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Libya's Post-Gaddafi Political Crisis: Electoral Deadlock, External Actors and India's Interests

Prasanta Kumar Pradhan *

Abstract

Libya continues to suffer from chronic political instability, humanitarian crisis and terrorism even after more than a decade since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. A lack of trust and consensus among the political parties has resulted in repeated postponement of the parliamentary and presidential elections. The road to forming a democratically elected government through elections has been marred by mutual distrust, allegations of fraud, and security concerns. While it is widely believed that the formation of a strong central government in Libya based on the verdict of the people is the best possible solution to the present crisis, the differences between the two msajor factions: the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord and the Tobruk-based House of Representatives over electoral laws and power sharing have stalled the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections. Several armed militia groups backed by the political parties have often engaged in violence. Continuing instability has drawn external powers into Libya, each with its own agenda and interests. The involvement of the regional and extra-regional powers often complicates the already complex political scenario. In such a difficult situation, it has been challenging for India to manage its bilateral relations with Libya after Gaddafi's fall. This paper intends to study and analyse the internal political crisis in Libya, the failure of the political leadership to hold elections, the role of regional and external players in Libya's prolonged crisis, and its implications for India.



1. Introduction

Chronic political instability, the deteriorating internal security situation in the country, armed conflicts, terrorism, economic hardship and humanitarian crisis have been the markers of post-Gaddafi Libya. Since the fall of Muammar Gaddafi in October 2011, the very unity and cohesion of the

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nation and the people have suffered. At the peak of the Arab Spring, it was believed that Gaddafi's fall would open the door to democratic governance in Libya. However, the country spiralled into a host of political, economic, social and security-related problems. The new political leadership failed to build consensus on key issues with differences among the key political factions leading to violent armed conflicts and the involvement of armed militias and foreign mercenaries. Accordingly, the road to forming a democratically elected government through elections has been marred by mutual distrust, allegations of fraud and security concerns. The involvement of the regional and extra-regional players has further complicated the situation. Therefore, despite the best efforts, the negotiations among the key stakeholders have not yielded any tangible results. An unstable Libya has several economic and security implications for India. As the situation deteriorated, India had to evacuate its nationals from the country. Its energy and economic interests were also affected as the instability continued throughout the country.

2. Managing the transition

In early 2011, as the popular protests against Gaddafi gained momentum, the rebel forces sought to unite under a common political agenda. In February 2011, they formed the National Transitional Council (NTC), which was seen as the political wing of the opposition. A number of defected political leaders from the Gaddafi government played an important role in establishing the NTC. Later, people from different walks of life and activists joined the NTC, thereby strengthening the transitional authority and the wave of protests against Gaddafi. NTC was set up as a transitional authority. Its objective was to serve as a guard during the transition period and hand over power to an elected legislative body after holding elections.

After Gaddafi's killing in October 2011, NTC was recognised as the sole representative of the Libyan people by several countries. Despite international recognition, it faced many challenges.[1] Firstly, there was dissatisfaction among some factions within the rebel group with the leadership and structure of the newly formed, self-appointed body. Secondly, it failed to consolidate and exercise its control over all the parts of the country as well as rein in various armed militia groups.

In July 2012, elections were held for the General National Congress (GNC). In August, the NTC transferred power to the GNC, which was declared the legitimate representative of the Libyan people.[2]

One of the GNC's principal responsibilities was to prepare for elections to a new parliament. Parliamentary elections for the House of Representatives (HoR) were held in 2014. Voter turnout was low and reports of widespread violence accompanied the election.[3] Members of the GNC subsequently questioned the legitimacy of the HoR and refused to step down. The HoR, which had emerged from the election, relocated to the eastern city of Tobruk, and as a result, both institutions continued to assert their respective claims to political legitimacy, deepening the country's political division.

The internal security situation in the country continued to deteriorate. As the political crisis prolonged with no immediate resolution in sight, the post-Gaddafi period witnessed a sharp rise in terrorist activities and the emergence of armed militias and terrorist groups. ISIS, Al Qaeda and other local terrorist groups expanded their presence and increased their operations.[4] After receiving a strong military response in Syria and Iraq, many ISIS fighters moved to Libya. ISIS increased its activities in areas like Sirte, Benghazi and Derna. An unstable Libya provided ISIS with a conducive environment to recruit fighters for neighbouring countries such as Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt.[5]

Similarly, Al Qaeda has maintained a strong base in Libya, especially in Derna and Benghazi.[6] After facing military action in Libya for years, the military capabilities of ISIS and Al Qaeda have been significantly weakened. However, these groups have the capacity to resurface at any time if the situation in the country worsens further. The presence of various armed militia groups in different parts of the country with different tribal and political affiliations increased the insecurity throughout the country. This further challenges the country's unity and integrity during the transition.

3.Libyan Political Agreement of 2015

In December 2015, the UN-mediated Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) was signed between the two factions and the Government of National Accord was established.[7] The agreement was signed in Skhirat, Morocco, with foreign ministers of Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia, Turkiye, Italy and Spain attending the signing ceremony.[8] This reflected the involvement and mediation of regional and neighbouring countries in the talks. This was an interim arrangement for the country and both the parties – the GNC and the HoR – agreed to participate.

Under the agreement, the parties committed themselves to national reconciliation, territorial integrity, counterterrorism, the rejection of violence, stronger local governance and improved humanitarian assistance.[9] They also agreed to work towards drafting a permanent constitution.[10] The LPA recognised the HoR as the country's legislative authority and established the High Council of State as a consultative body whose views were to carry weight in relation to the GNA. Its mandate covered issues including national unity, counterterrorism, the prevention of violence, the return of refugees and national reconciliation.[11]

The GNA received recognition from the United Nations Security Council as Libya's legitimate government. Within months, however, tensions between the rival political institutions intensified. The newly established GNA struggled to exercise effective authority over the competing political factions and armed groups. The arrangement failed to produce a durable political settlement as disagreements between the GNC and the HoR continued. The emergence of competing political authorities, each supported by armed groups, became a major obstacle to Libya's political transition.

4. Negotiations between rival factions

As the LPA failed to achieve its objectives, political instability and violence continued unabated. To break the political stalemate, a meeting with the key stakeholders was held in Paris in May 2018. Key Libyan leaders, including Prime Minister Fayez Al Sarraj, the president of the House of Representatives, Aguila Saleh, the head of the Council of State, Khaled Al Mishri, and the Chief of the Libyan National Army, General Khalifa Haftar, participated in the meeting. This meeting was facilitated by France with several other countries and UN representatives participating in the discussions. The Paris meeting seemed like an icebreaker between the two rival governments of Tripoli and Tobruk. Most importantly, the leaders agreed to hold the Parliamentary and Presidential elections on December 10, 2018.[12] They also agreed to accept the results of the election, the unification of the central bank, the establishment of unified military and security institutions and the abolishing of parallel governments and institutions.[13]

In November 2018, another meeting was convened in Palermo, Italy, with the mediation of Italy. At

the Palermo Conference, leaders such as Fayez Al Sarraj, Khalifa Haftar, Aguila Saleh, and Khaled Al Mishri participated, along with representatives from around 20 countries, and the UN was in attendance. Though nothing substantial emerged from the meeting, it turned out to be another confidence-building exercise in the fragile Libyan political process. All the parties reiterated their support for holding elections, respecting the election results, and reunifying financial and security systems, among other measures. They all agreed to contribute peacefully to the transition process, respect national sovereignty, and commit to a political solution to the conflict.[14] The UN Special Envoy for Libya, Ghassan Salame, and the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte claimed that the Conference has been a success.[15] But despite such claims and the repeated commitments made by the Libyan leaders, the situation on the ground did not witness any tangible improvement as violence and political instability continued as before.

To advance the negotiations, the Berlin Process was launched in 2020, this time with Germany's mediation. In September 2019, a consultation between the German authorities and Ghassan Salame took place to advance negotiations between the Libyan factions. Germany agreed to host the meeting, and as a result, the first Berlin Conference was held in January 2020. Some European and Arab countries, along with representatives from the UN, the Arab League, the African Union, and the European Union, participated in the meeting. The meeting called for a ceasefire, an arms embargo, a return to the political process, security sector reform, and respect for humanitarian and international law.[16]

In March 2021, the Government of National Unity (GNU) was formed, bringing together members from both political factions. Mohamed Al Mnefi was appointed head of the Presidency Council, and Abdelhamid Dabeiba was appointed Prime Minister. This new executive is tasked with preparing the country for general elections in December 2021. But this election deadline has not been met, and the differences continue to create friction among political groups and leaders.

The second Berlin Conference was held in June 2021. They reaffirmed the commitments made at the previous Conference and acknowledged that the situation in Libya has improved, with armed conflicts having decreased significantly. It appealed to the parties

to hold parliamentary and presidential elections, take necessary measures towards security sector reforms, unify Libya's institutions, and ensure a fair and transparent allocation of resources throughout the country.[17] Despite its commitments and agreements, Libya has yet to hold elections.

Differences among the political factions over electoral laws have been a major factor in the frequent postponement of the elections. While it is widely believed that forming a unified central government in Libya,[18] based on the will of the people, is the best possible solution to the present crisis, differences between the two major factions over electoral laws and power-sharing have delayed the holding of parliamentary and presidential elections. The key differences include eligibility criteria for candidates, election mechanisms, the legal framework, and leaders with dual citizenship. These issues remain the most critical challenges to charting Libya's future roadmap today.

In order to bring consensus between the two competing factions, a 6+6 committee was formed, taking six members from each side to draft electoral laws for parliamentary and presidential elections. In June 2023, the Committee meeting in Morocco announced that it had reached a consensus on the electoral laws, pending confirmation from both sides.[19] In October 2023, the 6+6 committee announced that the electoral laws had been finalised and sent to the High National Elections Commission (HNEC). The Committee also stated that the laws are final and cannot be modified.[20]

5. Conflict over revenue sharing

Libya possesses the largest proven crude oil reserves in Africa. According to the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the country holds 48,363 million barrels of proven crude oil reserves. Crude oil has long been the principal source of government revenue and the backbone of the Libyan economy. However, prolonged political instability and the absence of reconciliation between the rival political factions have constrained the country's oil sector, preventing it from realising its full production potential. In 2024, Libya's crude oil production stood at approximately 1.13 million barrels per day.[21]

The distribution of oil revenues has remained one of the most contentious issues between the Tripoli-based GNU and the eastern

government. The National Oil Corporation (NOC), which is responsible for oil production and exports, and the Central Bank of Libya (CBL), which receives the foreign exchange earnings from oil exports, are both headquartered in Tripoli and operate under the authority of the GNU. However, the eastern authorities exercise de facto control over much of Libya's oilfields and export infrastructure located within their territory. As a result, they possess the military capability to disrupt oil production and exports during periods of political disagreement or armed confrontation with the Tripoli-based government. The eastern authorities have repeatedly accused the GNU of corruption and mismanagement of oil revenues and have threatened to halt oil production and exports until a more equitable mechanism for revenue distribution is established.[22] In an effort to address these concerns, the rival administrations agreed in 2023 to establish a 'Financial High Committee', comprising representatives from both sides, to oversee the distribution of oil revenues.[23] Nevertheless, the absence of a transparent and mutually acceptable revenue-sharing mechanism continues to constitute one of the principal obstacles to political reconciliation and state reunification in Libya.

6. Role of External Powers

Continuing instability has drawn external powers into Libya, each with its own agenda and interests. Their involvement has added complexity to an already fragmented political environment. Neighbouring states, particularly Egypt and Turkiye, have played important roles in the conflict. Qatar and the UAE have also emerged as significant regional stakeholders. Among the extra-regional powers, the United States, France, Italy and Russia have maintained substantial political and security interests in Libya.

Egypt shares a long border with Libya and has remained concerned about the movement of terrorist organisations and armed groups across the border. As violence intensified in Libya, Cairo became increasingly concerned about the potential movement of weapons and armed groups into Egyptian territory. Libya consequently emerged as an important national security concern for Egypt. As a result, Cairo strengthened border security and introduced measures to prevent cross-border infiltration.[24] At the political and diplomatic level, Egypt called for a ceasefire and a political settlement among the rival factions. It initially supported the Tobruk-based government and the Libyan National

Army (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar. Egypt later sought to mediate among Libyan factions and promote agreement on elections.[25]

Like Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has also remained deeply involved in the Libyan crisis. Abu Dhabi has called for de-escalation and dialogue among the Libyan parties[26] while reportedly providing military support to Khalifa Haftar.[27] This support strengthened Haftar's position in his confrontation with forces aligned with the GNA. The UAE's involvement has been influenced by its concerns over the Muslim Brotherhood and affiliated groups operating in Libya. Abu Dhabi has officially designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organisation. Egypt and the UAE, therefore, share important interests concerning the activities of Islamist groups in Libya.

Turkiye has been one of the principal supporters of the Tripoli-based GNA. In December 2019, the Turkish parliament approved a military agreement with Libya that facilitated the deployment of Turkish personnel and equipment.[28] Turkiye subsequently sent military personnel to Libya in January 2020 to support the GNA against Haftar's offensive on Tripoli. Turkish military assistance played an important role in strengthening the GNA's position. Ankara's policy towards Libya is shaped by strategic, economic and security considerations. It seeks to expand its influence in North Africa and strengthen its position in the Eastern Mediterranean.[29] In November 2023, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan submitted a motion to the Turkish parliament seeking an extension of the Turkish military mission in Libya, which was approved.[30] Turkiye also maintains significant commercial interests in Libya and long-term energy interests in the Eastern Mediterranean.[31]

Similarly, Qatar has also been a major supporter of the GNA while calling on Libyan parties to exercise restraint and resolve their differences through dialogue.[32] Doha has expressed support for the UN-mediated political process and the implementation of relevant UN resolutions aimed at restoring Libya's stability and sovereignty. Qatar became involved in Libya during the uprising against Gaddafi, providing political support and assistance to rebel forces.[33] Following Gaddafi's fall, Doha continued to provide political and military backing to the GNA.[34] It also developed close coordination with Turkiye, reflecting a convergence of interests in Libya. Qatar and Turkiye have been accused of supporting Islamist forces

in Libya against groups associated with the Tobruk-based HoR.

Apart from the regional countries, extra-regional powers have also played an important role in Libya. The United States and Russia have pursued markedly different positions. While the US has supported the Tripoli-based GNA, Russia has developed close relations with Khalifa Haftar. Haftar has visited Moscow several times and held discussions with Russian officials. Russia's interests in Libya include arms supplies, energy interests and its broader strategic competition with the United States. Although Moscow officially supports intra-Libyan dialogue and a national consensus,[35] the US, UK and several other countries have accused Russia of supplying weapons to Haftar and supporting foreign mercenaries operating in eastern Libya.[36] Russia remains an important actor in Libya's political and security landscape and is likely to retain considerable influence over the country's political trajectory.

The United States has remained an important external actor in Libya since the anti-Gaddafi uprising in 2011. It played a central role in the NATO-led military operation against Gaddafi and has remained engaged with Libya since then. In the post-Gaddafi period, Washington has maintained relations with major Libyan stakeholders, particularly the GNA and the HoR. The US recognised the GNA and supported it through the United Nations. It has also provided security, development and humanitarian assistance to Libya. Between 2011 and 2021, the US provided US$605 million in development and security assistance and US$269 million in humanitarian assistance to Libya.[37] It also provided approximately US$11 million in humanitarian assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic.[38] Much of this assistance has supported local governance, humanitarian relief, economic growth and administrative requirements.[39]

The active involvement of regional and extra-regional powers has transformed Libya's civil war into a proxy conflict in which rival Libyan factions have relied on foreign military and political support. Regional states have provided assistance to different Libyan factions, while foreign mercenaries backed by external actors have created serious challenges for Libya's security and political transition. In December 2020, UN Acting Special Representative for Libya Stephanie Williams stated that at least 20,000 foreign fighters and mercenaries were present in Libya, describing

their presence as a violation of Libya's sovereignty and the arms embargo.[40] Libya's political polarisation, combined with the divergent interests of external powers, has made it more difficult to establish a durable political settlement and organise the parliamentary and presidential elections agreed upon by the competing factions.

7. Role of the UN

In the midst of the political instability and violence, the United Nations remains the most credible mediator in Libya. The UN has been engaged with the Libyan people and the political leadership continuously since the formation of the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) in 2011. The primary objectives of UNSMIL are to support the transitional authorities of Libya in the post-conflict effort, to provide mediation in the implementation of Libyan political arrangements, to support key Libyan institutions, to foster political dialogue and national reconciliation, and to monitor and report on human rights.[41] In 2020, the UN Security Council, in resolution 2542, expanded the mandate of UNSMIL to include engaging with regional and extra-regional countries and regional organisations, and countering arms proliferation in the country, among others.[42]

Alongside its efforts to bring political leaders to the negotiating table, UNSMIL has sought to engage the wider Libyan population. It facilitated the Libyan National Conference and organised consultations across the country.[43] Between April and July 2018, meetings were held in different parts of Libya, allowing citizens from diverse social backgrounds to express their views on the issues confronting the country. These consultations generated a broad range of suggestions and perspectives. The final stage of the conference was planned for early 2019 ahead of the proposed parliamentary and presidential elections.

UNSMIL has remained involved in international negotiations and meetings between the rival Libyan factions. It has worked with political actors representing diverse interests and ideological positions in an effort to build common ground for restoring peace and stability. It has provided much-needed technical support and humanitarian aid while working in a hostile environment with severe security concerns. The UNSMIL also coordinates numerous initiatives in Libya to advance dialogue, bringing rival parties to the negotiating table and working with mediators to hold peace talks. It has been part of all

peace talks and conferences involving Libyan political factions and mediating countries. In an atmosphere of distrust and violence, the UNSMIL remains the only trusted actor in the complex Libyan political horizon.

8. Challenges

The political deadlock in Libya is hampering its progress towards peace and stability. This leaves Libya facing several complex political, social, and internal security challenges in the near future. The progress towards political understanding and negotiation between the rival political factions is extremely slow and fragile. The intricate web of political instability, armed militia groups and electoral uncertainty continues to pose significant challenges in the post-Gaddafi Libya.

The first major challenge concerns the distribution of political power. The principal issues dividing the two major political factions remain unresolved, and disagreements have prevented parliamentary and presidential elections from taking place. The establishment of a unified political authority, equitable distribution of national wealth and legitimate security and military institutions under civilian authority will remain central to Libya's post-election political order. Building consensus among Libya's fragmented political leadership on these issues is essential to rebuilding the state. In December 2023, Abdoulaye Bathily, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Libya and Head of UNSMIL, told the UN Security Council that distrust and rivalry among political leaders were among the principal causes of the political crisis.[44] Preserving Libya's political unity is therefore central to protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Security sector reform constitutes another major challenge. Disarming and integrating militia groups operating across Libya requires a detailed assessment of their organisational structures, political affiliations and interests. Numerous armed groups emerged after Gaddafi's fall and expanded in the absence of an effective central authority. Many have organised themselves around ethnic, tribal, sectarian and local political affiliations and operate with limited institutional oversight. Reports of armed clashes, arbitrary arrests and detention by armed groups in different parts of the country have further weakened the rule of law.[45] Southern Libya is particularly vulnerable because of the limited presence of central state institutions and the activities of militia groups.

Armed groups from neighbouring countries have also operated in the region. The weakness of state authority has made parts of Libya's southern border difficult to secure and enabled armed groups to become involved in illicit and criminal activities.

The political factions in Tripoli and Tobruk also maintain their own military structures. Over the past decade, these forces have expanded their capabilities and received military training and weapons from regional and extra-regional actors. The integration of armed groups associated with the rival factions into a unified national military structure remains essential to establishing a functioning security sector.

Terrorist organisations have also exploited Libya's political fragmentation and security vacuum. The prolonged instability has created opportunities for groups, including ISIS and Al Qaeda, to establish networks and maintain a presence in parts of the country. Their activities have been particularly evident in the south and other areas where state authority remains weak. Although terrorist activity has declined significantly in recent years, remnants of these organisations retain the capacity to conduct attacks when security conditions become favourable.[46]

The weakness of Libya's security and intelligence institutions allowed terrorist organisations to develop networks and expand their operations. ISIS captured areas including Derna, Benghazi and Sirte before being pushed back by Libyan forces. The organisation also carried out terrorist attacks across the country. Other militant organisations have posed similar security challenges. On 11 September 2012, the US Consulate in Benghazi was attacked by Ansar al-Sharia, resulting in the deaths of US Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens and three other officials.[47] Over the years, terrorist attacks have declined substantially over the years, but remnants of militant organisations remain active underground and retain the potential to exploit renewed instability.

9. Implications for India

The relationship between India and Libya has historically been cordial and grounded in mutual interests. In the years following India's independence, the two countries shared a broad convergence in their foreign policy outlook, particularly their commitment to non-alignment and opposition to colonialism. During Muammar Gaddafi's rule, India–Libya relations remained politically friendly and were characterised by

stable economic ties. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's visit to Libya in 1984 provided further impetus to bilateral relations. However, from the early 1990s, Libya became increasingly isolated following the imposition of international sanctions. Despite these developments, India maintained its diplomatic and economic engagement with Libya and subsequently welcomed the lifting of United Nations sanctions, signalling its continued interest in sustaining bilateral ties.

India's relationship with Libya became increasingly complicated as popular protests against Muammar Gaddafi's regime intensified in 2011. India was a non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council when the Libyan crisis erupted. India supported UNSC Resolution 1970, which imposed a range of measures against the Gaddafi regime. As the crisis escalated, Western involvement in Libya intensified, and discussions over military intervention to overthrow Gaddafi gained momentum. Consequently, India abstained from UNSC Resolution 1973, which authorised the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya. Explaining its position, India expressed reservations about the resolution, arguing that it provided for "far-reaching measures under Chapter VII of the UN Charter with relatively little credible information on the situation on the ground in Libya".[48] India consistently emphasised Libya's sovereignty and territorial integrity and opposed foreign military intervention in the country. At the same time, it expressed concern over the Gaddafi regime's treatment of civilians during the protests. As the violence intensified and the situation deteriorated rapidly, India found it increasingly difficult to sustain its diplomatic engagement with Libya under the prevailing circumstances. As a result, bilateral interaction has been minimal and high-level political engagement has remained constrained.

9.1 Repatriation and assistance

At the onset of the protests in 2011, around 18,000 Indians were living and working in Libya. As the security situation deteriorated, India launched 'Operation Safe Homecoming' to evacuate its nationals from the country. By August 2011, more than 16,200 Indians had been evacuated by air, sea and land.[49] However, some Indians chose to remain in Libya despite the worsening security environment. As the situation improved gradually, several Indians returned to Libya in

search of employment opportunities. The security situation deteriorated again in 2014, prompting the Indian government to undertake another evacuation operation, during which around 3,793 Indian nationals were repatriated.[50] In view of the continuing instability and deteriorating security conditions, India subsequently imposed a travel ban on its nationals travelling to Libya. Following Gaddafi's removal, India recognised the National Transitional Council (NTC) in November 2011 and offered all possible assistance to the Libyan people.[51] India provided humanitarian assistance to Libya through the United Nations Office of the Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid. Besides, India also provided life-saving drugs and medical equipment to the NTC.[52]

9.2 Terrorism

The deteriorating security environment also had direct implications for India, as several Indian nationals were abducted by ISIS and other armed groups in different parts of Libya. The growing threat of terrorism and militia violence, therefore, posed a significant challenge to India's interests and the safety of its nationals in the country. In March 2015, an Indian nurse, Sonu Sathyan and her infant son died when they were caught in a violent clash between two rival armed groups in Zawiya.[53] In July 2015, four Indian nationals were kidnapped by ISIS in Sirte.[54] In September 2015, two other Indian nationals working for a hospital in Sirte were kidnapped by ISIS and were later released in 2016.[55] Similarly, seven Indian workers were kidnapped by an armed militia group in September 2020 while they were on their way from Shwerif to Tripoli airport.[56] They were released the next month, following coordination between the Government of India and the Libyan authorities.

9.3 Energy

Libya, which possesses the largest proven crude oil reserves in Africa, ranks among the leading oil-holding countries globally. Before the fall of Gaddafi, India imported approximately US$961 million worth of crude oil from Libya in 2010–11.[57] However, as the conflict intensified, oil production and exports were severely disrupted, leading to a significant decline in Libya's oil supplies to India. In 2025–26, India's crude oil imports from Libya stand at US$546.38 million.[58] Although Libya has not been a major supplier of crude oil to India, oil has traditionally constituted an important component of bilateral trade. India's interests in Libya's energy sector also extend

beyond oil imports. Indian energy companies, including Indian Oil Corporation, Oil India Limited and ONGC Videsh Limited, have been involved in Libya's energy sector. However, Libya's prolonged political instability and deteriorating security environment have disrupted these investments and constrained the expansion of Indian commercial engagement. A stable and secure Libya could create opportunities for Indian companies to expand their engagement in the country's energy sector.

India has gradually adapted its approach to the political impasse and challenging security environment in Libya, which has constrained the development of bilateral relations. India has consistently maintained that there is no military solution to the Libyan conflict and has advocated for a Libyan-led and Libyan-owned peace process. It has urged the rival Libyan factions to engage in dialogue and negotiations to reach a political consensus and end the conflict. India has also called upon the international community to adopt a unified approach towards combating terrorism in Libya and to facilitate the withdrawal of foreign fighters from the country.[59] Despite the ongoing political impasse, India reopened its embassy in Tripoli in 2024, signalling its willingness to gradually re-engage with Libya. If the security situation remains stable, India is likely to pursue a cautious and gradual restoration of its bilateral engagement. The reopening of the diplomatic mission could provide an important foundation for revitalising economic and energy ties, including greater opportunities for Indian companies to participate in Libya's reconstruction and energy sectors.

10. Conclusion

Libya's political and security landscape remains fragile. The failure of the post-Gaddafi political transition has contributed to prolonged instability despite sustained regional and international efforts to facilitate a settlement. Power-sharing among political elites, the establishment of a constitutional framework for parliamentary and presidential elections, and the equitable distribution of state revenues remain among the most contentious issues in the search for national consensus. Rival political authorities, competing interests among political factions and deep distrust among political leaders have complicated efforts to achieve a durable settlement. The post-Gaddafi period has also witnessed the erosion and fragmentation of state institutions. Libya's challenges are therefore multidimensional, encompassing political fragmentation, armed violence, terrorism, institutional

weakness, humanitarian distress and prolonged insecurity. A Libyan-led and Libyan-owned political process, supported by the United Nations and other credible international actors, offers the most viable framework for restoring peace and stability, strengthening state institutions and the rule of law.

The developments in Libya since 2011 have had several implications for India. The prolonged instability compelled India to evacuate thousands of its nationals from Libya and led to the closure of the Indian Embassy for security reasons, thereby disrupting regular diplomatic communication and engagement between the two countries. The continuing political and security crisis has also constrained India's economic engagements in Libya. A stable and peaceful Libya could have potentially emerged as an important source of energy for India and provided greater opportunities for Indian companies to invest in the energy and other sectors of the Libyan economy. Greater political stability in Libya could also have facilitated high-level political visits, expanded economic engagement and paved the way for stronger strategic cooperation between the two countries. However, the persistent instability has significantly restricted India's engagement with Libya, limiting the scope to expand bilateral relations and realise their full economic and strategic potential. ■

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