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The UN Initiative in Libya – A Technical and Political Pathway to Elections?

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1. Background and Rationale:

The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) established a 20-member Libyan Advisory Committee in February 2025¹. Comprising experts in law, constitution, and electoral matters, its mandate was to provide technically sound and politically feasible options to resolve the contentious issues blocking national elections. This initiative stemmed from a UN assessment that the current political stalemate is unsustainable, threatens Libya's unity and sovereignty, and fuels public anger over the inability to choose representatives.

¹ Ibrahim Osman Adam Ali/Ibrahim Musa Said Qaradah/Abulqasim Ramadan Abulqasim Bribesh/Amina Khairallah Mohammed Al-Hasia/Jaziya Jibril Mohammed Shuaitir/Zahra Ali Al-Mazoughi Tibar/Abdul Fattah Khalifa Al-Suwayi Al-Saiih/Abeer Ibrahim Al-Sanussi Amina/Essam Youssef Miftah Al-Mawi/Ali Saeed Ali Al-Barghathi/Ali Mahmoud Hamad Khairallah/Omar Ibrahim Omar Ahsain/Kamal Mohammed Hudhaifa Al-Houni/Al-Koni Ali Rahouma Aboudah/Lamees Abdul Majeed Bin Abubakr Bin Saad/Mohammed Hassan Bashir Obaid/Maryam Abubakr Khalil Amghar Mohammed Addeh/Nouri Khalifa Omar Al-Abbar/Nouri Abdullah Al-Mahdi Abdul Aati/ Wafia Ahmed Abdul Majeed Saif Al-Nasr

2. Mandate and Findings of the Advisory Committee:

The Committee's work was framed by existing Libyan agreements and UN Security Council Resolution 2755 (2024)². It conducted a comprehensive analysis of the constitutional amendment 13³ and electoral laws 27⁴ and 28⁵ of 2023, identifying key legal and institutional obstacles to credible elections:

- Legal Issues: An unjustified constitutional linkage and mandatory simultaneity between presidential and parliamentary elections; ambiguous candidacy requirements (e.g., dual nationality, prior convictions); complex nomination procedures; and inadequate regulation of electoral appeals.
- Institutional Issues: Persistent security and institutional divisions; the lack of a unified body to secure elections; and the absence of independent funding for the High National Elections Commission (HNEC)⁶.

3. Key Recommendations of the Advisory Committee:

The Committee proposed detailed technical solutions to these problems, including:

- Decoupling Elections: Severing the legal link between presidential and parliamentary elections, allowing each to proceed on its own merits.
- Candidacy Requirements: Allowing dual nationals to run provided they pledge to renounce foreign citizenship upon winning, enabling a candidate to win in the first round with an absolute majority.
- Government Formation: Stressing that a new, unified government with a maximum 24-month mandate is a political and legal necessity to oversee the elections, ensuring neutrality and security.
- Representation: Recommending increasing women's representation in parliament to 30% and enhancing quotas for cultural components to ensure fair inclusion.
- Electoral Appeals: Reforming the appeals process to make it more efficient and less susceptible to obstruction.

4. National Consultations and Public Opinion:

UNSMIL supported the Committee's work with extensive public consultations, including surveys of over 22,000 Libyans. Key findings revealed that:

² <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4065149>

³ <https://lawsociety.ly/legislation/%D%8A%7D%84%9D%8AA%D%8B%9D%8AF%D8%9A%D%-84%9D8%A%7D%84%9D%8AF%D%8B%3D%8AA%D%88%9D%8B%1D8%9A-%D%8B%1D%82%9D-13-85%9%D%84%9D%8B%3D%86%9D%8A2023-9/>

⁴ <https://lawsociety.ly/legislation/%D%82%9D%8A%7D%86%9D%88%9D%-86%9D%8B%1D%82%9D-85%9%-27D%84%9D%8B%3D%86%9D%8A%-2023-9D%-85%9D%8A%8D%8B%4D%8A%3D-86%9%D%8A%7D%86%9D%8AA%D%8AE%D%8A%7D%8A%-8D%85%9D%8AC%D%84%9D%8B-3%D%8A%7D%84%9D%8A3/>

⁵ <https://lawsociety.ly/legislation/%D%82%9D%8A%7D%86%9D%88%9D%-86%9D%8B%1D%82%9D-85%9%-28D%84%9D%8B%3D%86%9D%8A%-2023-9D%-85%9D%8A%8D%8B%4D%8A%3D-86%9%D%8A%7D%86%9D%8AA%D%8AE%D%8A%7D%8A%-8D%8B%1D%8A%6D8%9A%D%8B-3%D%8A%7D%84%9D%8AF/>

⁶ <https://h nec.ly/>

- The top priority for a roadmap is to avoid extending transitional periods (39%).
- The most urgent measure is enhancing electoral security (96%).
- The most critical issue to address is unifying state institutions and ending political division (56%).

5. The New UN Roadmap (Tetteh Proposal):

Building on the Committee's recommendations and public sentiment, SRSG Hanna Tetteh presented a new roadmap to the UNSC on August 21, 2025. It is structured around three pillars over 12-18 months:

- Technical Electoral Framework: Implementing a sound legal framework for concurrent presidential and parliamentary elections.
- Unified Institutions: Establishing a new unified government to lead the transition.
- Structured Dialogue: Facilitating a broad-based Libyan dialogue to address critical issues for a conducive electoral environment.

A proposed timeline includes reconstituting the HNEC and enacting legal amendments within two months, followed by the formation of a new unified government.

6. Reactions and Challenges:

- Official Libyan Reactions: Key figures (Presidential Council head Al-Menfi, PM Dbeibah, PM-designate Hammad, and Aqila Saleh) expressed general welcome but emphasized different priorities: a binding timeline, resolving electoral law disputes, or the immediate formation of a new government. The High State Council also welcomed the initiative.
- The Libyan Presidential Council welcomed the plan and stressed the necessity of establishing a binding timeline and resolving disputes over electoral laws through a referendum or alternative pathways. Council President Mohamed Yunus al-Menfi welcomed the «sincere efforts» of the UN envoy, particularly regarding her «accurate reading» of the political scene and her emphasis on the «necessity of setting a clear timeline that obligates the two councils (Parliament and the High State Council) to agree on resolving the remaining contentious points.» Al-Menfi stated, «The time has come to give the people the final say in determining their destiny, starting with a referendum on the contentious articles in the electoral laws, and on the alternative path should the disagreement between the two councils persist.»
- The Head of the Government of National Unity, Abdulhamid Dbeibah, considered the major obstacle to still be the electoral laws, affirming that the solution is to head directly towards elections. He said: «From the beginning, I emphasized that the electoral laws are the obstacle that has stalled the election process since 2021,» adding, «I repeated this multiple times - and today the Special Envoy's briefing to the Security Council confirms what we said and makes addressing this point a fundamental priority for launching the roadmap, whose preliminary features were announced today; this is something we welcome and support.» Al-Dbeibah considered that «any roadmap that pushes towards elections and the unification of all institutions without exception represents a step in the right direction.» He continued: «Our position is firm: going directly to elections based on implementable laws is the only solution to end the political division and achieve the will of the Libyans.» He went on to say: «The real bet remains on the awareness and free will of the Libyans, which we are working to translate practically through a comprehensive

ational consultation⁷ that ensures the voice of every Libyan is present in this entitlement.» Speaking about what he called his «firm stance,» he said that «going directly to elections, based on implementable laws, is the only solution to end the political division and achieve the will of the Libyans,» considering that «consensus on ending parallel bodies, according to the framework of the Political Agreement and its appendices, is welcome and supports the unification path, but it must not be a pretext to delay elections or obstruct the will of the people.» Al-Dbeibah concluded that «Libyans look to the Security Council to support the election process and hold obstructers accountable; so that the voice of the international community supports our people's aspirations for a unified, stable, prosperous state, and a government they choose themselves.»

- In a related context, the head of the parliament-designated government, Osama Hammad, said in a statement that he «welcomes the roadmap announced by the UN envoy in accordance with one of its essential elements, namely the necessity of forming a new unified executive authority for the entire Libyan territory.» Hammad renewed «his government's commitment to the demands of the Libyan people,» affirming «his government's support for the voice and will of the people calling for the formation of a new unified executive authority that achieves their aspirations to build a stable state based on the principle of peaceful transfer of power through free and fair parliamentary and presidential elections.» He also affirmed «his government's readiness to cooperate with all national and international parties in a manner that serves Libya's supreme interest and preserves its sovereignty.»
- For his part, Aguila Saleh welcomed the call made by Tetteh to form a «new unified government» tasked with preparing for simultaneous presidential and parliamentary elections, considering it a «fundamental step towards unifying the executive authority and enhancing unity.» He affirmed his «full support» for the call to form the government «in a way that ensures the unification of state institutions, preserves national sovereignty, and achieves the aspirations of the Libyan people for security, development, and prosperity,» reminding that Hammad's government «is the legitimate government emanating from the House of Representatives, which has gained its confidence.»
- The High State Council (HSC) welcomed the briefing, stressing its «full support for the international and national efforts seeking to achieve permanent stability and preserve Libya's sovereignty,» and affirming its readiness for «constructive cooperation with the Mission and all parties to contribute to preparing the appropriate climate for the electoral process.» It then received Stephanie Khoury, Deputy Special Representative for Political

⁷ It is worth recalling that in December 2023, the Head of the Government of National Unity, Abdul Hamid Dbeibah, issued Resolution No. 572, which established a permanent high committee called the «High Committee for National Survey,» chaired by the Director of the Government Communication Center. According to its founding resolution, the committee will be responsible for conducting national surveys and inquiries, documenting data on issues and matters of concern to citizens and the government in all their forms, ensuring full transparency, and enabling individuals to participate in surveys electronically through a government digital platform. As per its establishment decision, the committee will undertake tasks such as proposing topics for surveys, monitoring their implementation, collecting and preserving data, information, and documents using technical and scientific methods, as well as tracking data compilation and analysis with precision. It will also follow up on all platforms concerned with publishing the results and oversee media and awareness campaigns during the execution of the surveys.

Affairs in UNSMIL, to review the roadmap and discuss how to address the situation of the High National Elections Commission alongside the contentious points in the electoral laws⁸.

6.1. Reactions of Libyan Political Parties

The reactions from Libya's political parties to the UN roadmap were deeply fragmented, reflecting the country's polarized landscape. Their positions ranged from full endorsement to outright rejection, with several parties adopting a conditionally critical stance.

The Democratic Independent Party adopted a rejecting and skeptical stance. Its statement sharply criticized the UN Envoy for allegedly ignoring human rights violations and raised doubts about the accuracy of her reporting. The party dismissed the proposed 12-18 month timeline as a waste of time and public funds. It fundamentally rejected the involvement of the existing House of Representatives (HoR) and High State Council (HSC), labelling them as «dilapidated bodies» that would only lead to further political bargaining. The party also rejected a return to previous dialogue frameworks like Berlin or Skhirat, citing their historical failures. Instead, it demanded the immediate formation of a comprehensive national government, binding international action to hold spoilers accountable, and a new political path based solely on popular will.

The Libyan Parties Alliance expressed a stance of radical rejection. It opposed the UN's approach, perceiving it as a mechanism for «managing the crisis» rather than solving it. The Alliance rejected any solutions that would grant a new lease on life to what it considers expired authorities. It accused the UN Mission of marginalizing genuine national parties and forces and of succumbing to the hegemony of intervening states, becoming a tool for external powers. Its core demand was for a foundational political process, such as a constituent assembly, to replace the current institutions and break from foreign interference.

The Justice and Construction Party offered a constructively critical stance. It cautiously welcomed any steps aimed at ending transitional phases but focused its criticism on the international community's lack of enforcement mechanisms. The party argued that the UN Security Council's failure to impose sanctions on obstructing parties was a key reason for the prolonged crisis. It advocated for a comprehensive political process with a solid constitutional foundation to lead to elections, placing it in the category of conditional supporters who require sufficient guarantees to endorse the process.

The Popular Voice Party exhibited a rejectionist and populist stance. It completely rejected the roadmap, viewing it as a new chapter in a repeated effort to prolong the crisis. The party accused the UN Mission of no longer being an honest broker but rather «a party to the crisis.» Its solution called for a purely national process free from external guardianship, where a free national will would decide the state's form and system. It mobilized for popular rejection of what it termed a «political farce,» advocating for an independent, sovereign state.

Conversely, the Democratic Party maintained a stance of full endorsement. It welcomed the roadmap as an important and urgent step to overcome the political stalemate. The party expressed clear support for the technical steps outlined, including amending electoral laws, reforming the electoral commission, and forming a new government within two months. It viewed the proposed structured dialogue as a vital opportunity for consensus and called on all Libyan stakeholders and the international community to support the UN Mission and ensure the plan's success.

⁸ Despite this welcoming stance, a statement issued by the High State Council on 26 August stated:»The Council decided to form a committee from among its members to study the roadmap and present its report to the Council for appropriate decision.»It also addressed «the unilateral measures taken by the House of Representatives and its violation of the Libyan Political Agreement signed in Skhirat regarding the appointment of holders of military and security positions,» deciding to «reject those decisions and consider them null and void,» calling for «the necessity of adhering to the Constitutional Declaration and its amendments, and the agreements, foremost among them the Skhirat Agreement.»

The Libyan National Rally Party presented a stance of conditional criticism. It acknowledged a «cautious awareness» of Libyan aspirations in the Envoy's briefing but expressed deep skepticism about its feasibility. The party strongly criticized building the roadmap on institutions it deemed incapable and divided, arguing that bodies that have «fed on failure» could not produce radical solutions within two months. It demanded a new foundational path, such as forming a new council with overwhelming popular support, to replace the current institutions. However, it left the door open for cooperation if the Mission demonstrated a genuine intent for a comprehensive solution rather than a «reproduction of crisis tools.»

The Libya Al-Karama (Dignity) Party expressed a supportive stance with clear priorities and conditions. It affirmed its support for a national roadmap leading to elections but outlined specific prerequisites. These included the necessity of involving all active political and civil society forces and forming a new unified interim government. Crucially, it asserted that the General Command of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces, under Khalifa Haftar, is the indispensable national guarantor for implementing the roadmap, preserving state unity, and countering obstruction. This position frames its endorsement as conditional on specific institutional and security guarantees.

6.2. Reactions of Civic and Regional Groups

Responses from civic and regional groups varied from full support to conditional engagement, often centered on specific demands or alternative proposals.

The Political Bureau of Saif al-Islam al-Gaddafi was supportive and pragmatic. It unambiguously endorsed the UN proposals, interpreting them as a viable and timely framework to break the political impasse. Its statement focused on practical implementation, emphasizing the importance of the technical steps—unifying institutions and forming a government with a sole electoral mandate—and called for broad consensus to ensure the process's success, reiterating explicit support for UNSMIL.

A group of citizens presented a legal-innovative initiative through a formal petition to the Supreme Court. This approach advocates for a judicial resolution to the constitutional deadlock. It petitions the court to apply an international legal principle to forgo a public referendum, arguing that the vote of the constituent body (43 out of 57 members) was a sufficient expression of national will, citing a 1951 precedent. The goal is to establish new constitutional legitimacy through a binding judicial decision, thereby bypassing political blockages and conclusively ending the transitional period.

The Peacemakers Team was conditionally supportive with a focus on popular legitimacy. It welcomed the briefing as an important step but contended that any roadmap is susceptible to failure without enhanced mechanisms for popular validation. It insisted that all outputs of the political dialogue must be subjected to a popular referendum to ensure legitimacy and serve as the foundation for a new social contract. The group emphasized the critical role of civil society in the dialogue and affirmed its readiness to contribute its expertise in community mediation.

A Team for Political Dialogue and Reconciliation was guardedly supportive with a sovereignist emphasis. It accepted the UN framework as a potential vehicle for ending the transition but predicates its full support on the prioritization of its own «national roadmap.» It strongly emphasized national ownership and institutional unification as a prerequisite for elections. The team urged the UN Security Council to adopt a binding resolution with clear enforcement mechanisms and sanctions for spoilers, while simultaneously affirming the primacy of national sovereignty and rejecting external imposition.

The Supreme Council of the Amazigh of Libya adopted an issue-specific and conditional stance. Its engagement is predicated on the fulfillment of specific demands concerning representation and cultural rights. The council demands legally guaranteed representation for the Amazigh

component (no less than 10%) in any dialogue and future authorities. It stipulates that any future political document must explicitly protect cultural diversity and demands a dedicated constitutional dialogue track under UN supervision. It also called for immediate institutional reforms to prevent state institutions from being used for exclusion or repression

6.3. Reactions of the International Community

The international community's response to the UN roadmap was broadly supportive but nuanced, reflecting distinct strategic priorities and diplomatic approaches among key global and regional actors.

Regional powers and organizations expressed strong endorsement. The Arab Republic of Egypt welcomed the proposal, with a particular emphasis on the formation of an interim government and the critical importance of adhering to the 12-18 month timeline to ensure credibility. It underscored the necessity of a sound electoral process for concurrent presidential and parliamentary elections and renewed its full support for UN efforts to restore stability while preserving Libya's unity and sovereignty. The European Union and its Member States issued a strong welcome, describing the roadmap as comprehensive and consultative. They praised its three-pillar structure, urged the swift reconstitution of the High National Elections Commission, and declared readiness to provide tangible support, including holding obstructers accountable. The EU notably coupled its support with a firm condemnation of a rocket launch near the UN headquarters, labeling it an unacceptable act of intimidation. The African Union welcomed the plan, calling on Libyan parties to engage in good-faith dialogue and reconciliation. It praised the efforts of its own High-Level Committee on Libya and expressed its full support for the UN roadmap, characterizing it as a fundamental step towards peace and stability. Similarly, the Arab League welcomed the initiative as an opportunity that must be seized, emphasizing the necessity of Libyan ownership and leadership of the political process while reaffirming its commitment to supporting dialogue and preserving Libya's sovereignty.

The positions of permanent members of the UN Security Council revealed a spectrum of support conditioned by differing foreign policy doctrines. The United States of America, along with Britain and France, framed the plan as a decisive «last chance» to unify institutions and hold elections. The U.S. specifically highlighted ongoing violations of the arms embargo and illicit oil trafficking, explicitly hinting at the imposition of sanctions against spoilers. In contrast, China and the Russian Federation prioritized the principles of sovereignty and non-interference. Both stressed that any viable political path must emanate from an internal Libyan consensus and not be externally imposed. Russia further insisted that a political settlement must be accompanied by a balanced withdrawal of all foreign forces and mercenaries from the country.

This divergence underscores a fundamental tension within the international response: between those advocating for a timed, enforceable process with consequences for obstruction, and those emphasizing an uncompromised, internally-driven solution, highlighting the ongoing challenges in achieving a cohesive international consensus on Libya.

Observers' assessments of the UN envoy's efforts remain divided. Some critics argue that her approach essentially recycles the crisis without offering tangible solutions, clear timelines, enforceable guarantees, or functional mechanisms to conclude Libya's prolonged transitional phase. They contend that she relies on the same institutional actors—namely the High State Council and the House of Representatives—alongside factions practicing “politics of fait accompli,” while excluding broader political, academic, and civil society voices from the dialogue.

Others maintain that placing excessive expectations on the UN to resolve the crisis—after fourteen years of conflict—is increasingly unrealistic. They highlight the organization's historical limitations in mediating wars, compounded by a divided UN Security Council that lacks the cohesion to impose a settlement. From this perspective, sustainable solutions must ultimately emerge from within Libyan society itself, rather than through external imposition.

Further skepticism concerns the viability of forming a unified government via consensus between the House of Representatives and the State Council. Critics point to the close alignment between State Council head Mohamed Takala and Government Head Abdulhamid al-Dbeibah, which may hinder genuine engagement in the executive pathway. The emphasis on municipal elections is also viewed by some as a tactical pressure mechanism rather than a substantive step toward resolution. Moreover, the absence of binding legal guarantees to ensure implementation remains a recurring weakness in UN-led initiatives.

More fundamental reservations question the feasibility of the envoy's new roadmap, which predicates progress on the existence of a "suitable environment"—a condition undermined by ongoing security challenges, militia dominance, and institutional fragmentation across eastern and western Libya. The proposal lacks concrete mechanisms to create such an environment or to enforce compliance, particularly given the Security Council's internal divisions and inability to sanction obstructionists effectively. Past agreements, such as Skhirat (2015), Paris, Berlin, and Geneva, have often been met with rhetorical acceptance but practical sabotage by parties seeking to preserve their interests.

Despite these criticisms, some observers consider the current UN plan the most structured and realistic initiative to date, offering a potential pathway out of political deadlock. They highlight its inclusive design and practical mechanisms as strengths that could foster broader consensus. However, developments in eastern Libya—including the suspension of municipal elections and reported moves to consolidate military authority under Khalifa Haftar—suggest a deepening institutional divide that may complicate any unification effort. Such actions indicate a preference for entrenching regional autonomy rather than pursuing national reconciliation.

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