

The Role of The United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping: Case of Libya



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ABSTRACT: After the fall of the Gaddafi regime in February 2011, Libya turned into a theater of conflicts between various armed groups, and the country was divided into two independent governments, one in eastern Libyan, headed by Abdullah Al-Thani and supported by the forces of Major General Khalifa Haftar. As for the capital, Tripoli, and the west, is run by the Government of National Accord headed by Fayez Al-Sarraj. International and regional parties tried to intervene, and The intervention of the United Nations was decisive, which gave the crisis another dimension. In this study, we will discuss the extent of the role of the United Nations in resolving the conflict and what programs it used by discussing the United Nations mission in Libya.

KEYWORDS: Libya, United Nations, UNSMIL, Conflict, Peacekeeping, Interventions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of the Libyan conflict are complex and multifaceted, with internal and external factors shaping its trajectory. Historically, Libya's identity as a "gateway to Africa" is contrasted with its favored orientation towards the Mediterranean, reflecting a conflicted sense of identity (de Waal, 2011). Despite this, Libya's close ties to Africa through demography and politics are evident. Understanding the events and outcomes of the conflict proves challenging due to its fluid nature, characterized by shifting alliances and the involvement of external actors (Alawi, 2020). External interventions often overlook Libyan agencies, attributing contradictory legitimacy and power to various factions. The crisis is seen as an exemplar of the geopolitical maneuvering of international states, with some countries intervening due to perceived threats to security and stability (Alawi, 2020). The conflict's roots can be traced back to Gaddafi's rule, during which state institutions weakened, leading to the proliferation of weapons and the emergence of armed groups and terrorist organizations (Alawi, 2020). This paved the way for regional and international interventions, further exacerbating the power struggle among Libyan factions.

Currently, Libya is divided between rival governments in Tripoli and the east, each supported by militias with shifting loyalties (Al-Subaitili, 2017). The capital city, Tripoli, is fragmented, with armed organizations vying for control at the neighborhood level. The conflict has also impacted the youth population, exacerbating economic instability and psychological distress (Khalifa, 2022). The United Nations has sought to play a role in conflict resolution, guided by Sustainable Development Goal 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies (United Nations official website). Resolutions like 1970 and 1973 were implemented in response to the escalating conflict, though they have been subject to debate (United Nations website). In this article, we will address the Libyan crisis, its background and causes, and the United Nations' intervention in resolving the crisis through its various programs.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is a case study in Libya, which embraces the Libyan conflict within the United Nations intervention in conflict resolution. The study would focus on analyzing the events since 2011 when the conflict began, along with the military-political actions taken by the United Nations. In terms of data collection, this study relies on secondary data. For the close identification and understanding of the nature, and reasons, of the conflict and united nation conflict resolution. This thesis implied multiple resources, scientific articles, books, e-books, thesis, internet news reports, documentaries, interviews, and policy papers. Firstly, the background of the Libyan conflict and its causes will be analyzed to know the conflicting parties and external interventions in the conflict for some countries like Türkiye, Russia, Gulf and European countries, and Egypt. Secondly, the difference between conflict resolution and peacekeeping will be studied to analyze the role of the United Nations in peacekeeping and conflict resolution through the United Nations mission in Libya. Lastly, Findings will be generated along with the theoretical framework to determine the role of the United Nations in conflict resolution and peacekeeping in Libya.

The Role of The United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping: Case of Libya

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Conflict theory calls for taking into account the role of power and economic interests in conflicting political issues that lead to social conflict. Conflict theory factors were identified according to the patterns and fields of conflict, including the political and religious factors, which we find evident in the conflict between religious groups and between supporters and opponents of authority in Libya. The theory has proven that there are cases of dissatisfaction with material resources such as power, income, and property in Libyan society between small or large groups such as clans, and tribes.

3.1 Conflict Theory

Conflict theory provides a scientific explanation for the occurrence, types, and impact of societal conflicts, focusing on the unequal distribution of power and resources. Unlike functionalist perspectives, which view society as a cohesive unit, conflict theorists argue that power governs society, and its unequal distribution leads to conflicting interests among different groups (Coser, 2003). This theory aims to explain various social phenomena, such as discrimination, poverty, wars, and domestic violence, attributing them to structural power divisions and resource disparities inherent in all societies (Nickerson, 2021). The Marxist approach to conflict theory, influenced by Marx's work, emphasizes the conflict between the ruling capitalist class (bourgeoisie) and the working class (proletariat) within capitalist society. Marxists believe that one class imposes its power and authority, leading to conflicts and the absence of consensus (Nickerson, 2021). They argue that society is based on class relations, with those in power using institutions like the media and propaganda to maintain their dominance. Conflict theory operates on several key assumptions, including the prevalence of competition in human relationships, the occurrence of revolutionary events resulting from tensions between social categories, structural inequalities in power and rewards, and the role of war as both a unifying and divisive force in society (Hays, 2022). Critics of conflict theory argue that it overemphasizes conflict and neglects the presence of consensus in society, while also highlighting discrepancies between its ideals and real-world applications (Dayef & Zidan, 2016). Some critics view conflict theory as an incitement to violence and totalitarian control, citing examples from Soviet regimes and Eastern Europe to illustrate its limitations in achieving social equality and justice.

4. CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION

4.1 Conflict Management

Conflict management involves diagnosing, identifying sources, selecting methods, and monitoring outcomes. Crisis management is employed when conflict escalates quickly, often requiring third-party intervention (Bercovitch, M.Regan, 1999; Özcan, 2021; Swanström, Weissmann, 2005). Peaceful strategies like negotiation and mediation aim for long-term conflict transformation, while military or economic measures offer short-term solutions (Schwarz, 2016). Conflict management aims to limit or contain conflict behavior while conflict resolution seeks to end violent conflict and address underlying causes (Siman Tov, 1994).

4.2 Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution entails ending conflicts by addressing their root causes. Negotiation, mediation, and arbitration are common methods. Negotiation involves direct discussion between parties to reach agreements (W.Burton, 1988). Mediation, facilitated by a neutral third party, focuses on reconciling differences and achieving settlements (Nnaemeka, 2019). Arbitration, often used in international conflicts, involves a neutral third party making binding decisions (Al-Khazendar, 2014). Bargaining, a political tool, involves give-and-take to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes (Hakki, 2013). Effective conflict resolution requires understanding various intervention methods and their application in different contexts (Al-Khazendar, 2014).

5. BACKGROUND OF THE CONFLICT

Libya, the continent's second-largest country, with a population of 6,154,623, relies on an oil-based economy (A.Daw & El-Bouzedi, 2015). Muammar Qaddafi's rule brought relative prosperity through oil revenue but sparked discontent, leading to the 2011 "February Revolution" (Kekilli, 2017). NATO-backed rebels ousted Qaddafi, ushering in a period of political transition overseen by the National Transitional Council and the General National Congress (Soufan, 2016). However, internal divisions fueled instability, resulting in rival governments in Tripoli and Tobruk (Nofal, 2017). Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's emergence and his Operation Dignity aimed to restore stability but instead escalated conflict (Sbitli, 2017). Despite international efforts like the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum, which seeks to establish a national unity government (BBC, 2023), Libya remains plagued by insecurity and political divisions. (BBC, 2023).

5.1 Main Actors and Warring Parties

The political landscape in Libya is complex, involving various actors vying for power and influence. The General National Council (GNC), established in July 2012, emerged as Libya's first democratically elected parliament after the collapse of Muammar Qaddafi's regime (Geneva, 2017). However, following parliamentary elections in June 2014, which saw a significant loss for the Islamist/Misratan bloc, some members of the GNC refused to hand over authority to the newly elected House of Representatives (HoR). Instead, they reinstated the GNC in August 2014, leading to political fragmentation and rivalry between the two bodies.

The Role of The United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping: Case of Libya

The House of Representatives (HoR), situated in Tobruk and Al-Bayda, represents the eastern faction of Libya's political spectrum (Ilardo, 2019). Originally intended to collaborate with the Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli under the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA), the HoR rejected the GNA's proposed ministerial list. Consequently, it backed the rival government led by Abdullah Al Thani, operating from Al-Bayda in eastern Libya. This fragmentation has perpetuated political divisions and hindered efforts to establish a unified government. The Presidential Council (PC), established in Tripoli in March 2016, is headed by Fayeze al Saraj and was formed as a result of the UN-brokered Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) signed in December 2015. Intended to lead the Government of National Accord (GNA), the PC faced internal divisions, notably with the resignation of Musa al-Koni in January, signaling a lack of cohesion within Libya's political leadership (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018).

On the military front, various armed groups compete for control and influence across Libya. The Libyan National Army (LNA), led by Khalifa Haftar, presents itself as the national army but comprises a mixture of former police officers and tribal or regional-based militias (Geneva, 2017). Haftar, appointed by the HoR as army commander in March 2015, launched Operation Dignity in May 2014, aiming to combat Islamist groups. The LNA's backing by diverse units, including militias and special forces, underscores the complexity of Libya's security landscape. Opposing the LNA are groups such as Libya Dawn, a coalition of Islamist-affiliated militias that seized control of Tripoli in 2014. Supported by the reconstituted GNC, Libya Dawn's offensive against the internationally recognized government further exacerbated the country's political and security challenges (BBC, 2016).

During Muammar Qaddafi's 42-year reign, Libyan Islamists faced repression but resurfaced after his fall in 2011, spanning a spectrum from moderates to hardliners, affiliated with political parties and militias (Glenn, 2017). The Islamic State (IS) capitalized on post-revolution chaos to establish a stronghold in 2014, aiming for regional dominance. Expelled from Sirte in 2016 by militias backed by the Government of National Accord with US air support (Sizer, 2017). Ansar al-Sharia, suspected of Al-Qaeda ties, dissolved in 2017 after involvement in the Benghazi attack. It fought against General Haftar's forces before its dissolution (Glenn, 2017). The Benghazi Revolutionaries Shura Council and Derna Mujahideen Shura Council, with Al-Qaeda ties, oppose the Libyan National Army. The former receives support from Tripoli figures, while the latter controls Derna, engaging in conflicts with IS and cooperating with Haftar's forces (Eljarh, 2016).

Libya Dawn, an Islamist militia, seized parts of Tripoli in 2014, aligning with the General National Congress (GNC) against the House of Representatives (HoR) recognized by most of the international community (BBC, 2016; Ross, 2015). The Libya Shield Forces (LSF), established in 2012, operate under the Ministry of Defense, comprising revolutionary brigades primarily from Misrata (Geneva, 2017;

McQuinn, 2012). The Benghazi Defense Brigades (BDB), formed in 2016, includes rebels from Benghazi, Derna, and Misrata, opposing Haftar's forces while seeking alignment with the Sarraj-led government (ACRPS, 2017). The Libyan National Guard (LNG), formed in 2017, supports Khalifa Al-Ghwell's General National Congress, mainly composed of Misrata militias controlling western Tripoli (Geneva, 2017).

5.2 Foreign involvement

Regional and international involvement in Libya's conflict is multifaceted. Algeria has focused on reconciliation efforts, advocating for inclusive dialogue among conflicting parties (Sbitli, 2017). Tunisia, while concerned about stability due to its shared border, faces limitations in influencing events within Libya due to internal challenges (Nofal, ...). Sudan initially supported the Government of National Accord but later shifted its support to the internationally recognized government (Sbitli, 2017).

Egypt sees Libya's situation as a strategic challenge, providing support to the Libyan National Army and engaging in military actions against extremist elements (Geneva, 2017). However Gulf countries, including Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, initially supported international intervention, with concerns about Islamist groups influencing their stance (Mezran & Varvelli, 2017). In addition, Turkey's intervention aims to protect its interests in the eastern Mediterranean, supporting the Government of National Accord and providing military assistance (Süsler, 2022). What's more, the European Union has been involved in providing humanitarian aid and civil protection, focusing on supporting stability and delivering relief (Koenig, 2012). Italy has engaged in the Libyan crisis to safeguard its energy and economic interests, supporting the Government of National Accord and providing diplomatic and training support (Pedde, 2017). Besides France pursues stability and counterterrorism efforts, supporting both sides to varying degrees (Sbitli, 2017).

Russia supports Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar to strengthen its regional position and counterbalance Western influence (Mezran & Varvelli, 2017). As for the United States, under the Biden administration, has increased diplomatic engagement, advocating for a ceasefire and national elections (M. Blanchard, 2022). Italy's involvement in Libya stems from a dual interest in protecting its economic and energy interests while addressing humanitarian concerns. Italy's engagement with Libyan decision-makers, particularly in energy and migration issues, highlights its strategic priorities (TELCİ & ŞEFKATLİ, 2021). France's policy in Libya is driven by concerns about terrorism and illegal immigration, aligning with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar's vision for a strong regime (Sbitli, 2017). French support for both the Government of National Accord and Haftar's forces reflects a dual approach, raising questions about consistency in French foreign policy (Geneva, 2017). Russian involvement in Libya reflects a strategic

The Role of The United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping: Case of Libya

interest in bolstering its presence in the Arab world and countering Western influence (Sbitli, 2017). Moscow's support for Haftar aims to strengthen its position in Libya and the broader region, with a focus on preventing destabilization near its borders (Mezran & Varvelli, 2017). Russia's stance on the 2011 intervention in Libya highlighted its opposition to Western-led regime change, emphasizing the importance of protecting civilians (Stepanova, 2018).

5.3 Causes of conflict

The conflict in Libya has multifaceted roots, spanning political, social, economic, and international dimensions. Political instability arises from a lack of consensus on governance structures and failed attempts at national dialogue (Molesworth & Newton, 2015). Gaddafi's legacy of weak institutions and divisive policies exacerbates the situation, as state bodies become centers of power struggle (Alawi, 2020; World Bank report, 2023). Moreover, social factors, including tribalism and the militarization of tribes, deepen divisions and hinder reconciliation efforts (Dinicu, 2020). The absence of effective state institutions allows Islamic groups to thrive, while jihadists pose a threat to stability (Sökmen & Zaki, 2020). As well as Economic disparities, fueled by the mismanagement of oil revenues and lack of opportunities, breed resentment and unrest (Costantini, 2016; Arafat, 2017; Perroux, 2019).

International interventions, driven by strategic interests and resource competition, exacerbate the conflict.

Western powers vie for influence and access to Libya's resources, while regional actors like Russia and Turkey further complicate the situation (Lotfi, 2021; Kashan, 2020). Libya's strategic importance as an oil producer heightens global interest, shaping external involvement and exacerbating internal tensions (Attwa, 2021). the Libyan conflict is a complex web of intertwined factors, underscoring the need for holistic approaches to peacebuilding and resolution that address political, social, economic, and international dynamics.

6. THE ROLE OF THE UN IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACEKEEPING

6.1 The Relationship Between Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping

The conflict resolution academic study and practice and the role of peacekeeping share many similarities in international conflict management. The field of conflict resolution was emerging at somehow the same time as the height of the Cold War, the basic principles of peacekeeping were defined by Dag Hammarskjöld and Lester B. Pearson, and the work of one of the first peacekeeping operations was guided by These principles, Emergency Force of the United Nations (UNEF), in response to the Suez Crisis in the Middle East in 1956, the Emergency Force of the United Nations (UNEF) was created. A similar interest in the dynamics and resolution of the conflict was developed by Both areas, and many of the same concepts and principles support both. Despite a history of "mutual neglect" between the field of conflict resolution and peacekeeping practice, the latest endeavors have been made to integrate the theory and conflict resolution and peacekeeping practice (Woodhouse, 2000).

The United Nations' contribution to conflict settlement may be formally or informally to formal methods, and the General Assembly's resolution may pass by the Security Council. which provides conflict resolution guidelines. UN organs, including the Secretary-General, in a dispute may work as a mediator or give services of fact-finding and observation. Finally, peacekeeping forces may be sent by the Security Council to the conflict area. Informal methods are often non-public, like the good offices provision by the SecretaryGeneral to the parties. In addition, the World Organization's function of providing an arena for contacts and communication is important (Vayryenn, 2015).

6.2 UN institutions

The United Nations (UN) emerged from the need for global cooperation to maintain peace and prevent future conflicts after World War II (Tanveer, 2021). Comprising six main organs, including the General Assembly (GA), Security Council (SC), and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the UN addresses various global challenges (Yurtsever & Hmaidan, 2019). The GA serves as a forum for member states to discuss and decide on key issues, while the SC focuses on maintaining international peace and security, authorized to take non-military and military actions if necessary (Kane, 2014). Along with ECOSOC coordinates UN efforts on economic, social, and humanitarian issues, supervising commissions and facilitating international conferences (Fasulo, 2014). The Trusteeship Council (TC) oversaw trust territories until their independence, with its functions absorbed by other UN bodies (Sherman S. Hayden, 1951). Furthermore, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) handles legal disputes between countries and provides advisory opinions, contributing to the development of international law (E.donoghue, 2014). Led by the Secretary-General, the UN Secretariat implements the organization's work, supports member states, and manages various programs and initiatives (United Nations Reports, 2015). Overall, UN institutions collaborate to address global challenges, promote peace, and advance human well-being, working towards a more peaceful and prosperous world.

7. THE UNITED NATIONS AND PEACEKEEPING

UN peacekeeping, defined as the deployment of military personnel to intervene between conflicting groups to prevent or halt violence, is a crucial tool in global conflict management. This intervention typically involves state agents, guerrilla groups, paramilitaries, militias, and mobs, all of whom resort to violence as a means of conflict resolution (Yilmaz, 2014). As conflicts proliferate globally, the international community has increasingly turned to various intervention and conflict management tools. The

The Role of The United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping: Case of Libya

United Nations (UN), in particular, has played a significant role in maintaining global peace and security through Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) in different regions (Ahouangan, 2019). The inception of UN peacekeeping operations dates back to the mid-20th century, with the establishment of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in 1948. UNTSO deployed unarmed military observers to Palestine to supervise the truce negotiated during the first Arab-Israeli war. This marked the first instance of the Security Council's intervention under Chapter VII of the Charter (Goulding, 2014). After UNTSO, the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) was deployed in response to the 1956 Suez Crisis, serving as the first armed UN peacekeeping operation. UNEF's success in observing the ceasefire and facilitating the withdrawal of British, French, and Israeli forces from Egyptian territory set a precedent for future missions (Goulding, 2014).

UN peacekeeping operations adhere to several fundamental principles outlined by Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld and General Assembly President Lester Pearson. These principles include the consent of the parties to the dispute for mission deployment, the non-use of force except in self-defense, participation of contingents from small voluntary contributions and neutral countries, impartiality, and control of peacekeeping operations by the Secretary-General (Woodhouse & Ramsbotham, 2001). For example, in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) was established in 2004 following a UN Security Council resolution (Ahouangan, 2019). The resolution aimed to enforce a ceasefire and facilitate the implementation of peace agreements to resolve the civil war in the country. However, challenges persist in UN peacekeeping efforts due to the diverging interests of Security Council members. Some countries, such as the United States, often act according to their interests rather than adhering strictly to UN principles, leading to questions about the effectiveness and credibility of UN interventions (GÜRBÜZ, 2019). Despite the UN's efforts, conflicts in regions such as Israel-Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Idlib, and Rakhine continue to escalate without adequate intervention from the international community, eroding confidence in the UN's ability to address global crises (Gübrüz, 2019). As the sole international body authorized to make decisions regarding potential conflicts, the UN Security Council's actions are closely scrutinized. However, discrepancies between its decisions and UN principles, coupled with the involvement of permanent Security Council members in arms production and support for terrorist organizations, further undermine the UN's credibility in the international arena (Gübrüz, 2019).

7.1 The UN mission in Libya

Following the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011, Muammar al-Gaddafi was ousted, leading to a period of instability. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) was established on September 16, 2011, to facilitate Libya's transition to democracy (Chiesa, 2016). Despite initial challenges, UNSMIL focused on mediating between conflicting parties and gradually mitigated political polarization (Asseburg & Muriel, 2018).

UNSMIL's primary mission, mandated by the Security Council, includes supporting Libyan political, security, and economic dialogues through mediation and good offices. It also monitors human rights, supports Libyan institutions, and coordinates international assistance (United Nations). The mission provides technical advice, capacity building, and awareness campaigns to promote democratic transformation, justice, reconciliation, and institutional restructuring (Zaydan, 2013). Libyans expect continued collaboration and support from UNSMIL to achieve their goals.

The United Nations mission in Libya plays a multifaceted role in building peace, encompassing both humanitarian and political dimensions. On the humanitarian front, the mission focuses on supporting Libya's transition by promoting reforms in the judicial and prison systems, implementing transitional justice measures, ensuring humane treatment of detainees, and providing humanitarian assistance to displaced persons (Wali, 2011; Fethi, 2022). Efforts also include facilitating negotiations for truces to evacuate civilians and retrieve bodies amid ongoing violence (United Nations).

7.2 The role of the United Nations mission in building peace in Libya

In addition to its humanitarian efforts, the UN mission plays a crucial political role in mediating between conflicting parties to mitigate polarization and facilitate reconciliation. UN-led negotiations between parliamentary representatives have aimed to break down political impasses and promote unity (Asseburg & Lacher, 2018). The mission has been instrumental in brokering agreements, such as the Libyan Skhirat

Agreement signed in 2015, aimed at addressing political divisions and establishing a unified government (Mustafa, 2022; Asiedu, 2017). However, challenges remain in implementing these agreements and consolidating authority (United Nations, 2015; Salamé, 2017). Despite the complexities and challenges, the UN's involvement in Libya serves as a valuable case study in mediating political conflicts and navigating post-conflict state-building efforts (Smith, 2020).

8. CONCLUSION

Since the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 and after the establishment of the Security Council, its primary mission has been to build peace and resolve conflicts after what befell the world as a result of the two world wars. The international community wanted to establish an organization responsible for protecting countries from conflicts and wars.

In the turbulent landscape of the Libyan conflict since the fall of the Gaddafi regime in 2011, the United Nations has emerged as a key player in facilitating peace and stability, in this research our primary goal was to shed light on the role of the United Nations in

The Role of The United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping: Case of Libya

resolving the Libyan conflict, in which the parties to the conflict varied from terrorist groups to political bodies and external interventions that increased the complexity of the situation and made Libya live in a state of long division, and these parties did not meet until after The Skhirat Agreement, in which the United Nations laid the foundation stone for the settlement, and through the United Nations mission, which focused on supporting the transitional phase and providing a multifaceted role that includes political and humanitarian dimensions, for the sake of peace and stability. Challenges remain, including external interference and social and economic injustices, but continued international support and Libyan-led initiatives are key to overcoming obstacles. Despite the difficulties, UN involvement offers hope for a peaceful and inclusive future in Libya.

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The Role of The United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping: Case of Libya

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