatory frameworks, and authorities capable of implementing and sustaining long-term commitments. In the Libyan case, these conditions remain unevenly developed, making a comprehensive contractual framework difficult to negotiate and even more difficult to implement.

From this perspective, the evolution of EU–Libya relations should be understood not as a linear process of economic integration but as a broader process of political, institutional, and regional reintegration. The challenge is not simply to expand trade or political dialogue with Libya, but to create the domestic conditions under which deeper Euro-Mediterranean cooperation can become viable and sustainable. Consequently, progress in governance, institutional coordination, territorial administration, public service delivery, and political legitimacy is likely to be a prerequisite for any future contractual relationship comparable to those already established between the European Union and other Southern Mediterranean partners.

The implications for cooperation with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) are particularly significant. The UfM provides a framework through which Libya can progressively engage in regional cooperation even in the absence of a formal Association Agreement. Unlike traditional trade agreements, the UfM operates through sectoral and project-based cooperation in areas such as infrastructure, energy, transport, climate adaptation, environmental sustainability, higher education, employment, urban development, water management, and migration governance. These areas correspond closely to many of Libya's long-term reconstruction and development needs.

In this sense, the UfM can be viewed as a pre-integration platform for Libya. Participation in UfM initiatives allows Libyan institutions, municipalities, technical agencies, universities, economic actors, and civil society organizations to engage with regional networks and cooperative mechanisms without requiring the level of political integration associated with a formal Association Agreement. Such engagement can contribute to capacity building, institutional learning, technical modernization, and the development of administrative practices that are essential for future economic and political integration.

Moreover, UfM cooperation offers a means of addressing the structural drivers of instability that have affected Libya since 2011. High youth unemployment, uneven regional development, infrastructure deficits, environmental pressures, energy transition challenges, and migration management all represent areas where practical cooperation may produce tangible benefits for both Libya and its Mediterranean partners. By focusing on functional cooperation rather than contentious political questions, the UfM provides opportunities for confidence-building and gradual institutional strengthening.

The migration dimension is particularly important. Libya occupies a central position in Mediterranean migration routes and remains a key partner for European migration management policies. However, a narrowly securitized approach to migration risks reinforcing instability if it is not accompanied by broader investments in governance, local development, border administration, labour-market opportunities, and regional cooperation. Through its multidimensional framework, the UfM offers mechanisms for linking migration management to economic development, employment creation, education, and social resilience, thereby addressing some of the underlying factors that shape migration dynamics.

Energy cooperation also presents substantial opportunities. Libya possesses significant hydrocarbon resources and considerable potential for renewable energy development. As Euro-Mediterranean energy cooperation increasingly focuses on diversification, sustainability, and connectivity, Libya could become an important partner in regional energy networks. Yet meaningful participation in such initiatives requires regulatory coherence, institutional capacity, and political stability, again highlighting the connection between domestic state-building and regional integration.

At the Maghrebi level, deeper UfM engagement could also contribute indirectly to the objectives of the Union du Maghreb Arabe (UMA). A more stable and institutionally capable Libya would strengthen regional connectivity, facilitate trade and transport links, improve border cooperation, and reduce one of the principal sources of uncertainty affecting Maghrebi integration. In this respect, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation and

Maghrebi integration should not be viewed as competing processes but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of regional development.

The broader strategic implication is that Libya's path toward a future Association Agreement is likely to pass through progressive participation in UfM frameworks rather than through immediate negotiations on comprehensive contractual integration. Cooperation in infrastructure, energy, education, local governance, climate adaptation, transport, migration, and economic development can create the institutional foundations necessary for deeper political and economic engagement in the future. The UfM therefore serves not merely as a forum for dialogue but as a mechanism through which Libya can gradually rebuild the capacities required for fuller participation in regional and international institutions.

Indeed, " The European Union (EU) has a strong interest in a stable, secure, united and prosperous Libya. Through diplomatic action and bilateral support, the EU seeks to assist the country and the Libyan people to return to peace and resume the transition to democracy. The EU fully supports the United Nations (UN)-led mediation efforts in the Libyan crisis."[3]

Ultimately, a future EU–Libya Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement should be understood as the culmination of a broader process of domestic reconstruction and regional reintegration. Such an agreement would signify more than the normalization of bilateral relations between Libya and the European Union. It would indicate that Libya has achieved a sufficient degree of political stability, institutional coherence, and administrative capacity to participate fully in the Euro-Mediterranean framework. At the same time, it would strengthen links between the Maghreb and Europe, contribute to the long-term objectives of the UfM, and enhance prospects for greater economic and political cooperation across the Mediterranean basin. In this sense, the Association Agreement represents not the beginning of Libya's integration into the Euro-Mediterranean space, but the successful conclusion of a gradual process of state-building, regional cooperation, and institutional consolidation.

Hence, it has been resolved that Libya should resume its seat in the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) group under the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and should seek integration into the Agadir Agreement, the free trade agreement linking Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco, which serves as a stepping stone toward deeper South–South and Euro-Mediterranean economic integration.

The implications of this decision are significant from political, economic, and administrative perspectives. Politically, Libya's renewed participation in UfM structures would strengthen its regional engagement, enhance diplomatic cooperation with Mediterranean partners, and support its gradual reintegration into multilateral institutions. Such engagement could also contribute to state-building efforts and institutional normalization by providing platforms for policy dialogue and confidence-building.

Economically, accession to the Agadir framework would offer Libya opportunities to expand trade with neighboring Arab Mediterranean economies, benefit from trade facilitation measures, harmonized customs procedures, and improved access to regional value chains. In the longer term, integration could help diversify the Libyan economy beyond hydrocarbons, attract foreign investment, and prepare domestic industries for participation in a broader Euro-Mediterranean free trade area.

From an administrative and institutional standpoint, Libya would need to undertake substantial preparatory measures. These include strengthening customs administration, aligning trade regulations with Agadir standards, improving border management systems, enhancing trade facilitation mechanisms, and building the capacity of relevant ministries and regulatory agencies. Reforms aimed at regulatory harmonization, transparency, and institutional coordination would be essential to ensure effective implementation of the obligations arising from both UfM participation and eventual Agadir accession.

[3] https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-libya-relations_en

In addition, Spain envisages Libya to integrate into the naval component of the 5+5 framework to demonstrate its meddle and willingness to resocialise and to lead under a cooperative security regime. One reason the 5+5 framework is often considered successful is its **informal and flexible nature**. Unlike the European Union or the Union for the Mediterranean, it operates through ministerial meetings, working groups and practical projects rather than strong supranational institutions. This has allowed countries with significant political differences to continue cooperating on shared concerns. A notable offshoot is the **5+5 Defence Initiative**, established in 2004, which focuses on maritime security, terrorism, migration routes, military cooperation and confidence-building measures among the ten member states. The framework has also inspired projects such as the **WestMED Initiative**, which promotes cooperation on the blue economy, maritime governance and environmental sustainability across the same ten countries. From a historical perspective, the 5+5 Dialogue is often seen as one of the precursors to later Euro-Mediterranean cooperation structures, including aspects of the Barcelona Process and the Union for the Mediterranean. For someone interested in cultural heritage and regional identity, the 5+5 Dialogue is interesting because it reflects the idea that the **Western Mediterranean forms a shared historical space**, linking Iberia, southern Europe and the Maghreb through centuries of trade, migration, religion and political interaction.

Libya could become a full member of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Libya has already signed the AfCFTA Agreement. However, it still needs to complete the ratification process. Ratification would allow Libya to participate more fully in the African single market. Membership could increase Libya's trade with other African countries. It could also help Libya diversify its economy beyond oil and gas. Libyan businesses could gain better access to a large African market of consumers. Therefore, joining AfCFTA could provide Libya with important long-term economic opportunities.

Overall, Libya's reintegration into these regional frameworks would represent an important step toward deeper economic cooperation, institutional modernization, and greater participation in the evolving Euro-Mediterranean integration process. As Africa's largest oil producer it has the potential to achieve modernisation and to proceed on Europeanisation per the rythm of society and qua the tastes of the Libyan elites. The diversification of its economy, strengthening of governance and a more pluralist policy making system will depend on both the EU willingness to up its game and for Libya to take ownership in partnership with the UN and the EU and AU.

The Geoeconomics of the Saharan Trade Routes: From pragmatic engagement to partnership

The geoeconomics of the Saharan trade routes should be understood not as the economics of a desert, but as the political economy of a vast **trans-Saharan connective system** linking the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Sahelian, West African, Nile and Red Sea economies. The Sahara has historically been portrayed as a barrier separating North and sub-Saharan Africa. In economic terms, however, it has repeatedly functioned as a **corridor, market, resource zone and strategic interface**. Contemporary roads, ports, pipelines, electricity networks, telecommunications systems and border crossings are progressively replacing the caravan infrastructure of the past while reproducing many of its underlying geographical logics.

The historical caravan system was structured around a relatively small number of durable corridors connecting North African commercial centres with the major markets of the Sahel and West Africa. The contemporary system retains these geographical orientations but has transformed their scale, speed and strategic significance.

Table

Principal axis	Contemporary strategic logic	Main external gateway
Morocco–Mauritania–Senegal	Atlantic–Sahel trade and logistics	Atlantic ports
Algeria–Mali–Niger–Nigeria	Mediterranean–central Sahel connectivity	Algerian Mediterranean ports
Libya–Niger–Chad	Central Mediterranean–Sahel corridor	Libyan ports
Tunisia/Libya–	Central Sahara–eastern Sahel	Mediterranean/Red Sea

Chad/Sudan	connectivity	
Egypt–Libya–Sudan	Nile–Sahara–Red Sea system	Egyptian and Red Sea ports
Mauritania–Mali–Senegal	Atlantic mineral, livestock and food corridor	Nouakchott/Dakar

The contemporary Saharan economy is consequently composed of overlapping **formal, informal and illicit circuits**. Official commerce includes foodstuffs, livestock, fuel, manufactured goods, construction materials, agricultural inputs and consumer products. At a higher strategic level, the movement of oil, gas, minerals, electricity and potentially critical raw materials is becoming increasingly important. Informal trade remains economically significant because border communities frequently operate through commercial networks that predate modern state boundaries. Illicit markets exploit precisely the same geographical advantages: distance, porous borders, weak administrative capacity and enormous differences in taxation and prices between neighbouring states.

Table

Economic circuit	**Principal flows**	**Geoeconomic significance**
Formal commerce	Food, manufactured goods, machinery, agricultural products	Regional market integration
Livestock economy	Cattle, sheep, goats, camels	Sahel–Maghreb food economy
Energy	Oil, gas, fuel and electricity	Strategic interdependence
Minerals	Gold, uranium, iron ore, phosphates and other minerals	Global resource competition
Informal trade	Fuel, food, consumer goods and livestock	Local livelihoods and border economies
Illicit trade	Drugs, weapons, smuggled fuel and other commodities	Shadow economies and armed-group financing

The crucial transformation is therefore from **caravan geography to corridor geography**. What matters increasingly is not simply the existence of resources or markets but the capacity to connect them through reliable infrastructure. Roads, bridges, customs facilities, logistics platforms, railways, pipelines, fibre-optic cables and electricity interconnectors determine whether an economic resource can be transformed into a commercially viable flow.

This produces what can be called **corridor power**. A state does not need to dominate the entire Sahara to exercise geoeconomic influence. Control of a strategic border crossing, road junction, mining region, port, pipeline or logistics centre can provide leverage over flows extending hundreds or thousands of kilometres beyond the immediate territory. The modern Saharan economy is therefore increasingly organised through **nodes and corridors rather than continuous territorial control**.

Ports consequently become central to Saharan geopolitics. The economic value of a trans-Saharan corridor ultimately depends on its ability to connect inland production and consumption to global maritime networks. This generates competition among Atlantic, Mediterranean and Red Sea gateways

Table

Gateway system	**Potential hinterland**	**Strategic advantage**
Moroccan	Mauritania, Mali, Senegal and	Atlantic access and sophisticated port

Atlantic	wider West Africa	infrastructure
Algerian Mediterranean	Mali, Niger and central Sahel	Direct Mediterranean–Sahel connection
Libyan Mediterranean	Niger, Chad and central Sahara	Geographical proximity to central Sahel
Egyptian/Red Sea	Libya, Sudan, Chad and eastern Africa	Connection to Red Sea and Asian markets
Mauritanian Atlantic	Mauritania, Mali and western Sahel	Mineral exports and Atlantic connectivity
Senegalese Atlantic	Mali and western Sahel	Access to major West African markets

This creates a wider **competition for the Sahel's external gateways**. Morocco seeks to consolidate an Atlantic–Sahelian system; Algeria has strategic incentives to develop its southern commercial connections; Mauritania seeks to translate its Atlantic position and mineral economy into regional connectivity; Libya possesses considerable geographical potential but remains constrained by political fragmentation; while Egypt occupies a unique position between the Sahara, the Nile Valley and the Red Sea.

Energy adds another layer. North Africa already possesses major oil and gas infrastructure, while the Sahara has exceptionally large solar potential. The long-term possibility is not simply to export hydrocarbons from the Sahara but to transform parts of the desert into a major **renewable-energy production zone**. Electricity interconnections could create a new north–south and south–north geography in which energy generated in Saharan and Sahelian areas is consumed regionally or exported towards Europe.

The strategic geography can therefore be represented as:

Saharan resources → infrastructure → North African gateways → Mediterranean/European markets

while simultaneously:

European capital, technology and manufactured goods → North African gateways → Saharan and Sahelian markets.

This creates the possibility of a genuinely integrated **Euro-Mediterranean–Saharan economic system** rather than a simple relationship between Europe and individual North African states.

Minerals may become equally transformative. The wider Saharan and Sahelian zone contains important deposits of gold, uranium, iron ore, phosphates and other strategic resources. Yet possession of mineral resources does not automatically translate into geoeconomic power. The decisive issue is increasingly the ability to control the **entire value chain** from extraction through transport and processing to export.

A mine located in a politically insecure region without a dependable corridor to a port has much less strategic value than a mine embedded in a secure logistics system. Consequently, infrastructure policy, mining policy and security policy increasingly converge.

The security dimension is particularly important because Saharan trade routes cross states with very different administrative capacities. Formal customs systems coexist with informal taxation and, in some areas, armed groups that impose their own charges on transport and commerce. Armed organisations can consequently exercise a form of **shadow sovereignty**, extracting rents from economic flows without necessarily controlling all the territory through which those flows pass.

Table

Formal economic geography	Shadow economic geography
Customs posts	Informal checkpoints
State taxation	Armed-group taxation
Licensed transport	Informal transport networks
Regulated markets	Cross-border markets
Official mining	Artisanal and illicit extraction
State security	Non-state protection
Formal logistics	Smuggling corridors

This explains why security cannot be treated as an external variable in Saharan economic development. **Security is itself an economic infrastructure.** A road is valuable only if traders can use it predictably; a border crossing creates value only if transactions can occur with reasonable certainty; and a mining project requires a secure route to market. Conversely, insecurity increases transport costs, encourages informal commerce and redirects flows towards alternative corridors.

The external dimension is consequently becoming more important. The European Union is concerned simultaneously with migration, energy security, trade, border management and access to strategic resources. China approaches the region primarily through infrastructure, construction, mining and commercial connectivity. Gulf actors increasingly view North Africa, the Sahara and the Red Sea as a connected investment and logistics space. Turkey has expanded commercial and diplomatic engagement across parts of Africa, while Russia has sought strategic influence particularly through security relationships. These external actors interact with, rather than simply replace, the geoeconomic strategies of Algeria, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, Mauritania and the Sahelian states.

The resulting system can be conceptualised as a **multi-layered Saharan geoeconomic space**.

Table

Layer	Core Asset	Principal source of Power
Trade	Markets and commercial flows	Market access
Energy	Oil, gas and solar potential	Energy interdependence
Minerals	Gold, uranium, iron, phosphates and other resources	Resource access
Infrastructure	Roads, ports, railways, pipelines and fibre	Connectivity
Finance	Investment, credit and project finance	Capital allocation
Security	Borders, routes and strategic nodes	Control of movement
Governance	Customs, regulation and agreements	Institutional authority

The deepest transformation is therefore conceptual. The Sahara should no longer be treated primarily as an empty geographical space separating two different Africas. It is better understood as a **continental interface** in which North African, Sahelian and West African economies increasingly intersect. Its strategic value lies precisely in its capacity to connect different economic systems.

The nineteenth-century caravan route and the twenty-first-century trans-Saharan corridor are different technological systems, but they share a fundamental principle: **control of connectivity creates economic power**. The camel caravan depended on oases, wells and protected trading posts; the modern corridor depends

on roads, fuel stations, border crossings, logistics platforms, telecommunications and ports. In both cases, the actor capable of securing and organising the nodes acquires influence over the wider flow.

The future geoeconomics of the Sahara will therefore depend less on who possesses the largest territory than on **who connects resources to markets, markets to ports, ports to global supply chains, and infrastructure to political stability**. This makes the Sahara potentially one of the most consequential north–south economic interfaces of the twenty-first century: a zone where European energy requirements, African demographic expansion, mineral competition, regional integration and global infrastructure strategies converge.

Libya as a MED-Sahara hinge

Libya could be the missing Mediterranean–Saharan hinge in the geoeconomic system described above. Its significance is not simply that it has oil or that it borders the Sahel. Its real strategic value is that it potentially connects **the central Mediterranean, the Sahara, the Sahel and, through Chad and Sudan, the wider African interior**.

That has important consequences for the EU and, more fundamentally, for how the Libyan peace process and UNSMIL should conceptualise Libya's future.

Libya as the Mediterranean–Saharan hinge

Libya occupies an unusually advantageous position. Its enormous Mediterranean coastline opens directly towards Europe, while its southern territory reaches into the Saharan corridor towards Niger and Chad. The country therefore has the geographical potential to become a **Mediterranean gateway for central Saharan and Sahelian trade**.

The strategic configuration could eventually look like this:

Europe → central Mediterranean → Libyan ports → southern Libya → Niger/Chad → West and Central Africa

with a complementary eastward connection:

Libya → Chad/Sudan → Nile/Red Sea

and an energy dimension:

Libyan oil and gas + Saharan solar → Mediterranean energy system → Europe

This makes Libya potentially much more than an energy supplier. It could become a **continental logistics platform**.

Table

Libya's asset	Potential function	Wider geoeconomic effect
Mediterranean coastline	Ports and maritime logistics	European–African gateway
Southern Libya	Trans-Saharan corridor	Connection to Niger and Chad
Oil and gas	Energy exports	EU energy diversification
Solar potential	Renewable electricity	Mediterranean–Saharan energy integration
Large territory	Logistics and infrastructure	Continental connectivity

Central position	East–west and north–south routes	Corridor diversification
Reconstruction needs	Infrastructure investment	European and international investment opportunity

The crucial implication for the EU

This changes the EU's strategic interest in Libya.

The EU has often approached Libya through three largely separate lenses: **migration, hydrocarbons and security**. The Saharan geoeconomic perspective suggests that these should be integrated into a much broader **Mediterranean–Saharan connectivity strategy**.

Libya could become an EU partner for developing a controlled and economically productive corridor between the Mediterranean and the Sahel. Such a strategy would potentially give the EU an alternative to viewing southern Libya primarily as a migration-security problem.

The distinction is important.

A security-only conception sees southern Libya as a frontier to be controlled.

A geoeconomic conception sees southern Libya as a gateway to be developed.

That does not make security less important. It changes its purpose: security becomes the condition for connectivity, investment and legitimate commerce.

This also changes the logic of the peace process

The economic geography gives a powerful argument for moving beyond the idea that the Libyan political process is essentially about **dividing political authority among competing elites**.

The more ambitious objective should be to create a state capable of **organising national economic space**.

UNSMIL's current roadmap already identifies institutional reunification, economic governance, security and reconciliation alongside elections. Its economic track explicitly addresses public-finance management, resource management, diversification, balanced development and private-sector growth.

The Saharan dimension could give these otherwise separate objectives a common strategic purpose:

The reunification of Libya is necessary not merely to produce a legitimate government, but to enable Libya to function as an integrated Mediterranean–Saharan economy.

That is a much stronger political proposition.

Southern Libya becomes central rather than peripheral

The traditional political geography of Libya is heavily concentrated on **Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and the struggle over Tripoli and Benghazi**. A corridor strategy would force the political process to give much greater weight to **Fezzan and the southern municipalities**.

Fezzan is strategically important because it is where Libya's Mediterranean economy meets the Saharan and Sahelian economic system.

This means that southern development should not be treated simply as a reconstruction or regional-equity programme. It could become a **national geoeconomic strategy**.

Table

Current framing of southern Libya	Strategic reframing
Remote periphery	Continental gateway
Border-security problem	Trade and security corridor
Migration route	Legal mobility and commercial corridor
Source of instability	Potential source of regional integration
Marginalised region	Strategic national economic zone
Smuggling economy	Formal cross-border commerce
Security expenditure	Infrastructure and security investment

The peace dividend could therefore become geographical

One of the weaknesses of Libya's post-2011 political economy is that peace has often been discussed in terms of **institutional arrangements**, while economic incentives remain fragmented.

A functioning trans-Saharan corridor could create a different incentive structure.

If Tripoli, Benghazi, Fezzan and the municipalities along the southern routes all obtain identifiable economic benefits from national connectivity, the value of institutional fragmentation becomes lower.

In other words:

national reconciliation → institutional unification → infrastructure investment → trade corridors → regional economic benefits → stronger incentives for maintaining national unity.

This would make economic integration an instrument of peacebuilding rather than merely an outcome of peace.

But there is an important danger

The same geography can strengthen conflict if the corridor is captured by competing armed groups.

A valuable road, border crossing, logistics centre or mineral corridor creates **rents**. If those rents are monopolised by militias, tribes, municipalities or political factions, infrastructure can reinforce fragmentation rather than overcome it.

This is precisely why UNSMIL's economic and security tracks need to converge. UNSMIL itself recognises that economic reform and political progress are mutually dependent, while its roadmap explicitly seeks to address the security and economic conditions necessary for elections.

The objective should therefore not be simply:

"build the road."

It should be:

"build the institution that governs the road."

That means unified customs, transparent revenue allocation, national border management, regulated transport,

municipal participation and mechanisms ensuring that corridor revenues do not become another source of armed competition.

Implications for UNSMIL

This suggests a potentially important evolution in UNSMIL's approach.

UNSMIL's current mandate already supports institutional reunification, economic governance, national reconciliation and the prevention of renewed conflict. Its roadmap is explicitly intended to end successive transitions through elections and institutional unification.

The Saharan perspective would add a **geoeconomic dimension** to that mission

Table

UNSMIL priority	**Saharan-geoeconomic interpretation**
Institutional unification	Create one national economic space
Economic reform	Capture and distribute corridor rents transparently
Security-sector reform	Secure strategic economic corridors
National reconciliation	Integrate regions into shared economic projects
Local governance	Give southern municipalities a stake in connectivity
Elections	Establish legitimate authority over national resources
Private-sector development	Build formal cross-border commerce
International coordination	Align EU, UN, AU and regional infrastructure strategies

This would fit particularly well with the current Structured Dialogue, whose economic track has already addressed resource management, diversification, equitable development and economic restructuring, while the security track has examined the conditions necessary for credible elections.

Implications for the EU–UN relationship

The EU should therefore avoid treating the Libyan peace process and its own economic interests as separate policy domains.

Instead, it could support a **Libya–Sahel Connectivity Compact** built around three mutually reinforcing objectives:

political unification + economic corridors + security governance.

The EU would not need to finance an enormous trans-Saharan infrastructure programme immediately. A more realistic approach would begin with feasibility studies, border modernisation, customs harmonisation, municipal economic development, logistics nodes, digital connectivity and selected road rehabilitation.

The strategic objective would be to demonstrate that **peace produces connectivity and connectivity produce**

-s a peace dividend.

This would also fit the EU's existing support for the UNSMIL political roadmap. The EU has already recognised that strengthening UNSMIL and creating conditions for institutional unification and elections are interconnected objectives.

The larger strategic proposition

The most interesting consequence is that Libya could become the **northern anchor of a Mediterranean–Saharan economic corridor**.

That would reposition Libya from being perceived principally as:

an oil producer + migration transit state + security problem

towards:

an energy producer + Mediterranean gateway + Saharan logistics hub + Sahelian economic partner.

For the EU, that would mean a broader strategic relationship with Libya. For UNSMIL, it would provide a concrete economic rationale for institutional reunification. For the peace process, it would give the political settlement something that Libya has lacked for years: **a national economic project whose benefits depend upon the country functioning as one territorial and institutional space**.

The key proposition could therefore be stated very simply:

Libya's strategic future lies not only in controlling its oil, but in controlling and developing the connectivity between the Mediterranean and the Sahara.

And that suggests a potentially important shift in the peace process: **from negotiating the distribution of Libya's existing rents toward creating new national rents from connectivity, logistics, energy and trade.**

UNSMIL's present roadmap already seeks to end successive transitions through elections, institutional unification and a structured dialogue covering governance, economy, security and reconciliation. The Saharan geoeconomic strategy could provide the **integrating economic narrative that connects those four tracks into a single national project**.

HOW THE MEDITERRANEAN-SAHARA SYSTEM WORKS

The key point is that Global Gateway should not approach the Mediterranean–Sahara as a collection of individual infrastructure projects. It should approach it as an integrated geoeconomic system of corridors, nodes and markets. The EU's current Global Gateway already provides the basic instruments: it combines EU, Member-State and European financial institutions, seeks to mobilise up to €300 billion, and concentrates on digital, climate and energy, transport, health, and education/research.

Figure



The mechanism is essentially:

European capital and technology → Mediterranean gateways → Saharan corridors → Sahelian markets/resources → Atlantic, Mediterranean and Red Sea ports → global markets.

But the important point is that the flows are **bidirectional**.

Europe supplies machinery, capital, technology, services and manufactured goods. North Africa provides energy, logistics and industrial gateways. The Sahara and Sahel provide minerals, agricultural products, livestock and potentially renewable energy. African markets provide the demand that makes the corridors commercially viable.

So the objective should not be to build a road across the desert. It should be to create a **functioning economic corridor** in which road, customs, energy, digital infrastructure, finance, logistics and security reinforce one another.

The EU already has the right conceptual precedent. Global Gateway's Africa–Europe Investment Package explicitly calls for multi-country transport infrastructure, strategic corridors and harmonised regulatory frameworks, while its digital programme includes terrestrial and submarine fibre connectivity.

What makes a corridor actually work?

Component	What it does	Global Gateway role
Roads/rail	Moves goods and people	Finance strategic missing links
Ports	Connects inland economies to world trade	Modernise gateways and logistics
Border posts	Converts movement into legal commerce	Digital customs and one-stop borders
Energy	Powers industry and transport	Renewable generation and interconnection
Fibre	Carries information and financial transactions	Secure terrestrial/submarine networks
Logistics hubs	Concentrates storage, processing and distribution	PPPs and investment guarantees
Finance	Makes projects bankable	EIB/EFSD+ guarantees and blended finance
Regulation	Makes corridors predictable	Customs, standards and transit agreements
Security	Protects infrastructure and commerce	Corridor security and governance
Local industry	Creates value along the route	Industrial zones and SME finance

This is particularly important because Global Gateway's comparative advantage is **not simply providing grants**. Its strength is using public money, guarantees, political diplomacy and European financial institutions to reduce risk and bring private capital into projects that otherwise would not be commercially viable. The Global Gateway Guarantee Programme, for example, is designed to de-risk private investment in renewable energy, digital infrastructure and transport.

What should Global Gateway prioritise?

I would substantially sharpen the current Global Gateway priorities around a **Mediterranean–Sahara Connectivity Initiative**.

Strategic corridor architecture should come first

The EU should identify perhaps **three or four strategic north–south corridors**, rather than distributing resources among dozens of disconnected projects.

The most strategically interesting would be:

Table

Corridor	Strategic function	Priority
Central Mediterranean–Libya–Niger/Chad	EU–Libya–Sahel connectivity	**Very high**
Algeria–Niger–Nigeria	Mediterranean–central Sahel trade	**Very high**
Morocco–Mauritania–Senegal–Mali	Atlantic–Sahel connectivity	**Very high**

Egypt–Libya–Sudan	Mediterranean–Nile–Red Sea connectivity	High, but security-dependent

The **Libyan corridor deserves particular attention** because Libya could become the EU's central Mediterranean gateway into the Sahara. But this should be conditional on political stabilisation and institutional unification rather than prematurely financing a geopolitical corridor through a fragmented state.

The EU itself defines its interest in Libya as a stable, secure, united and prosperous country and supports the UN-led political process.

Libya should become a strategic pilot

This is where the geoeconomic argument connects directly to the peace process.

Instead of treating Libya primarily as a problem of migration, oil and militia violence, the EU could develop a long-term proposition:

Unified Libya → secure south → functioning ports → trans-Saharan corridor → regional trade → investment → employment → stronger incentives for national political settlement.

In other words, **connectivity becomes part of peacebuilding**.

The EU should therefore prepare a **Libya–Sahara Connectivity Compact**, but make major infrastructure investment conditional on institutional milestones: unified economic institutions, transparent revenue management, functioning customs, agreed border governance and credible security arrangements.

That would give the peace process an economic destination rather than making elections the end-point of the strategy.

Border infrastructure is probably more important than another highway

One of the least glamorous but most transformative Global Gateway investments would be **smart trans-Saharan border crossings**.

A modern border post can combine customs, immigration, sanitary controls, vehicle inspection, digital documentation, banking and security. This can transform a journey that currently involves informal payments and unpredictable delays into a predictable commercial transaction.

The EU should therefore finance **corridor governance**, not merely corridor construction.

This fits very closely with Global Gateway's existing emphasis on safe transport, regulatory harmonisation and regional economic integration.

Energy should be built around regional grids, not only exports to Europe

The EU should resist the temptation to make the Sahara primarily a source of electricity or hydrogen for Europe.

The stronger model is:

solar/wind → local electricity → industrialisation → regional electricity trade → surplus exports to Europe.

That creates African productive capacity rather than simply an extractive energy relationship.

The existing Africa–Europe Green Energy Initiative already targets renewable generation and energy access,

with more than €20 billion pledged under the Team Europe approach and an ambition to support at least 50 GW of additional renewable capacity.

Digital corridors should accompany physical corridors

This is an area where the EU has an enormous strategic opportunity.

A road corridor without digital infrastructure remains a low-productivity transport route. A road combined with **fibre, digital customs, mobile payments, logistics data and cloud infrastructure** becomes an economic platform.

The EU's Medusa submarine cable initiative is particularly relevant because it is intended to connect North African countries with Europe, with an envisaged extension towards West Africa.

The strategic formula should therefore be:

road + port + power + fibre + customs + finance.

Not merely **road + port**.

Processing should be prioritised over extraction

This is perhaps the most important change I would make to Global Gateway.

The EU should not primarily finance corridors that carry **unprocessed African resources to European ports**.

It should finance **corridor-based industrialisation**.

For example:

mineral → processing → component → manufacturing → export

rather than:

mine → truck → European port → Europe.

The same principle applies to agricultural products, livestock, renewable energy and hydrocarbons.

This turns connectivity into **developmental geoeconomics**.

Global Gateway should create a Mediterranean–Saharan investment platform

The EU could use Global Gateway's existing Team Europe architecture to establish a dedicated platform bringing together the Commission, EIB, Member-State development banks, African development institutions and private investors.

Its purpose would be to identify **bankable corridor projects**, prepare them technically, provide guarantees and coordinate political agreements.

That is precisely the type of function envisaged by the Global Gateway Investment Hub, which connects European companies, Member States, financial institutions and partner-country authorities around investment projects.

The strategic hierarchy

I would therefore rank the priorities as follows:

Table

Priority	Global Gateway objective	Strategic rationale
1	Corridor governance and political agreements	Without governance infrastructure cannot generate integration
2	Strategic transport corridors	Create north–south economic connectivity
3	Ports and logistics hubs	Connect Africa to global supply chains
4	Digital corridors	Reduce transaction costs and create modern economies
5	Regional electricity grids	Convert Saharan renewable potential into development
6	Industrial/processing zones	Capture African value-added
7	Smart borders and customs	Formalise trade and reduce smuggling rents
8	SME and private-sector finance	Spread corridor benefits into local economies
9	Security of infrastructure	Protect the economic system
10	Education and skills	Create the human capital necessary to operate it

The EU should therefore **not try to compete with China simply by spending more money**. Its comparative advantage is different: standards, regulation, institutional capacity, financial de-risking, technology, private-sector mobilisation and political legitimacy. Global Gateway explicitly combines these elements and seeks to catalyse private investment rather than operate as a conventional aid programme.

The larger strategic objective

The ultimate objective should be to construct a **Mediterranean–Sahara–Sahel economic space**.

Europe would be the capital, technology and high-value market.

North Africa would provide ports, energy, industry and logistics.

The Sahara would become a connective and energy space rather than a geopolitical vacuum.

The Sahel would become a market and production zone rather than merely a security frontier.

And Libya, if successfully reunified, could occupy the particularly valuable position of **central Mediterranean gateway to the African interior**.

That gives Global Gateway a much more ambitious purpose than infrastructure development:

Global Gateway should use connectivity to transform the Sahara from Europe's southern security frontier into Europe's southern economic hinterland.

And for Libya specifically:

The EU should make connectivity part of the peace dividend: political unification should open the way to infrastructure, infrastructure should create trade, and trade should create economic interests in preserving Libyan unity.

This would also complement the EU's existing Africa strategy, which already identifies transport connectivity, economic integration, private-sector development, peace and security as interconnected priorities.

Libya's Saharan–Mediterranean Energy System: Strategic Significance from Libyan, African Union, and European Union Perspectives

Libya's hydrocarbon sector is best understood as a single integrated Saharan–Mediterranean energy system. The country's vast oil and gas reserves are concentrated beneath the Sahara Desert, while its access to international markets depends on infrastructure located along the Mediterranean coast and offshore waters. This geographical relationship gives Libya a unique strategic position at the intersection of Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe. The Sahara serves as the source of production, while the Mediterranean functions as the corridor through which Libya converts underground resources into economic and geopolitical influence.

The Libyan Perspective: From Desert Resources to Maritime Access

From a Libyan national perspective, the Sahara constitutes the foundation of the country's economic power. The Murzuq Basin in the southwest and the Sirte Basin in central Libya contain the overwhelming majority of the nation's proven oil and gas reserves. Major producing fields such as El Sharara, El Feel, Sarir, Messla, and Amal have long formed the backbone of Libya's petroleum industry and have generated the revenues upon which the state depends.

Yet Libya's strategic value does not derive solely from the existence of these resources. Equally important is the country's Mediterranean frontage, which enables hydrocarbons extracted from the desert interior to reach international markets. Offshore developments such as the Bouri Oil Field and the Bahr Essalam Gas Field, together with the Mellitah processing complex and the country's export terminals, connect Libya's Saharan reserves to Europe and the wider global economy. From the Libyan perspective, the Sahara and the Mediterranean are therefore inseparable components of a single national energy architecture. One provides the resources; the other provides access, revenue, and strategic leverage.

The African Union Perspective: Libya as a Pillar of Africa's Energy Geography

From the perspective of the African Union, Libya occupies a central position within the broader Saharan energy landscape. The Sahara is not merely a vast desert expanse but one of the world's most significant hydrocarbon provinces, extending across multiple North African and Sahelian states. Within this larger system, Libya's Murzuq and Sirte basins rank among the continent's most productive petroleum regions and contribute substantially to Africa's overall oil and gas output.

Libya's importance to Africa extends beyond production volumes. Its location at the northern edge of the continent provides one of Africa's most direct connections to European energy markets. The Mediterranean coastline transforms Libya into a strategic gateway through which African energy resources can be exported, attracting investment, generating foreign exchange, and strengthening the continent's role in global energy trade. For the African Union, Libya therefore represents both a major source of hydrocarbons and a critical bridge linking African resources to international demand centers.

The European Union Perspective: Proximity, Security, and Diversification

For the European Union, Libya's strategic importance derives primarily from geography. Few major hydrocarbon-producing states are located as close to Europe as Libya. The narrow Mediterranean crossing between North Africa and Southern Europe provides a natural advantage that reduces transportation distances, lowers shipping costs, and enhances supply flexibility.

European interest is particularly focused on Libya's Mediterranean-facing infrastructure. The Bahr Essalam Gas Field, the Bouri Offshore Oil Field, the Mellitah complex, and the coastal export terminals are viewed as critical assets because they facilitate the movement of energy directly into European markets. The Greenstream pipeline linking Libya to Italy further strengthens this relationship by providing a direct gas connection between North Africa and the European energy network.

From the European perspective, Libya forms part of a broader strategy of energy diversification. The country

offers an alternative source of oil and gas that can complement supplies from other producing regions. Consequently, the stability of Libya's desert production zones and the security of its Mediterranean export infrastructure are matters of considerable importance for European energy security and regional economic resilience.

The Saharan–Mediterranean Nexus

The true strategic significance of Libya lies in the interaction between its Saharan resource base and its Mediterranean access routes. Neither region can be fully understood in isolation. The Saharan basins provide the reserves, production capacity, and long-term economic potential that make Libya a major energy producer. The Mediterranean provides the maritime space, offshore fields, pipelines, ports, and export facilities that transform those resources into geopolitical influence and international trade.

This relationship creates a continuous energy corridor extending from the desert interior to European markets. Oil and gas extracted from the Murzuq and Sirte basins are transported northward through pipelines and processing facilities before entering Mediterranean shipping lanes or direct export networks. The result is a highly integrated system that links African resource wealth with European energy demand.

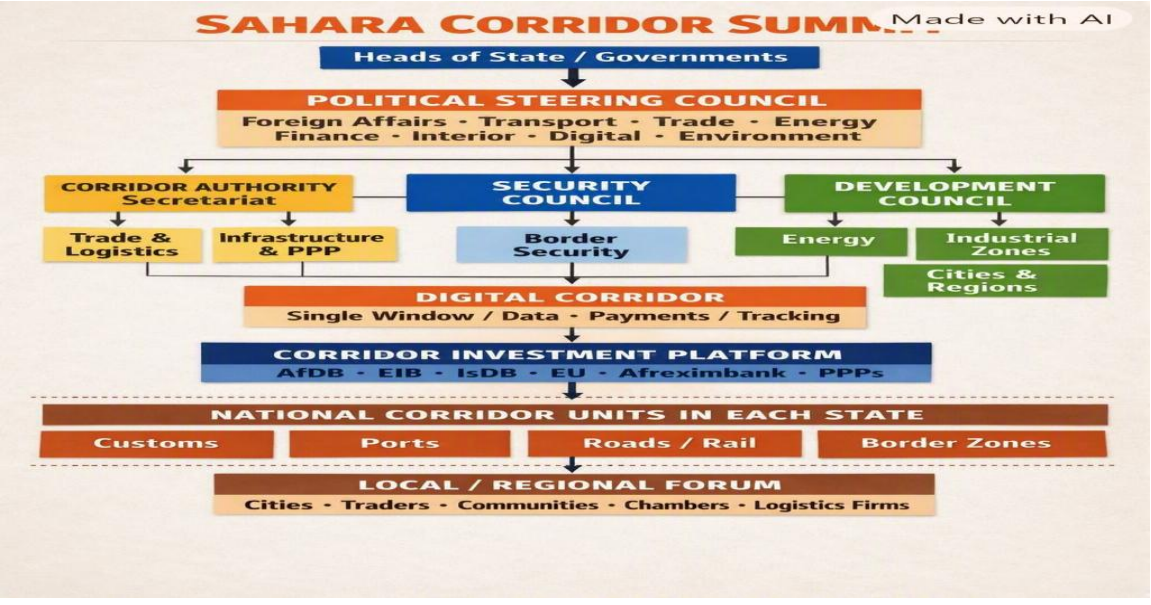
From a Libyan perspective, the Sahara and the Mediterranean constitute complementary pillars of national prosperity and sovereignty. From the perspective of the African Union, Libya is a cornerstone of Africa's hydrocarbon economy and a vital gateway between the continent and global markets. From the perspective of the European Union, Libya is a strategically located energy partner whose proximity and infrastructure contribute to regional energy security. Taken together, Libya's Saharan production zones and Mediterranean export corridors form one of the most significant energy systems in the wider Euro–Mediterranean and African geopolitical landscape.

A SAHARA CORRIDOR GOVERNANCE COMPACT

A Sahara Corridor Governance Compact should not be designed as another regional organisation. It should be a corridor-specific, treaty-based governance architecture that connects North Africa, the Sahel and the Gulf of Guinea around trade, logistics, energy, digital connectivity and security. This builds on the existing Trans-Saharan Road framework, which already envisages moving from a road corridor to a transport, logistics and ultimately economic corridor.

The key innovation would be to make Libya a northern Mediterranean gateway, rather than treating the Sahara only as an Algiers–Lagos axis.

Figure Proposed organigramme



The **Sahara Corridor Summit** organigramme embodies a grand architecture of continental coordination — a lattice of governance designed to transform geography into synergy. At its apex, the **Heads of State and Governments** stand as the symbolic custodians of vision, their collective authority lending legitimacy and momentum to the corridor's transnational ambition. This summit is not merely a meeting of leaders but a declaration that the Sahara, long perceived as a barrier, can become a bridge — a connective tissue of trade, energy, and digital integration.

Beneath this summit crown lies the **Political Steering Council**, the nerve center of policy orchestration. Composed of ministers from foreign affairs, transport, trade, energy, finance, interior, digital, and environment, it functions as the corridor's diplomatic and strategic compass. Its task is to harmonize national interests into a shared continental rhythm, ensuring that the corridor's arteries pulse with coordinated regulation and mutual trust.

From this council radiate three pillars — **Corridor Authority Secretariat**, **Security Council**, and **Development Council** — each representing a distinct dimension of governance. The Secretariat is the administrative backbone, translating political vision into operational frameworks. The Security Council safeguards the corridor's integrity, ensuring that movement and exchange occur within a zone of stability. The Development Council, meanwhile, embodies the creative impulse — the drive to build, innovate, and regenerate.

Within the **Corridor Authority**, specialized units handle trade, logistics, infrastructure, and public-private partnerships. These are the engineers of connectivity, tasked with transforming policy into pavement, and treaties into tangible routes. Their work ensures that the corridor is not an abstraction but a living network of roads, rails, and data lines — a choreography of movement across borders.

The **Security Council** anchors the corridor's resilience. Its focus on border security and transit integrity reflects the understanding that prosperity cannot flourish without protection. It is the sentinel of the Sahara, ensuring that the flow of goods and people remains lawful, safe, and predictable — a bulwark against instability and illicit trade.

The **Development Council** is the corridor's creative forge. It oversees energy systems, industrial zones, and urban-regional development, weaving together the threads of sustainability and growth. Its mandate is to ensure that the corridor does not merely connect economies but cultivates them — nurturing industrial ecosystems and empowering cities as nodes of innovation.

At the technological heart of this structure lies the **Digital Corridor**, a realm of data, payments, and tracking. It is the invisible infrastructure that binds the physical one — a single window through which trade, finance, and logistics converge. This digital layer transforms the corridor into a smart ecosystem, where transparency and efficiency replace bureaucracy and opacity.

Supporting this digital foundation is the **Corridor Investment Platform**, a consortium of financial institutions — AfDB, EIB, IsDB, EU, Afreximbank, and PPPs. It represents the financial bloodstream of the initiative, channeling capital into infrastructure, innovation, and integration. Through this platform, the corridor becomes not only a policy but a portfolio — an investable vision of continental transformation.

At the national level, **Corridor Units** in each state ensure that the grand design translates into local action. Customs, ports, roads, rail, and border zones form the operational grid through which the corridor's promise materializes. These units are the corridor's capillaries, carrying its lifeblood into the everyday realities of governance and commerce.

Finally, at the grassroots, the **Local and Regional Forum** embodies the democratic soul of the corridor. Cities, traders, communities, chambers, and logistics firms gather here to voice, negotiate, and co-create. It is the agora of the Sahara Corridor — where policy meets people, and where the dream of continental integration becomes a lived experience.

The political agreement

I would structure the system around six mutually reinforcing agreements, rather than one enormous treaty.

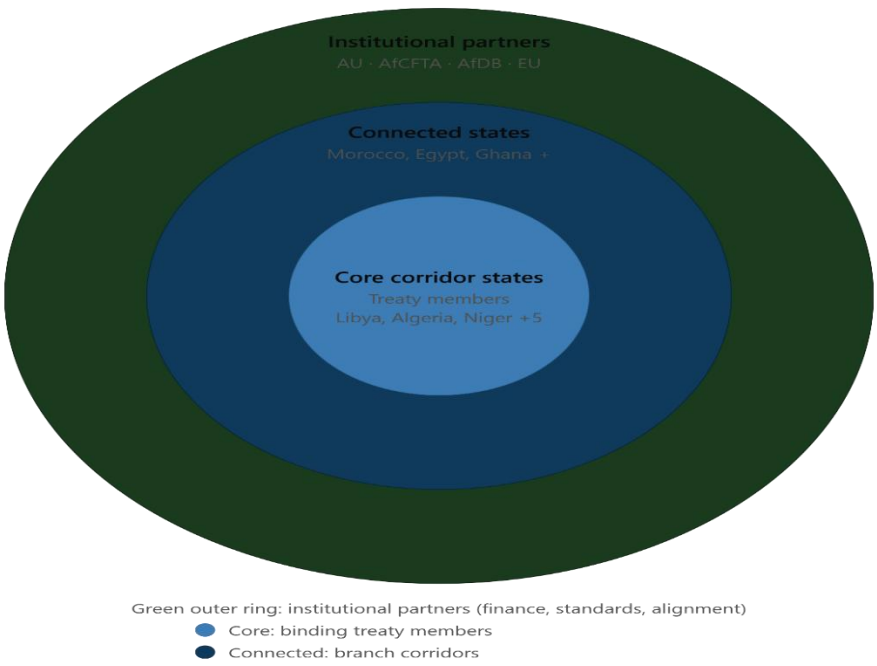
Instrument	Main purpose	Principal parties
Sahara Corridor Treaty	Establishes the corridor as a common economic and strategic space	Participating states
Corridor Management Agreement	Creates the supranational/technical Corridor Authority	Corridor states + AU
Transit & Customs Protocol	Common customs procedures, guarantees, electronic transit and one-stop borders	Customs authorities
Security & Border Protocol	Joint protection of roads, pipelines, fibre, ports and border crossings	Interior/Defence authorities
Investment & Infrastructure Protocol	Guarantees for PPPs, concessions, investment, land access and infrastructure standards	States + investors
Economic & Social Development Protocol	Industrial zones, local employment, pastoral mobility, border communities and environmental protection	States + regional/local authorities

The model has a useful African precedent. The Abidjan–Lagos arrangement combines a treaty, an intergovernmental agreement, an international project agreement, enabling legislation and rules of procedure, while its corridor authority has legal personality and financial autonomy. Its Board also combines public and private representation, which is particularly relevant for a Sahara corridor where logistics operators, ports, energy companies and traders are essential actors.

Membership should be concentric

Rather than forcing every country into identical commitments, I would create three circles.

FIGURE



The **three concentric circles** of the Sahara Corridor Summit form a geopolitical geometry of participation — a layered architecture that balances sovereignty, connectivity, and institutional partnership. Each circle defines a distinct mode of engagement, ensuring that the corridor's governance remains both inclusive and structured.

At the **core**, the **Corridor States** — Libya, Algeria, Niger, Chad, Tunisia, Mali, Nigeria, and Mauritania — constitute the treaty's full members. They are the custodians of the corridor's legal and operational framework, bound by shared obligations and rights. This inner circle is the corridor's engine room, where decisions are binding and coordination is continuous. Their cooperation transforms borders into bridges, creating a seamless trans-Saharan axis of trade and infrastructure.

Surrounding this nucleus is the **Connected States** layer — Morocco, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Ghana, and others. These countries participate through branch corridors and market access agreements, linking their economies to the core network. They represent the corridor's expansionary frontier, extending its influence westward to the Atlantic and eastward to the Nile. Their engagement is pragmatic: they benefit from connectivity without assuming full treaty obligations.

The outermost ring comprises the **Institutional Partners** — the African Union (AU), AfCFTA, AfDB, Afreximbank, EIB, EU, IsDB, and UN agencies. This circle provides the scaffolding of expertise, finance, and standards. It is the corridor's ecosystem of support, ensuring that the initiative aligns with continental frameworks and global best practices. These institutions transform ambition into feasibility, supplying the technical and financial oxygen that sustains the corridor's growth.

Together, these circles form a **triadic equilibrium**: the core ensures legitimacy, the connected layer ensures reach, and the institutional ring ensures sustainability. The geometry is not rigid but dynamic — a living system that adapts to political realities and economic opportunities. It mirrors the Sahara itself: vast, interconnected, and constantly shifting.

The **Core Corridor States** embody the principle of shared sovereignty. Their collaboration is not merely logistical but philosophical — a commitment to collective development across fragile ecologies and complex borders. They are the corridor's constitutional heart, where integration is both a political act and a moral statement.

The **Connected States** represent the corridor's pragmatic diplomacy. Their participation demonstrates that integration can be modular — that nations can engage at varying depths according to their capacities and interests. This flexibility makes the corridor resilient, capable of expanding without fracturing.

The **Institutional Partners** bring the corridor into the realm of global governance. Their presence ensures that the initiative is not isolated but embedded within the architecture of continental and international cooperation. They are the guarantors of credibility, translating regional ambition into global alignment.

In essence, the three circles form a **Saharan mandala of governance** — concentric yet interdependent, each layer reinforcing the other. The core provides direction, the middle provides diffusion, and the outer ring provides durability. It is a model of integration that respects diversity while pursuing unity.

This is important because the existing Trans-Saharan Road Corridor already cuts across several regional organisations—ECOWAS, CEN-SAD, the Arab Maghreb Union and others—which has historically made harmonisation difficult. The new institution should therefore sit above the fragmentation without trying to replace ECOWAS, AU, AfCFTA or Maghreb institutions.

The Corridor Authority

The most important organ would be a Sahara Corridor Authority (SCA) with a relatively small permanent secretariat.

Its functions should be deliberately practical:

corridor planning → infrastructure standards → customs harmonisation → logistics performance → investment packaging → digitalisation → dispute resolution → monitoring.

It should not become another political bureaucracy.

A Board of Governors would contain one ministerial representative from each core state, while an Executive Board would contain technical and private-sector members. A professional Director-General should be appointed competitively, with a single non-renewable or limited-renewal mandate.

The Authority should have legal personality and financial autonomy, following the more advanced Abidjan–Lagos model.

A separate Security Coordination Committee.

Security should not be subordinated to the transport authority.

The Sahara Corridor Security Council would coordinate:

border security, organised crime, trafficking, terrorism, convoy protection, intelligence exchange, critical infrastructure protection, migration management and emergency response.

But it should not become a new military alliance.

Its principle should be:

secure the corridor without securitising the entire corridor.

That distinction is crucial for the economic legitimacy of the project.

The economic architecture

The corridor should ultimately be governed as an economic ecosystem, not merely a road.

The Authority should therefore coordinate five interconnected networks:

Table

Network	Strategic objective
Transport	Road, rail, ports, dry ports and logistics hubs
Energy	Electricity, solar, gas and potentially hydrogen
Digital	Fibre, data centres, digital customs and payments
Trade	AfCFTA-compatible customs and transit regime
Industrial	Processing, assembly, agro-industry, mining and logistics zones

This corresponds closely to UNCTAD's recommendation that the Trans-Saharan Road evolve successively into a transport corridor, logistics corridor and economic corridor.[4]

The political bargain

The underlying political agreement should be extremely simple:

[4] https://unctad.org/publication/trans-saharan-road-corridor

North Africa obtains secure access to Sahelian and West African markets; Sahelian states obtain reliable access to Mediterranean ports; Libya becomes a Mediterranean–Sahara gateway; landlocked states obtain guaranteed transit; and European and African investors obtain a predictable regulatory environment.

This gives Libya a particularly important role. Instead of being treated principally as a security problem, Libya becomes one of the northern gateways of the Sahara economic system, connecting the interior through southern Libya to Mediterranean ports and potentially linking the corridor eastward toward Egypt and westward toward Tunisia and Algeria.

The institutional design should therefore include a Libya–Niger–Chad Development Axis as a dedicated branch rather than forcing everything through the Algiers–Lagos backbone. Historical African infrastructure planning has already envisaged Libya–Niger–Chad road and rail connections.

The EU/Global Gateway interface

For the EU, the optimal arrangement would not be an EU-controlled corridor. It should be an African-owned corridor with a Global Gateway investment window.

I would therefore add:

Sahara Corridor Investment Platform

with AfDB, Afreximbank, EIB, IsDB, EU/Global Gateway and private investors participating.

Its job would be to turn the political agreement into bankable packages: border posts, roads, rail, fibre, solar generation, logistics parks, dry ports, water infrastructure and industrial zones.

That would also make the Sahara corridor a possible EU–Africa strategic infrastructure platform, rather than simply another migration/security programme.

The strongest institutional formula is consequently:

Political Treaty → Corridor Authority → Security Council → Customs/Transit Regime → Investment Platform → National Corridor Units → Border/Local Economic Zones.

The precedent from Abidjan–Lagos is particularly valuable because it demonstrates that a corridor can be treated legally as one integrated infrastructure system rather than six separate national projects.

ELEMENTS OF POLITICAL TREATY

The Sahara Corridor Political Treaty should be the constitutional foundation of the entire corridor architecture. It should not merely declare political support for infrastructure development; it should establish a durable political compact among the participating states, define their reciprocal obligations, protect the corridor from political disruption and provide the legal basis for its institutions.

Its first element should be a Declaration of Common Strategic Interest, recognising the Sahara Corridor as a shared space of peace, connectivity, commerce, energy and development linking the Mediterranean, the Sahel and West Africa. The parties would commit themselves to treating the continuity of the corridor as a collective strategic interest.

The Treaty should establish a principle of sovereign equality and territorial integrity. Participation in the corridor would not imply any transfer of sovereignty over territory or natural resources. At the same time, states would accept that the exercise of sovereignty must be compatible with their obligations to maintain the uninterrupted functioning of agreed international corridors.

A central provision should therefore guarantee freedom and continuity of transit. Goods, vehicles, energy, data and authorised persons should be able to move according to agreed rules, with states undertaking not to impose arbitrary closures, discriminatory restrictions or politically motivated obstruction.

The Treaty should create a non-discrimination principle covering transit, customs, logistics services, infrastructure access and investment. Nationality should not become an instrument for excluding legitimate commercial activity along the corridor.

A mutual security commitment should require the parties to protect the corridor against terrorism, organised crime, trafficking, sabotage and attacks on critical infrastructure. Security cooperation should remain compatible with international law and human rights, preventing the economic corridor from becoming an instrument of uncontrolled militarisation.

The Treaty should establish a joint political crisis mechanism. If a conflict, coup, border closure or major security incident threatens the corridor, the Political Steering Council should convene automatically and seek mediation, temporary arrangements and humanitarian and commercial continuity. This would give the corridor a degree of resilience against national political crises.

There should also be a non-interference and peaceful-settlement clause. Disputes concerning the Treaty would first be addressed through consultation, then mediation and, where necessary, arbitration or another agreed judicial mechanism. The purpose would be to prevent bilateral disputes from paralysing the entire corridor.

The Treaty should establish the Sahara Corridor Authority as a permanent institution with clearly delegated functions. Its authority should extend to corridor standards, technical coordination, project preparation, data, performance monitoring and implementation of common decisions, but not to matters remaining within national sovereignty.

A particularly important provision should establish binding common standards for customs, border procedures, infrastructure, digital documentation, vehicle standards, logistics and emergency response. The objective would be to create one operational corridor even though it crosses multiple jurisdictions.

The Treaty should contain a transparency and anti-corruption regime, requiring open procurement, publication of major concessions, conflict-of-interest rules, independent auditing and transparent financing. Without this, infrastructure investment could reproduce the rent-seeking structures that have historically weakened trans-Saharan connectivity.

A Corridor Investment Guarantee should protect agreed infrastructure and concessions against arbitrary expropriation, discriminatory treatment and unilateral cancellation, while preserving the legitimate regulatory powers of states. This would be essential for attracting European, African and international capital.

The Treaty should recognise the importance of border communities and pastoral mobility. Traditional trans-Saharan economic and social networks should not be treated merely as security problems. Special protocols should regulate pastoral movement, local commerce, markets, water access and community crossings.

There should be an explicit development and distribution principle: corridor investment must generate benefits along the route rather than concentrating value exclusively in ports and major cities. Logistics centres, industrial zones, energy projects and employment should therefore be distributed across participating territories.

The Treaty should establish a Sahara Corridor Fund, financed through member contributions, international financial institutions, development partners, user charges and investment revenues. This would provide a permanent financial base for maintenance and smaller projects that might otherwise remain commercially unattractive.

The European Union should be recognised as a strategic external partner, rather than as a governing party unl-

ess the African states themselves choose otherwise. Global Gateway could provide financing, technical standards, digital systems, energy infrastructure and project preparation while respecting African ownership of the institutional architecture.

Finally, the Treaty should contain a long-term commitment clause. Governments change; the corridor should not. Withdrawal should require substantial notice, and essential transit, investment and contractual obligations should survive political changes. The Treaty should therefore be designed to outlive individual governments and become a piece of regional political infrastructure in its own right.

The underlying constitutional principle could be expressed in one sentence:

The parties remain sovereign over their territories, but they accept a shared responsibility for the continuity, security and prosperity of the corridor that connects them.

That principle would turn the Sahara Corridor from an infrastructure project into a political **compact linking North Africa, the Sahel and West Africa around a common geography of movement, production and strategic interdependence.**

SUMMARY

The Sahara Corridor should be conceived not as a road, nor merely as a collection of infrastructure projects, but as a political and economic architecture capable of giving institutional form to a geography that has existed for centuries. Its purpose would be to connect the Mediterranean, the Sahara, the Sahel and West Africa through a single system of trade, transport, energy, digital connectivity, investment and security.

At its summit would stand a Sahara Corridor Council composed of the participating heads of state and government. Beneath it, a Political Steering Council would translate the strategic mandate into common decisions on transport, trade, customs, energy, finance, security and digital connectivity. The executive centre of the system would be a permanent Sahara Corridor Authority, endowed with legal personality, technical capacity and financial autonomy. Its task would not be to govern the participating states, but to govern the corridor itself: its standards, infrastructure, logistics, customs interfaces, investment projects and performance.

Security would have its own institutional pillar. A Sahara Security and Border Council would coordinate intelligence, border management, protection of transport routes and critical infrastructure, organised-crime prevention and emergency response. The objective should be to secure movement rather than militarise the entire economic space.

An Economic and Development Council would complete the architecture by linking transport to energy, industrial development, digital networks, agricultural production and the emergence of new cities and logistics centres. The corridor would thus become an economic system rather than a linear road across the desert.

At its financial core should stand a Sahara Corridor Investment Platform, bringing together African development institutions, European institutions, sovereign investors and private capital. The European Union and Global Gateway should participate as strategic investors and partners, while the political ownership remains African. The decisive principle should be that European capital helps build African connectivity rather than substituting for African political agency.

The participating states should establish national corridor units responsible for translating the common framework into roads, railways, ports, dry ports, customs posts, energy infrastructure, fibre networks and industrial zones. At the opposite end of the hierarchy, a Local and Regional Forum should give cities, border communities, traders, chambers of commerce, logistics companies and local authorities a permanent voice in the corridor's development.

The political settlement should therefore be organised around a single Sahara Corridor Treaty, complemented by protocols on transit and customs, security and borders, infrastructure and investment, digital connectivity,

energy, and social and environmental development. The treaty should establish common rules while allowing different speeds of integration.

Its strategic geography should be concentric rather than rigid. The core would comprise the states directly traversed by the principal corridor, while connected states could join through secondary branches and institutional partners could participate through investment, financing and technical arrangements. This would prevent the corridor from becoming hostage to the institutional fragmentation of existing African organisations.

Libya should occupy a particularly important position in this architecture. Its role would not be reduced to that of a southern European security frontier. Libya could become the Mediterranean gateway of the Sahara, connecting the interior through Niger and Chad towards the Libyan coast while simultaneously linking eastward to Egypt and westward to Tunisia and Algeria. In this conception, Libya's stabilisation becomes economically consequential for the entire corridor.

The central political bargain is therefore straightforward: the Mediterranean obtains deeper access to African markets; the Sahel obtains dependable access to Mediterranean ports; landlocked countries obtain guaranteed transit; African producers obtain larger markets; and international investors obtain a predictable institutional framework.

The Sahara Corridor would consequently represent something larger than infrastructure. It would be an attempt to transform the Sahara from a perceived barrier into a connective political geography. Its success would depend less on the kilometres of road constructed than on whether states accept the principle that the corridor itself constitutes a common strategic interest, requiring common rules, common institutions and a permanent political commitment.

CONCLUSIONS

A layered and strengthened governance setup offers a more realistic and effective way forward for Libya because it acknowledges the country’s deep fragmentation, diverse local power structures, and lack of institutional capacity. Rather than imposing a top-down model, a layered approach allows for the gradual rebuilding of trust, authority, and legitimacy across national, regional, and local levels. It enables inclusive participation, balances power among competing actors, and creates mechanisms for accountability and conflict resolution. By distributing responsibilities across multiple layers—central institutions, municipal authorities, tribal leaders, and civil society—it promotes resilience, adaptability, and local ownership, all of which are essential for sustainable peace and state-building in Libya’s complex socio-political context.

The opportunity costs of another failure in Libya are profound—both for Libyans and for the wider regional and international community.

As demonstrated by the behind the scenes diplomacy at the broaching of a Consultative Tribal Council – 20% of the East’s Officers corpse hails from the Obeidat tribe, and the indications Haftar could stage a coup d’Etat, the form of governance is a hotly contested issue in Libya, calling for diplomatic tact and power-sharing and a realistic way forward to prevent the division of Libya. Since it is the US that has insisted on letting the tribes fighting it out, and they have reengaged at the signal of peace and reconcialiton between Turkey and Greece, all eyes are now on the US to carry through on military get togetherness between East- West.

Given the coffers are quasi-empty in the central bank, and a split exist between the elderly and younger branch of the tribal element, it is imperative that the al-Gueddefas abuse of the system are corrected and the situation sufficiently stablised to keep the country together, something that implies to provide security, strengthen governance and address issues pertinent to the shortcomings of the 2011-agenda of national transitional council handover to Congress, and to make sure this time around the Congress addresses the most burning issues, something Syria managed to do, without even having deliberated publicly how to proceed on constitutional assembly prior to bringing Kurdistan back into the fold.

For Libya itself, another breakdown would prolong institutional paralysis, deepen economic collapse, and entrench the fragmentation of national sovereignty. The failure to restore unified governance would condemn millions to continued insecurity, poor public services, and economic stagnation, while further alienating a rising generation with no memory of stability or functioning statehood. Libya's vast oil wealth, which could fund reconstruction and development, would remain contested or underexploited, depriving the population of vital resources.

Regionally, another failure would fuel instability across North Africa and the Sahel, exacerbating cross-border arms flows, smuggling, terrorism, and irregular migration. Neighboring states—already under strain—would face heightened security threats and refugee pressures, potentially destabilizing fragile border areas.

For Europe and the wider international community, the failure to stabilize Libya undermines credibility in crisis management and multilateral diplomacy. It would prolong the migration crisis in the Central Mediterranean, increase security risks on Europe's southern flank, and leave a vacuum that could be exploited by malign actors, including extremist networks or rival global powers.

In essence, the opportunity cost of failure is not just the absence of peace, but the compounding of human suffering, regional disorder, and strategic loss—when, instead, Libya could be a pillar of stability, a source of energy security, and a partner in African and Mediterranean cooperation.

Sequence will be key. So long as the US is engaged, the moment most be sized on to move forward on establishing shura as constitutional principle as well as security and adopting a road-map to realise progress, whereas power sharing could be construed as an interim measure resulting from the National Congress that does seem to have seated and discussed anything in substance. You don't solve the problems by not talking about them. Next, a constitutional assembly must be convened by the three major parts of Libya, who have traditionally fought it out between themselves: Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripolitania.

So much more the EU will find it hard to accept a corrupt strong man rule, given its interests in border security and the need to up its game in Libya balanced by the situation across the pond , the potential for modernization in Libya given its energy riches and concerns about counter-terrorism and Russian influence, it is time to move forward in haste. The EIU's objectives are to prevent spill-over to the Eastern Mediterranean, maximise success for UNSMIL and prepare the ground for a unity government and its interests are to keep the energy flowing, the migrants out and the islamists down.

Given the council of elders and Notables are functioning as social glue, albeit increasingly challenged by the youth, we would envisaging a wider system of application of the principle of shura. It will become extremely important that the Constitutional Assembly has the legal advice they need.

While this approach offers no guarantee of success, it does provide a foundation grounded in realism, adaptation, and sincerity of effort. At the very least, we can assert—with a clear conscience—that we acted in good faith, sought to learn from past missteps, and genuinely attempted to do better. In a context as complex and fraught as Libya's, the willingness to revise approaches, engage humbly, and prioritize long-term stability over short-term optics is, in itself, a meaningful step toward responsible international engagement.

The central fact of Libya's post-2011 trajectory is that the international intervention achieved its immediate military objective—the removal of Muammar Gaddafi—but failed to establish the political and security conditions necessary for a viable post-conflict state. NATO's intervention ended in October 2011, and international military involvement was rapidly wound down, while Libya was left with fragmented armed groups, weak national institutions and no monopoly of force. (Belfer Center) The subsequent proliferation of weapons and armed factions, institutional division and repeated civil conflict were not inevitable consequences of Gaddafi's fall, but they were greatly amplified by the absence of a credible post-war state-building strategy.

The deepest Western failure was therefore not simply intervention, but intervention without ownership of the aftermath. The campaign treated the destruction of the old political order as the central problem and the creation of a functioning replacement as a secondary matter. Western governments were willing to use

considerable military power to defeat Gaddafi but unwilling to commit comparable political, economic and security resources to rebuilding Libya afterwards. The result was a profound mismatch between the scale of external intervention and the scale of external responsibility assumed afterwards. Critics have consequently described Libya as a case of tactical success followed by strategic failure. (Ministerio de Defensa).

This is where the phrase “the West abandoned Libya” is justified, although it should not obscure Libyan agency. Libya's subsequent fragmentation also reflected domestic political rivalries, the weakness of national institutions, competition over oil and state resources, regional divisions and the decisions of Libyan armed and political actors. Foreign powers subsequently aggravated those divisions by supporting competing factions. Libya today remains divided between rival political authorities and armed networks, demonstrating that the underlying problem was never resolved.

The Western approach also created a damaging precedent: international actors repeatedly treated Libya's political crisis as a succession of discrete mediation problems rather than as a problem of state formation. Elections, constitutional arrangements and government formation were pursued without first resolving the distribution of coercive power and the incentives of political elites to preserve institutional division. Elections therefore became another arena of competition rather than a mechanism for resolving it.

UNSMIL deserves a more nuanced judgment. Its role has been indispensable in preventing complete diplomatic collapse, facilitating ceasefires and political dialogue, supporting elections and bringing Libyan actors together. Its more recent Structured Dialogue is also more inclusive than some earlier processes, bringing diverse Libyan voices into discussions on governance, economics, security and reconciliation. In June 2026, it produced more than 525 recommendations intended to support elections, institutional unification and the treatment of longer-term conflict drivers.

But its fundamental limitation is that UNSMIL is primarily a mediator operating in a political system whose principal actors often benefit from the status quo. It can convene, recommend and facilitate; it cannot by itself create political incentives for elites to surrender institutional privileges, disarm, accept electoral defeat or unify competing centres of power.

This explains the recurring pattern: dialogue → agreement in principle → institutional bargaining → delay → renewed dialogue. The 2021 elections collapsed over disputes concerning the electoral framework and candidate eligibility, and the country subsequently remained divided. (Reuters) Even the current roadmap—which focuses on an electoral framework, institutional unification and structured dialogue—faces the same underlying problem: the actors expected to implement the transition are frequently the actors who benefit from its continuation.

The Structured Dialogue is therefore an important achievement in inclusion and diagnosis, but its success should not be confused with implementation. More than 525 recommendations are impressive as a record of consultation; they are not, by themselves, a political settlement. Indeed, the sheer number of recommendations risks reproducing Libya's longstanding problem of producing increasingly sophisticated frameworks without sufficient mechanisms for enforcement.

The danger is that UNSMIL is attempting to solve a power problem with a process solution.

The core obstacle is not that Libyans lack ideas about governance, elections or constitutional design. Libya has had years of conferences, agreements, roadmaps, electoral proposals and constitutional initiatives. The problem is that powerful actors have incentives to prevent a settlement that could threaten their positions.

A process centred principally on dialogue therefore risks becoming part of the equilibrium it is trying to change. Every new consultation can provide legitimacy to actors who have little incentive to implement its conclusions. The current process is especially vulnerable if elections are treated as the destination rather than as the culmination of prior institutional and security reforms.

There is also a danger of constitutionalising unresolved conflicts. If the constitutional process becomes another arena in which regional, institutional and elite interests compete for guarantees, the constitution may reproduce the fragmentation it is supposed to overcome. Libya first needs a minimum level of functional governance and political trust; the constitution should consolidate that settlement rather than be expected to manufacture it from nothing.

The more promising alternative is therefore to move from “dialogue first, implementation later” toward conditional, enforceable political sequencing: institutional unification, transparent transitional governance, municipal empowerment, security-sector arrangements, economic accountability and pluralist policymaking should create the conditions in which elections can actually settle political authority.

The fundamental lesson from 2011 is consequently not that Libya should have been left alone, nor that international involvement is inherently misguided. It is that external power without long-term political responsibility can destroy an authoritarian equilibrium without creating a democratic one. The West bears substantial responsibility for that strategic failure. UNSMIL has subsequently done important work mitigating the consequences, but its consensus-oriented model is unlikely by itself to overcome the entrenched interests that sustain Libya's fragmentation.

The risk now is not another spectacular failure. It is something more subtle: a permanently managed transition in which dialogue continues, recommendations multiply, elections remain perpetually conditional, and the institutions benefiting from fragmentation become increasingly entrenched. That is the outcome the next phase of international engagement must be designed specifically to prevent.

We discern the need for (1) A Joint security committee between Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan (2) Acceptance of Shura towards a Tribal Consultative Council undergirded by a stable tribal coalition drawn from the three core areas (3) A National compact on security towards a US-led road-map on military unification (4) power sharing arrangements (5) International Support Group (6) Constitutional assembly.

During Libya’s transition toward a constitutional assembly, the priority should be to build a governance system that is legitimate, inclusive and capable of delivering services without pre-empting the country’s permanent constitutional settlement. Transitional authorities should therefore act as stewards of the state rather than authors of the final political order.

A short transitional governance compact could establish basic rules: unified state institutions, transparent public decisions and spending, merit-based appointments, civilian oversight of security institutions, protection of civic freedoms, and clear limits and sunset clauses for transitional powers. These rules would reduce discretionary governance while building confidence among Libya’s regions and political actors.

Policymaking should become more pluralist through a formal consultation system. Major legislation and policies should be published for consultation before adoption, with input from municipalities, political parties, civil society, business and professional associations, universities, women and youth organizations, cultural communities and other affected groups. Government should explain publicly how significant recommendations were considered, making participation consequential rather than symbolic.

Municipalities should play a larger role. Giving local authorities clearer responsibilities and predictable resources for services, infrastructure and local development would reduce the concentration of political competition at the national level. Decentralization should be accompanied by national standards, financial oversight and administrative capacity-building so that it strengthens the state rather than fragments it.

A temporary social and economic consultative body could provide another channel for organized interests to influence policy without creating a second legislature. Its role would be advisory, with government required to respond publicly to its recommendations. Citizen assemblies and deliberative forums could complement this system by giving ordinary citizens, rather than only political elites, an opportunity to shape major policies.

Transparency should become a core principle of transitional governance. Public institutions should publish budgets, procurement decisions, major appointments, legislation and policy assessments. A basic right-to-information framework would allow journalists, civil society and citizens to scrutinize government decisions and reduce opportunities for patronage and corruption.

The legislature should also have stronger oversight powers, particularly through committees able to question ministers, examine public spending, hold hearings and review implementation. Independent audit and judicial institutions should provide additional checks, while avoiding excessive institutional vetoes that could paralyze the transition.

The EU is by far the biggest trading partner of the European Union. Libya's participation in the Agadir Agreement could contribute to its progress towards full WTO membership by promoting trade liberalisation, strengthening customs and regulatory institutions, harmonising trade rules with regional partners, and providing practical experience in implementing international trade commitments. Although participation in the Agadir Agreement would not automatically lead to WTO membership, it could complement and facilitate Libya's ongoing WTO accession process.

Finally, pluralism requires a functioning political and civic environment. Freedom of association, peaceful assembly, independent media, access to information and political participation should be protected throughout the transition. Political representation should remain separate from coercive power: armed groups should not acquire formal political vetoes simply through their capacity to use force.

The overall objective should be managed pluralism: broad participation and meaningful consultation combined with clear decision-making authority. Libya should not wait for the constitution to establish these practices. The transitional period itself should demonstrate how a more inclusive, transparent and accountable Libyan state can function, creating institutional habits and public trust that can then inform the constitutional settlement.

Perspective

Perspective: Ending Permanent Transitionalism in Libya

The central challenge for Libya is no longer to manage another political transition, but to create the conditions under which transitional politics can finally end. The analytical starting point should therefore be a shift from transition management to state consolidation. Libya's fragmentation should not be conceptualised as a stable alternative form of sovereignty, but as an incomplete process of state formation that requires political resolution. The first condition is a political settlement in which the principal Libyan power centres accept that political competition must take place within a single national constitutional order. Such a settlement must establish in advance that electoral outcomes are binding and that defeated actors will transfer authority peacefully. Elections should consequently constitute the mechanism through which legitimate authority is constituted, rather than another stage in an indefinite sequence of interim arrangements. A sufficiently clear constitutional framework is necessary to determine the distribution of executive, legislative and judicial authority and to provide predictable rules for political succession. The objective need not be constitutional perfection, but a constitutional settlement capable of establishing the basic architecture of a functioning state.

Institutional unification must then translate this political settlement into a single governmental structure. Libya requires one national government, one administrative hierarchy, one fiscal system and ultimately one chain of public accountability. Particular attention should be given to the Central Bank, the National Oil Corporation, audit institutions, ministries and public expenditure, since institutional fragmentation is inseparable from competing control over national resources. The security sector represents the most difficult dimension of consolidation because autonomous armed organisations possess political as well as coercive power.Their integration must therefore be understood as a process of transforming privately controlled coercive capacity into nationally regulated public authority.

This requires credible pathways into unified national security institutions alongside civilian employment, education and economic opportunities for former combatants. At the same time, autonomous chains of command, detention systems, checkpoints and armed economic enterprises must progressively disappear. Economic reform is equally fundamental because access to oil revenues, public employment, subsidies and foreign exchange provides powerful incentives for maintaining fragmented authority. Oil wealth should consequently be transformed from an object of political competition into the financial foundation of a transparent national fiscal settlement.

A unified budget, accountable expenditure, rationalised subsidies and strengthened public financial management are essential to this transformation. State consolidation should nevertheless not imply excessive centralisation, since empowered municipalities can provide legitimate and effective local governance within a unified sovereign framework. The appropriate model is therefore national sovereignty combined with meaningful decentralised administration and fiscal responsibility. International actors must also reconsider their role, moving from the management of competing authorities towards support for the consolidation of nationally legitimate institutions.

The United Nations, European Union, African Union and relevant regional powers should establish a common principle against the international legitimisation or permanent reproduction of parallel political structures. External security assistance, financial support and diplomatic recognition should increasingly be conditioned upon measurable progress towards institutional unification. The ultimate objective of international engagement should be to make international political management progressively unnecessary. Yet institutional consolidation will remain fragile unless the national state acquires legitimacy through tangible improvements in citizens' everyday lives.

Electricity, infrastructure, healthcare, education, banking, municipal services and economic opportunity must therefore become central components of the post-transition settlement. The emerging social contract must demonstrate that national statehood produces greater security, predictability and welfare than fragmented political authority.The decisive question is consequently not whether Libya can sustain another transitional arrangement, but whether the incentives supporting fragmentation can be systematically dismantled. This requires simultaneously addressing the political, institutional, security, economic and international sources of fragmented authority rather than treating them as separate policy problems.The ultimate research and policy objective should therefore be to identify the conditions under which Libya can move from externally managed transition to self-sustaining constitutional statehood, thereby bringing the country's prolonged transitional era to a definitive political end, comparable to the essence of the remit of UNSMIL.

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APPENDIX 1

National Development Plan for Libya

Proposed Architecture for a National Development Plan for Libya

National Development Plan as the National Strategic-Management Framework

The National Development Plan should serve as Libya’s central framework for translating the country’s long-term national vision into concrete development priorities, policies, programmes and investments. It should connect political leadership with economic planning, public budgeting, investment decisions and institutional responsibilities. Rather than functioning as a catalogue of projects, the Plan should become a mechanism for

managing national transformation and achieving measurable development outcomes. It should provide a common framework within which government institutions, municipalities, the private sector and development partners operate. The Plan should also provide continuity across political and budgetary cycles while allowing priorities to be reviewed as national circumstances change.

National Vision and Development Ambition

The Plan should begin with a clear national vision describing the Libya that the country seeks to build over the long term. This vision should establish the desired economic, social, institutional, environmental and territorial characteristics of the country. It should provide a shared direction for government, citizens, businesses and development partners and create a basis for prioritizing scarce national resources. The vision should be supported by a limited number of measurable national outcomes rather than a large number of disconnected objectives. It should also establish the principles of inclusion, sustainability, regional equity, economic diversification and institutional effectiveness.

Strategic Priorities

The National Development Plan should translate the national vision into a limited set of strategic priorities that represent the most important transformations required by Libya. These priorities should focus on issues such as economic diversification, human capital, infrastructure, institutional development, energy and water security, private-sector development and national cohesion. Strategic priorities should be selected on the basis of their potential contribution to national development rather than the interests of individual institutions. Each priority should have clearly defined outcomes, responsible institutions, indicative financing requirements and implementation horizons. This approach would allow national leadership to focus attention and resources on the areas with the greatest development impact.

Strategic Management Framework

The strategic-management framework should provide the mechanism through which national priorities are converted into policies, programmes and investments. It should establish the relationship between the long-term vision, medium-term development objectives and annual government actions. The framework should also identify dependencies between sectors, allowing government to understand how investments in infrastructure, education, energy, water, finance and institutions interact. Strategic management should include scenario planning so that Libya can respond to changes in oil prices, population, climate, technology and regional conditions. The framework should ultimately create a continuous cycle of planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and strategic adjustment.

Development Pillars

The Plan should organize national development around a coherent set of development pillars that reflect the interconnected nature of Libya's economic and social transformation. These pillars could include people and human capital, economic transformation, infrastructure and territorial development, energy and natural resources, governance and state capacity, peace and national cohesion, and environmental sustainability. Each pillar should contain sector strategies, national programmes and measurable outcomes. The pillars should not operate independently but should be linked through cross-cutting national priorities. Their purpose should be to create a common structure for coordinating government action and allocating development resources.

Human Capital and Social Development

Human capital should be treated as a central investment in Libya's long-term development rather than simply as a social expenditure. The Plan should address education, healthcare, vocational training, employment, youth development, women's participation and social protection as interconnected components of human development. Particular attention should be given to improving the quality and relevance of education and skills in relation to future labour-market requirements. Healthcare systems should be strengthened alongside

preventive health, primary care and medical workforce development. The ultimate objective should be to create a healthier, more skilled and productive population capable of supporting economic transformation.

Economic Transformation and Diversification

Economic diversification should be one of the central strategic objectives of the Plan, given Libya's dependence on hydrocarbons. The Plan should establish pathways for developing agriculture, manufacturing, tourism, logistics, services, technology, fisheries and other productive sectors. Oil and gas should remain strategically important while being increasingly connected to downstream industries, investment and broader economic development. Private-sector development should be supported through improved regulation, access to finance, infrastructure and investment facilitation. The objective should be to create a more productive, diversified and employment-generating economy that is less vulnerable to fluctuations in hydrocarbon revenues.

Infrastructure and Territorial Development

Infrastructure should be managed as an integrated national system rather than as a collection of individual construction projects. The Plan should establish priorities for transport, electricity, water, telecommunications, housing, logistics and municipal infrastructure based on national economic and social needs. Infrastructure investment should also support regional development by improving connectivity between cities, economic centres and underserved areas. Greater emphasis should be placed on rehabilitation, maintenance and lifecycle costs in addition to new construction. Infrastructure decisions should therefore be evaluated according to their contribution to economic productivity, public services, regional integration and long-term sustainability.

Energy, Water and Natural Resources

Energy and water security should constitute a strategic foundation of Libya's development model. The Plan should address the modernization of the electricity system, sustainable management of oil and gas resources, renewable energy development and improvements in energy efficiency. Water security should be addressed through desalination, groundwater management, improved distribution networks, irrigation efficiency, wastewater treatment and water reuse. Natural resources should be managed according to long-term national interests rather than short-term extraction objectives. The overall approach should strengthen resource security while preparing Libya for climate change and the global transition toward lower-carbon economies.

Governance and Institutional Development

Institutional reform should be treated as an essential condition for successful development rather than as a separate administrative programme. The Plan should clarify institutional mandates, improve coordination between national and local authorities and strengthen the capacity of public institutions to design and implement policies. Public administration reform should be linked to improvements in budgeting, procurement, data systems, digital government and public-service delivery. Greater transparency and accountability should be built into the management of public resources and development projects. The objective should be to create capable institutions that can consistently convert national strategies and financial resources into effective public outcomes.

Peace, Stability and National Cohesion

Development planning in Libya must recognize that sustainable economic and social development depends on national stability and institutional cohesion. The Plan should therefore incorporate national reconciliation, reconstruction, social cohesion and the strengthening of national institutions into the development framework. Development investments should be designed in a conflict-sensitive manner and should contribute to reducing regional and social inequalities. Reconstruction should focus not only on physical infrastructure but also on restoring services, livelihoods and institutional capacity. Development should ultimately become an instrument for strengthening national cohesion and creating shared economic opportunities.

Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience

Environmental sustainability should be integrated into economic and infrastructure decisions rather than treated as a separate environmental agenda. The Plan should address desertification, water scarcity, coastal degradation, biodiversity, waste management, pollution and climate adaptation. Major infrastructure and investment projects should incorporate environmental and climate-risk assessments. Libya should also identify opportunities for developing green industries, renewable energy and climate-resilient agriculture. The objective should be to ensure that development today does not create environmental and economic costs that undermine future generations.

Planning, Budgeting and Financing

Integration of Development Planning and the National Budget

A fundamental principle of the Plan should be that national development priorities and public expenditure are managed through an integrated planning and budgeting system. The National Development Plan should determine the broad priorities for public investment, while medium-term expenditure planning should translate these priorities into realistic financial allocations. Annual budgets should then provide the resources required to implement agreed programmes and projects. This would reduce the disconnect between strategic plans and actual government expenditure. It would also allow policymakers to assess whether proposed development ambitions are financially achievable.

Medium-Term Development and Expenditure Framework

Libya should establish a medium-term framework connecting the long-term National Development Plan with annual government budgets. This framework would provide indicative expenditure ceilings and investment priorities over several years rather than treating each budget as an isolated exercise. Ministries would prepare programmes within these financial limits and demonstrate how proposed spending contributes to national outcomes. The framework should also incorporate future operating and maintenance costs associated with new investments. This would strengthen fiscal discipline while allowing government to make credible multi-year commitments to major development programmes.

National Development Financing Framework

The Plan should include a dedicated financing framework that identifies the resources required to achieve national development objectives and the sources from which those resources can be mobilized. Domestic public revenues, particularly hydrocarbons and non-oil revenues, should form an important foundation while being complemented by private investment and development finance. The framework should distinguish between recurrent expenditure, public investment and financing for commercially viable projects. It should also identify opportunities for public-private partnerships, blended finance and international development financing. Most importantly, financing decisions should be based on national priorities and development impact rather than the availability of individual funding sources.

Management of Hydrocarbon Revenues

Because oil and gas revenues will remain important to Libya’s fiscal position, the Plan should establish a strategic framework for converting hydrocarbon wealth into sustainable national development. Hydrocarbon revenues should support productive investment in infrastructure, human capital and economic diversification rather than creating excessive dependence on recurrent expenditure. Fiscal planning should account for fluctuations in international oil prices and production levels. Stronger mechanisms should also be established for transparency, stabilization and long-term management of resource revenues. The objective should be to transform temporary resource wealth into durable national assets and productive capacity.

Public Investment Management

A national public investment management system should be established to ensure that major government investments are strategically justified, financially sustainable and properly prepared before receiving funding. Projects should be assessed according to strategic alignment, economic value, social impact, environmental impact, financial requirements and implementation readiness. A national project pipeline should distinguish between projects under preparation, projects ready for investment and projects under implementation. Funding should be prioritized toward projects with the strongest development contribution rather than simply those with the greatest political visibility. This would improve the quality and efficiency of public investment.

Governance and Delivery Architecture

National Development Council

A high-level National Development Council could provide overall strategic direction for the implementation of the National Development Plan. It would bring together the key national institutions responsible for planning, finance, economic policy, sector development and regional development. Its principal function would be to approve national priorities, resolve cross-government policy issues and ensure that major development decisions remain aligned with the national strategy. It should not become an operational bureaucracy but should provide strategic leadership and decision-making. Its authority should be clearly defined within the national governance framework.

National Planning Authority

The national planning institution should act as the technical owner and custodian of the National Development Plan. It should be responsible for strategic analysis, development planning, coordination of sector strategies, investment prioritization, national indicators and monitoring of development outcomes. It should maintain the national development evidence base and support government institutions in translating strategic objectives into programmes. It should also lead periodic reviews of the Plan and recommend adjustments when circumstances change. Its role should therefore evolve from traditional planning toward a modern strategic-management function.

Ministry of Finance

The Ministry of Finance should ensure that the National Development Plan is financially credible and fully integrated with fiscal policy and the national budget. It should work with the planning institution to establish medium-term expenditure ceilings and assess the affordability of national programmes. The Ministry should also oversee public investment financing, fiscal sustainability, public procurement and expenditure management. Development priorities should therefore be reflected in actual budget allocations rather than remaining policy commitments without funding. Close institutional coordination between planning and finance would be essential to achieving this integration.

Sector Ministries

Sector ministries should be responsible for converting national strategic priorities into sector programmes and deliverable actions. Each ministry should develop a sector implementation framework showing objectives, programmes, projects, budgets, responsibilities, milestones and performance indicators. Ministries should be held accountable for outcomes rather than simply the amount of money spent. They should also coordinate with other ministries where programmes have cross-sector implications. This would create clearer accountability for implementation while maintaining alignment with the national strategy.

Municipalities and Regional Development

Municipalities should have a defined role within the National Development Plan, particularly in translating national priorities into local development programmes. National priorities should be adapted to regional

conditions through territorial development strategies and municipal investment plans. Resource allocation should take account of population, infrastructure gaps, service deficits, economic potential and regional equity. This approach would provide greater coherence between national and local development while avoiding excessive centralization. It would also allow citizens and local institutions to participate more directly in development planning.

National Development Delivery Unit

A small, technically capable Development Delivery Unit could be established to monitor the implementation of the highest-priority national programmes. Its role would be to track milestones, identify implementation bottlenecks and ensure that unresolved issues are escalated to the appropriate decision-making level. It would not replace ministries but would strengthen coordination and delivery across institutional boundaries. The unit should focus on a limited number of nationally significant transformation programmes. Its effectiveness should be measured by improvements in programme delivery rather than by the size of its own organization.

National Development Programme and Project System

From Projects to Programmes

The Plan should move Libya from a fragmented project-based approach toward a programme-based approach to development. A programme should bring together multiple investments, reforms and institutional actions that collectively contribute to a defined national outcome. For example, a National Water Security Programme could combine desalination, network rehabilitation, groundwater management, wastewater reuse and agricultural water efficiency. This would create stronger connections between investments and outcomes. It would also allow government to manage development challenges as systems rather than as isolated construction projects.

National Priority Programmes

The National Development Plan should identify a limited portfolio of flagship programmes that represent the most important national transformations. Potential programmes could include national energy transformation, water security, healthcare transformation, education and skills, economic diversification, food security, digital transformation, transport connectivity, municipal development and private-sector growth. Each programme should have a clear outcome, accountable institution, implementation plan and financing strategy. Programmes should be selected according to national importance and development impact. Their progress should receive regular high-level review.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability

National Results Framework

The Plan should establish a national results framework that connects every major development objective to measurable outcomes, indicators and responsible institutions. The framework should distinguish between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and longer-term impacts. This would allow government to determine whether spending is actually producing improvements in economic and social conditions. Indicators should be limited to those that are meaningful and capable of being reliably measured. The results framework should become the foundation for reporting on national development performance.

National Development Dashboard

A national development dashboard could provide policymakers and the public with transparent information on implementation progress. It could report on programme milestones, expenditure, physical completion, performance indicators, regional distribution and major implementation risks. The dashboard should use reliable national data and be updated regularly. Transparency would strengthen accountability while allowing

government leadership to identify emerging problems before they become major failures. It would also create a common evidence base for public discussion about national development.

Independent Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring should be complemented by independent evaluation of major programmes and investments. Evaluations should assess whether programmes are achieving their intended economic, social and institutional outcomes and whether resources are being used efficiently. Major programmes should undergo periodic reviews rather than being evaluated only after completion. Lessons from evaluations should be incorporated into subsequent planning and budget decisions. This would create a learning-oriented development system rather than one focused exclusively on expenditure and project completion.

Territorial and Regional Development

National–Regional–Municipal Planning System

The National Development Plan should establish a clear relationship between national, regional and municipal planning. National priorities should provide the strategic framework, while regional and municipal plans should identify local needs, opportunities and implementation priorities. This would allow Libya to pursue national objectives while recognizing substantial differences between regions and communities. Territorial planning should also guide infrastructure investment, economic clusters, urban development and service provision. The resulting system would combine national coherence with local responsiveness.

Balanced Regional Development

Regional equity should be treated as both a social and economic development objective. Public investment should address disparities in infrastructure, healthcare, education, employment and economic opportunity between different parts of the country. At the same time, regional planning should identify each area's comparative economic strengths and development potential. The objective should not simply be equal spending across regions but equitable access to opportunities and essential services. This approach could make development investment an important instrument for strengthening national cohesion.

The Strategic-Management Cycle

The entire system should operate as a continuous national strategic-management cycle rather than as a plan that is written once and then implemented mechanically.

National Vision → Strategic Priorities → Development Pillars → National Programmes → Investment Portfolio → Financing → Budget Allocation → Implementation → Monitoring → Evaluation → Learning → Strategic Adjustment

This cycle should be supported by strong political leadership, capable planning institutions, disciplined public finance and reliable national data. It should allow Libya to adjust its priorities when economic, social, technological or geopolitical conditions change without abandoning the long-term national vision. The Plan should therefore be considered a **living management framework**, with formal annual reviews and deeper periodic reviews. Its ultimate purpose should be to transform national resources into sustainable improvements in prosperity, human development, institutional capacity and quality of life.

The Core Proposition

The proposed National Development Plan should ultimately be understood not as a traditional planning document but as **Libya's national strategic-management and development-delivery system**.

Its logic would be:

Vision defines where Libya wants to go.

Strategy defines the transformations required to get there.

Programmes define what government and partners will do.

Investment defines what must be built, modernized or transformed.

Financing defines how those priorities will be paid for.

Governance defines who is responsible for delivery.

Performance management defines whether progress is actually being achieved.

Evaluation and learning ensure that the strategy evolves based on evidence.

In this model, the National Development Plan becomes the **bridge between national ambition and national execution**—linking the President and Government, planning institutions, Ministry of Finance, sector ministries, municipalities, public enterprises, private investors and international development partners within a single national framework.

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