The Impact of Political Division on Libya's International Standing

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أثر الانقسام السياسي في مكانة ليبيا دوليا

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Abstract:

A Nationally Agreed Foreign Strategy as a Necessary Step toward Restoring Libya's International Standing In light of the instability Libya has experienced since 2011, political division has emerged as one of the most serious challenges affecting the structure of the state and its core functions, particularly foreign policy and international representation. This study is based on a central research question: What is the impact of political division on Libya's position within the international system? It seeks to analyze the relationship between the persistence of internal political fragmentation and the decline of Libya's effective presence on the international stage. The study aims to examine and analyze the dimensions of this impact through four main axes: First, the theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding the relationship between political division and a state's international standing. Second, tracing the historical stages of Libya's political division from 2011 to 2025. Third, analyzing the impact of political division on foreign policy and diplomatic representation. Finally, examining the repercussions on Libya's image and position within the international system. The study concludes that political division has weakened the unity of Libyan decision-making, led to duality in external representation, and eroded international trust. This has negatively affected the state's ability to negotiate, formulate foreign policy, and participate effectively in international forums. The findings also reveal that Libya has gradually shifted from an independent regional actor to an arena of external competition, contributing to the erosion of its geopolitical position. The study recommends the unification of state institutions—particularly the diplomatic apparatus—and the formulation of a nationally agreed foreign policy strategy as a necessary step toward restoring Libya's international standing.

Keywords: Political Division, Libya's International Standing, Foreign Policy.

الملخص:

استراتيجية خارجية وطنية متفق عليها، كخطوة ضرورية نحو استعادة مكانة ليبيا الدولية. في ظل حالة عدم الاستقرار التي تشهدها ليبيا منذ عام 2011، برز الانقسام السياسي كأحد أخطر التحديات التي أثّرت في بنية الدولة ووظائفها الأساسية، وعلى رأسها السياسة الخارجية والتمثيل الدولي. تنطلق هذه الدراسة من إشكالية رئيسية تتمثل في: "ما أثر الانقسام السياسي على مكانة ليبيا في النظام الدولي؟"، وتحاول تحليل العلاقة بين استمرار الانقسام الداخلي وتراجع الحضور الليبي الفاعل على الساحة الدولية. سعت الدراسة إلى رصد وتحليل أبعاد هذا التأثير من خلال أربعة محاور أساسية: **أولًا**، الإطار النظري والمفاهيمي لفهم العلاقة بين الانقسام السياسي ومكانة الدولة؛ **ثانيًا**، تتبع المراحل التاريخية للانقسام الليبي خلال الفترة من

2011 إلى 2025؛ **ثالثًا**، تحليل تأثير الانقسام على السياسة الخارجية والتمثيل الدبلوماسي؛ **وأخيرًا**، دراسة الانعكاسات المترتبة على صورة ليبيا وموقعها ضمن النظام الدولي. توصلت الدراسة إلى أن الانقسام السياسي أضعف وحدة القرار الليبي، وأدّى إلى ازدواجية التمثيل الخارجي، وتراجع الثقة الدولية، وهو ما انعكس سلبًا على قدرة الدولة على التفاوض، وصياغة السياسات الخارجية، والمشاركة المؤثرة في المحافل الدولية. كما كشفت أن ليبيا تحوّلت تدريجيًا من فاعل إقليمي مستقل إلى ساحة تنافس خارجي، الأمر الذي ساهم في تآكل موقعها الجيوسياسي وتوصي الدراسة بضرورة توحيد مؤسسات الدولة، وخاصة الجهاز الدبلوماسي، ووضع استراتيجية خارجية وطنية متفق عليها، كخطوة ضرورية نحو استعادة مكانة ليبيا الدولية.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: الانقسام السياسي، مكانة ليبيا، السياسات الخارجية.

Introduction:

Since 2011, Libya has experienced a state of political and institutional fragmentation that has significantly affected its international standing and its ability to engage in effective diplomacy. Following the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime, Libya failed to establish stable and unified institutions, leading to multiple competing centers of political authority. Rival governments in the east and west, combined with the persistent influence of armed militias, have further complicated the political landscape. Recent studies show that these divisions have not only impacted internal governance but have also led to a decline in Libya's credibility and capacity to represent its interests effectively on the international stage (Democratic Academy, 2025).

One of the most evident consequences of this political split is the lack of unified international representation. The existence of multiple actors claiming legitimacy has hindered the development of consistent and reliable relations with states and international organizations. This ambiguity has created confusion about who officially represents Libya in global forums and weakened the country's ability to formulate a cohesive foreign policy. Rather than advancing national interests, foreign relations have often reflected internal rivalries (Democratic Academy, 2025).

In terms of international recognition, the political divide has resulted in uncertainty about the legitimacy of Libyan authorities, which has negatively impacted both bilateral and multilateral relations. Despite repeated international mediation efforts—especially by the United Nations—there has been limited success in creating a stable political environment that enables comprehensive elections and internal consensus (African Security Analysis, 2025).

Libya's crisis has also affected its regional and international geopolitical role, as foreign powers have become increasingly entangled in the internal conflict. The situation has turned Libya into a proxy arena for geopolitical competition, with external actors supporting various factions. This interference has weakened Libya's sovereignty and reduced its ability to maintain strategic control over its own foreign policy (Minbar Libya, 2024; The Soufan Center, 2024).

Moreover, despite ongoing international initiatives to reach a comprehensive political solution, Libya continues to slide down the list of global priorities, especially as attention shifts to other regional or global crises. This relative neglect has contributed to a slowed or frozen international response to Libya's reconstruction needs. Western analyses suggest that the lack of sustained focus has left Libya trapped in a cycle of foreign influence and internal division, with little ability to reclaim unified national decision-making (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

In conclusion, Libya's political fragmentation is not merely a domestic challenge but a complex issue with clear international ramifications. It has diminished the country's global presence and reduced its capacity to play an active, independent role in international affairs. Addressing this situation requires a unified internal political approach that can restore credibility and strengthen Libya's position in the global system.

Problem Statement:

Since 2011, Libya has faced a deep political crisis marked by a clear institutional division between rival authorities in the east and west, alongside the presence of non-state actors and the absence of a unified central authority. This prolonged political fragmentation has not only impacted internal governance and stability, but has also had significant repercussions for Libya's foreign relations. It has weakened the country's international presence and limited its ability to independently and effectively manage its foreign policy.

In light of growing regional and international involvement in Libya's internal affairs, and the resulting ambiguity surrounding the recognition of legitimate governance, there is a pressing need to examine the extent to which political division has affected Libya's international standing. This includes evaluating how the fragmentation of authority has shaped Libya's role in the regional and global systems and its performance within international institutions.

Accordingly, the main research question can be formulated as follows:
- To what extent has the political division in Libya affected its international standing since 2011?
This central question gives rise to several sub-questions, including:
• How has political division influenced the effectiveness of Libya's diplomatic representation?
• To what degree has the fragmentation of decision-making centers impacted Libya's relations with international organizations?
• How have external powers contributed to reshaping Libya's position in the international system?

Research Objectives:
This study aims to analyze the impact of political division in Libya on its international standing since 2011, with a focus on the political and diplomatic dimensions related to the fragmentation of authority and the weakening of official representation. The main objectives of the study are as follows:
1. To analyze the manifestations of political division in Libya and its developments since the fall of the former regime.
2. To assess the impact of political fragmentation on the effectiveness of Libya's diplomatic representation in regional and international forums.
3. To examine the role of regional and international actors in responding to the political division and its influence on the international recognition of Libya's competing authorities.
4. To track changes in Libya's international position resulting from the political crisis, and evaluate whether its role as an international actor has declined or remained stable.
5. To propose recommendations that support Libya's ability to restore its international standing through resolving the internal political division.

Significance of the Study:
The significance of this study stems from the complex political context Libya has experienced since 2011, marked by persistent instability and institutional fragmentation. As foreign interventions increase and Libya's role in international forums declines, there is a pressing need for a scholarly analysis to understand how political division has impacted the country's international standing.

The theoretical significance of the study lies in its contribution to the body of literature on international relations in politically divided states. It offers an analytical framework to explore the relationship between domestic political structures and international engagement. The practical significance is reflected in providing insights for policymakers and the international community regarding the consequences of continued fragmentation and the potential for restoring balance in Libya's foreign policy through institutional unification.

Furthermore, the study sheds light on a relatively underexplored aspect of Libyan political research—the link between internal division and declining international effectiveness—which enhances comprehensive understanding of the crisis and supports the development of realistic strategies for resolution.

Methodology of the Study:
This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, aiming to describe and analyze the phenomenon of political division in Libya and interpret its implications for the country's international standing. This method allows for the connection between internal variables—such as the fragmentation of authority and institutional decline—and external developments in Libya's regional and international relations.

The study also employs the systems analysis approach to examine the relationship between the internal environment (Libya's political system) and external outputs (diplomatic representation and international position). This theoretical framework helps trace how institutional fragmentation and contested legitimacy affect the state's role in the international system.

Data collection relies on several tools, including:
• Analysis of reports and documents issued by international institutions (e.g., the United Nations, African Union).
• Review of previous academic studies and scholarly articles in both Arabic and English.
• Content analysis of official statements and press releases from the rival Libyan governments.
• Monitoring media coverage and research reports issued by regional and international think tanks.

These tools aim to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of the extent to which political division has influenced Libya's ability to maintain its international role and standing.

Scope of the Study:
This study is defined by a set of boundaries that delineate the scope of analysis, **as follows**:
1. Topical Scope: The study focuses on analyzing the relationship between political division in Libya and its international standing. It does not address economic or security aspects unless they directly influence diplomatic dynamics or foreign relations.

2. Temporal Scope: The study covers the period from 2011—the onset of the Libyan revolution and the fall of the former regime—until 2025. This timeframe allows for a comprehensive examination of the evolution of political fragmentation and its impacts over more than a decade.
3. Geographical Scope: The analysis is limited to the Libyan case, with references to relevant regional and international interactions where necessary, without engaging in direct comparisons with other countries.

Literature Review:

Since 2011, Libya has undergone profound political transformations due to sharp institutional fragmentation and the emergence of competing centers of political authority. This situation has drawn significant attention from researchers and regional and international think tanks, particularly because of its far-reaching effects on national sovereignty, foreign policy, and international standing. A review of relevant literature reveals a range of studies that addressed the political division from multiple perspectives—some focusing on national security, others on geopolitical dynamics and diplomatic performance. Below is a summary of the most pertinent studies, along with a discussion of their findings and the research gap this study aims to address:

First, a master's thesis from Al-Asmariya University (2022) titled *"Political Division and Its Impact on National Security: A Case Study of Libya"* examined the relationship between political fragmentation and the deterioration of national security structures. The study concluded that the existence of rival governments and contested legitimacy led to the erosion of state authority and loss of security control. This indirectly affected Libya's foreign representation, as external institutions mirrored the internal conflict rather than functioning as extensions of a unified sovereign authority.

Second, a report published by the French institute IRIS (2025), titled *"Political Stagnation in Libya and Its Geopolitical Consequences"*, argued that Libya's prolonged political stagnation created a strategic vacuum exploited by regional and international powers. This dynamic weakened Libya's role as an independent actor in its geopolitical environment and limited its ability to shape foreign policy based on clear national priorities.

A related study by the Democratic Arab Center (2025), titled *"The Impact of Political Fragmentation on Diplomatic Practices in Libya (2014–2025)"*, offered a direct analysis of how internal political divisions affected the performance of Libya's diplomatic missions. The study highlighted a lack of coordination among competing authorities, multiple claims to legitimacy, and diminished credibility in foreign relations—all of which contributed to a fragmented and ineffective foreign policy apparatus.

Similarly, a paper published by the Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies (2023), *"Political Divisions and Libyan Foreign Policy (2011–2023)"*, explored the impact of institutional fragmentation on Libya's foreign policy orientation. It found that internal disunity led to inconsistent positions on international issues and undermined Libya's credibility with global partners. This, in turn, weakened the state's ability to manage its external affairs effectively.

Complementing these findings, the *African Security Analysis* report (2025), titled *"Libya's Crisis in 2025: Fragmentation, Foreign Influence, and Prospects for Stability"*, concluded that political division eroded Libya's sovereignty and invited greater foreign interference. This dynamic contributed to a significant decline in Libya's independence in foreign policy decision-making and a diminished role in regional and international initiatives.

Finally, a study by *PeaceRep* (2022), *"Fragmentation of Peacemaking in Libya: Reality and Perception"*, examined how the multiplicity of internal and external actors undermined peacebuilding efforts. The study emphasized that institutional and political fragmentation weakened Libya's negotiating position and diminished its sovereignty in international diplomacy.

While these studies have made valuable contributions to understanding different aspects of Libya's political crisis, most of them focused primarily on security challenges or regional rivalries. Few have addressed the direct link between political division and the state's international standing in a comprehensive and systematic manner. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a focused analysis of how political fragmentation has affected Libya's diplomatic capacity and its role as an international actor—an essential dimension of state recovery and external legitimacy.

Theoretical Framework:

Axis I: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of Political Division and the International Standing of the State.

Political division is a multifaceted phenomenon in political science that refers to the fragmentation of political authority within a state, often resulting in competing centers of power that challenge governance, legitimacy, and institutional coherence. Conceptually, political fragmentation can emerge from structural weaknesses within the state, disputed legitimacy, societal polarization, or external pressures that exacerbate internal divisions. Fragmentation is not limited to electoral systems or partisan competition; it also encompasses institutional breakdowns where power disperses across rival

factions or parallel authorities, leading to a fractured political order. This fragmentation creates institutional tensions that constrain the ability of a state to formulate and implement coherent public policy, both domestically and internationally (Political Fragmentation Definition, 2026).

Political division has been linked in the literature to broader discussions regarding state capacity and institutional performance. Research on fragmentation emphasizes that when political power is diffused among competing actors, the effectiveness of governance weakens, and the central authority struggles to maintain unified control over its decisionmaking processes, which in turn affects how the state interacts externally. In contexts of profound fragmentation, the fragmentation of authority undermines normative instruments of state action and often correlates with reduced ability to project unified strategies in international relations.

Closely related to the notion of political division is the concept of international standing, which refers to a state's position and reputation in the international system, determined by its diplomatic influence, recognition, participation in international institutions, and capacity to shape transnational norms and decisions. In international relations theory, standing is influenced by both material and normative factors, including state capacity, legitimacy, governance stability, and adherence to international norms. A stable political order is central to sustaining credible foreign policy commitments and diplomatic engagement.

The theoretical linkage between internal political structures and international behavior is central to understanding how internal dynamics shape external outcomes. Realist and neorealist paradigms posit that internal upheavals and fragmentation influence a state's external capabilities and strategic behavior because internal coherence is seen as a prerequisite for projecting power internationally. Neorealism emphasizes that the international system is anarchic, and states must maintain internal cohesion to effectively compete or cooperate in global politics.

Moreover, constructivist and institutionalist perspectives argue that normative legitimacy and institutional coherence within the state are crucial for establishing stable international relationships and negotiating roles in multilateral arenas. From this vantage, political fragmentation that erodes legitimacy undermines international confidence and the state's diplomatic credibility (Political Fragmentation Definition, 2026).

In the context of Libya, a state plagued by enduring internal divisions since 2011, political fragmentation has become more than a domestic challenge—it now affects how the Libyan state is perceived and engaged with externally. It raises key questions regarding Libya's ability to maintain a coherent diplomatic posture, secure recognition from international actors, and participate effectively in international decisionmaking processes (Democratic Academy, 2025).

This conceptual framework provides the foundation for examining how internal political division interacts with external dimensions of state behavior, and it sets the stage for analyzing the subsequent developments in Libya's political trajectory and diplomatic positioning in the international arena.

Definition and Dimensions of Political Division:

Political division refers to the fragmentation of authority and legitimacy within a state's institutional structure. It occurs when there is a breakdown in the political consensus necessary for unified governance, resulting in the emergence of rival power centers that compete over sovereignty, policy direction, and institutional control. Political division often arises from contested legitimacy, constitutional disputes, failed transitions, or external interventions that deepen existing fractures.

Scholars define political division not merely as partisan disagreement or ideological polarization, but as a condition in which state institutions lose coherence and multiple entities claim the right to represent or govern the state. In such contexts, government functions are duplicated, decisions are disputed, and public authority is segmented. This division may manifest horizontally—between branches of government or political elites—or vertically, as in the case of territorial fragmentation where rival governments control separate regions (Wolff, 2011; Fabbe & Gallagher, 2020).

Three core dimensions are commonly identified in the literature:

1. Institutional Fragmentation: Occurs when formal political institutions are divided or duplicated across competing authorities. This may involve the existence of parallel parliaments, governments, or security forces, as is the case in Libya since 2014 (Democratic Academy, 2025).
2. Legitimacy Contestation: Involves rival claims to legal and political authority. Competing actors often justify their control through divergent interpretations of law, revolution, or electoral mandates, undermining the legal foundation of state unity (Brownlee, 2007).
3. Territorial Control: Refers to physical fragmentation, where different factions exercise de facto control over specific geographic areas. This limits the central government's sovereignty and complicates national policymaking and foreign representation (Fabbe & Gallagher, 2020).

In fragile or post-conflict states, these dimensions often overlap and reinforce one another. The more these divisions persist and institutionalize, the harder it becomes to reestablish a unified political

authority capable of representing the state domestically and internationally. Political division in such cases transforms from a temporary governance crisis into a structural impediment to national sovereignty and global engagement.

The Concept of International Standing: Indicators and Determinants:

International standing refers to the position, reputation, and influence a state holds within the international system. It reflects how other states and international organizations perceive and engage with a given country, and it shapes the country's capacity to participate in global decision-making, form alliances, and secure its national interests on the international stage.

This standing is not static; it is shaped by a complex set of material and non-material factors. Among the most commonly identified indicators of international standing are:

1. **Diplomatic Recognition:** The extent to which a state is recognized as legitimate by the international community, including its acceptance into international organizations, the presence of embassies and consulates, and reciprocal diplomatic ties.
2. **Participation in International Institutions:** Active membership and engagement in regional and global organizations (e.g., the United Nations, African Union, Arab League), which enhance a state's visibility and policy influence.
3. **Foreign Policy Credibility:** The degree to which a state maintains coherent, stable, and consistent foreign policy behavior, which allows for trust and long-term strategic partnerships.
4. **Political and Institutional Stability:** States with stable governance structures and functional institutions tend to gain more respect and influence internationally, as they are perceived as reliable partners.
5. **Soft Power and Normative Influence:** A state's cultural, ideological, and normative appeal (e.g., promotion of democracy, peace, regional stability) can boost its international reputation, even if its material power is limited (Nye, 2004).
6. **Capacity for Global Engagement:** This includes military capabilities, economic power, and the ability to contribute to international peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, or global governance initiatives.

Theoretical frameworks—particularly within realist, liberal, and constructivist schools of international relations—offer various explanations for how international standing is built and maintained. Realists focus on material power and military influence as primary sources of standing. Liberals emphasize institutional participation and rule-based engagement, while constructivists highlight the role of identity, norms, and perceptions in shaping a state's external image (Nye, 2004; Keohane, 1984).

In the case of states experiencing internal fragmentation, such as Libya, these indicators are often compromised. Political instability, contested legitimacy, and inconsistent foreign policy all weaken international standing, leading to reduced diplomatic leverage, limited participation, and a decline in global credibility. Understanding these determinants is critical to assessing how internal political division impacts a state's external role and the pathways to restoring its position in the international system.

Theoretical Approaches Linking Internal Political Structures to International Role:

The relationship between a state's internal political configuration and its external behavior has long been a subject of scholarly debate in international relations. Various theoretical traditions offer distinct interpretations of how domestic structures—particularly those characterized by fragmentation or instability—influence a state's capacity to act, project influence, and maintain its position in the international system.

1. **Realist and Neorealist Perspectives:** Realist theories, particularly structural realism (neorealism), emphasize that the international system is anarchic and that states are primarily concerned with survival and relative power. According to Kenneth Waltz (1979), internal characteristics are less relevant than systemic constraints; however, internal political cohesion is seen as a prerequisite for effective power projection. A fragmented state is less likely to maintain consistent foreign policy, making it a weaker actor internationally. Neorealists argue that political disunity undermines the state's ability to engage in strategic planning and defense, and increases vulnerability to external interference.
2. **Liberal Institutionalism**: Liberal approaches focus on the role of domestic institutions, norms, and decision-making processes in shaping foreign policy. Scholars like Robert Keohane (1984) argue that states with transparent, stable, and participatory institutions are better equipped to build lasting international relationships. Internal fragmentation disrupts these institutional pathways, reducing a state's reliability and weakening its leverage in international cooperation. Furthermore, divided governments often send mixed signals to external actors, eroding trust and limiting alliance formation.
3. **Constructivist Approaches:** Constructivists, such as Alexander Wendt (1992), highlight the role of identity, legitimacy, and collective meaning in shaping international behavior. From this

perspective, internal political fragmentation affects how a state is perceived by others and how it constructs its own foreign policy identity. Competing authorities within the state may promote divergent narratives, weakening the state's unified presence and undermining its ability to act as a coherent international subject.

4. **State Capacity and Governance Theories:** Beyond the main IR paradigms, interdisciplinary approaches focusing on state capacity and governance quality argue that institutional coherence, bureaucratic functionality, and monopoly over legitimate violence are necessary conditions for effective foreign policy. Weak, divided states often experience "foreign policy paralysis," where decisions are delayed, inconsistent, or heavily influenced by external actors (Rotberg, 2004).

These theoretical frameworks converge on one critical insight: a state's internal political unity and institutional functionality are deeply linked to its external credibility and strategic influence. In cases like Libya, where political division has persisted for over a decade, these theories help explain the country's weakened diplomatic posture, inconsistent foreign policy outputs, and eroded position within international forums.

Axis II: Developments of Political Division in Libya (2011–2025):

Since 2011, Libya has witnessed an unprecedented state of political and institutional division, coinciding with the collapse of the central regime and the fall of Muammar Gaddafi, without the establishment of transitional institutions capable of effectively managing the new phase. This division was neither temporary nor incidental—it gradually evolved into a reality of competing centers of power and a struggle over legitimacy among political and military entities, amid increasing external interventions and the absence of a national consensus on a unifying political project.

This division took various forms across different stages, starting with conflicts among transitional bodies post-revolution and culminating in the presence of two rival governments (in Tripoli and Benghazi/Sirte) competing for control over state institutions, including the Central Bank, the military, and foreign diplomatic representation. This situation weakened central authority, caused policy inconsistencies, stalled the democratic process, and turned Libya into fertile ground for regional and international power struggles.

Based on this trajectory, this section is divided into two main headings:

1. **The Historical Stages of Political Division in Libya (2011–2025):**

Since 2011, Libya has undergone profound political shifts that led to a prolonged state of political and institutional fragmentation, linked to the fall of the previous regime without an institutional alternative capable of managing the transition in a stable manner. This division took on a cumulative nature, progressing from temporary political disputes to a structural split that affected state institutions and political legitimacy, weakening national sovereignty and unified decision-making.

Revolution and Initial Political Transition (2011–2012): The Libyan revolution erupted in February 2011 as part of the Arab Spring and ended with the fall of Muammar Gaddafi's regime in October of the same year. The National Transitional Council assumed power as a transitional authority and received international recognition as Libya's legitimate representative. However, this transitional period lacked a clear institutional vision for state-building and struggled with widespread arms proliferation and armed group formation, which later paved the way for power struggles (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.-a).

Institutional Breakdown and the Rise of Political Division (2013–2014): Following the first legislative elections in 2012, Libya entered a new phase marked by growing political polarization and weakened institutional performance. By 2014, the crisis escalated with disputes over the legitimacy of the newly elected House of Representatives, leading to a clear split in both the executive and legislative branches. Rival governments emerged in the east and west, accompanied by the growing power of armed groups and a transformation of the political conflict into a geographic and institutional divide (House of Commons Library, 2023).

Civil War and Multiplicity of Authorities (2014–2020): The political split escalated into what became known as the Second Libyan Civil War. Parallel authorities emerged, supported by local and regional military actors. Although the Libyan Political Agreement (Skhirat Agreement) was signed in 2015 and led to the formation of the Government of National Accord (GNA), the agreement failed to end the conflict due to the refusal of some parties to recognize its outcomes and the persistence of eastern-based parallel powers. This phase entrenched the division, institutionalizing it and making reconciliation more difficult (Wikipedia contributors, n.d.-b).

Attempts at Unification and Continued Division (2021–2025): In 2021, the Government of National Unity was formed under a UN-sponsored political roadmap aimed at unifying institutions and preparing for national elections. However, electoral delays and disputes over constitutional laws reignited political fragmentation, with a new parallel government emerging, backed by the eastern-based House of Representatives. Thus, the political division persisted into 2025 amid a climate of political stagnation

and fading prospects for national consensus (House of Commons Library, 2023; JABHA Center for Studies, 2025).

This historical trajectory demonstrates that Libya's political division was not a sudden or isolated incident. Instead, it evolved over time due to weak state institutions, competing claims to legitimacy, and a complex interplay of internal and external factors. This has contributed to the erosion of state authority and the transformation of political fragmentation into a persistent structural feature, significantly impacting Libya's domestic stability and international standing.

2. Internal and External Drivers of Division:

Libya's political division was not merely the result of a transient moment or the fall of the former regime alone, but rather the outcome of a complex interplay between structural internal factors and direct external interventions that shaped the conflict's trajectory. This overlap has prolonged the crisis, hindered resolution efforts, and turned the division into a deeply embedded political reality. These driving forces can be categorized into two main dimensions:

First: Internal Factors:

1. **Absence of a Centralized State and Constitutional Institutions:** Since 2011, successive transitional authorities failed to establish a permanent constitutional framework or build institutions capable of enforcing the rule of law and ensuring unified political decision-making. The lack of a consensual constitution and stable oversight institutions created a political vacuum that encouraged unregulated competition for power (Democratic Academy, 2025).

2. **Ideological and Regional Polarization:** Divergent ideological affiliations and regional and tribal loyalties deepened internal divisions. Political actors were split across Islamic, liberal, and tribal currents, exacerbated by sharp regional tensions between the east, west, and south. This fragmentation obstructed the emergence of a comprehensive political consensus (International Crisis Group, 2016).

3. **Proliferation of Weapons and Militias:** The spread of arms outside state control undermined efforts to build unified security institutions. Militias became dominant political actors, exerting pressure on governments and imposing power balances through force. This dynamic obstructed political dialogue and weakened overall security stability (UNSMIL, 2020).

4. **Failure of Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Mechanisms:** No serious national mechanisms were implemented to ensure transitional justice, reparations, or community reconciliation. As a result, grievances and divisions accumulated, while political crimes and human rights violations remained unaddressed (Al-Wasat, 2022).

Second: External Factors:

1. **Regional and International Intervention in the Libyan Conflict:** Libya became a battleground for regional rivalries, with various countries supporting opposing factions for strategic and economic reasons. States such as Turkey, the UAE, Egypt, and Russia backed different political and military actors, exacerbating the conflict and entrenching a balance of power that blocked both resolution and compromise (The Soufan Center, 2024).

2. **Conflicting International Interests Regarding Libya's Future**: International actors differed on how to resolve the crisis and who should represent Libya on the global stage. This divergence fragmented diplomatic efforts and obstructed UN-led initiatives, particularly in the context of competing economic interests in oil and irregular migration (African Security Analysis, 2025).

3. **Weakness of International and Regional Mechanisms to Enforce a Settlement:** Despite numerous initiatives, international and regional institutions such as the United Nations, the African Union, and the Arab League failed to impose a comprehensive and binding resolution. This failure stemmed from both divided international positions and a lack of domestic political will (UN Report, 2023).

The Libyan experience over more than a decade has shown that political division is not solely the result of internal collapse but also of external dynamics that fueled the conflict and entrenched polarization. Therefore, any sustainable solution requires addressing both internal and external dimensions simultaneously—by building legitimate and inclusive institutions and regulating foreign intervention in a way that supports national stability rather than serving external agendas.

Axis III: The Impact of Political Division on Foreign Policy and Diplomatic Representation:

Foreign policy is one of the most important tools through which a state protects its strategic interests, consolidates its sovereignty, and enhances its interaction with the international environment. However, the effective exercise of these roles depends on the presence of a stable and cohesive internal political structure that enables the formulation of unified external positions and their implementation through effective diplomatic channels (Nye, 2004). In Libya, since 2014, severe political division has led to a pronounced deterioration in diplomatic performance and the fragmentation of foreign policy into competing tracks representing rival governments and institutions.

The multiplicity of Libyan governments (including the Government of National Accord, the Government of Salvation, the Government of National Unity, and the Government of National Stability) has resulted in fragmented external decision-making and conflicting statements and positions on numerous regional and international issues (Democratic Academy, 2025). Each faction has sought to solidify its legitimacy by attracting external support, even if this meant signing contradictory agreements, dispatching rival ambassadors, or entering partnerships that do not reflect a unified national will.

Instances of dual diplomatic representation have become increasingly visible, with some embassies experiencing internal divisions or ambassadorial changes based on decisions by competing governments, leading many states and international institutions to lose confidence in identifying the legitimate representative of Libya (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025). This fragmentation has also negatively impacted Libya's performance in international forums, including the United Nations and the African Union, where its presence has been marked by weakness and decline, gradually stepping back from influencing matters related to its regional environment.

In addition, political division has affected Libya's ability to participate in major international negotiations on strategic issues such as energy, migration, regional security, and even reconstruction. A report by The Soufan Center (2024) noted that internal conflicts have turned Libya into an object of negotiation rather than an active negotiating party, leading to its marginalization from positions of influence and opening the door for regional and international powers to impose their agendas by supporting fragmented Libyan actors.

Accordingly, this diplomatic decline cannot be separated from the context of internal political division, which has undermined legitimacy, scattered the instruments of foreign policy implementation, and stripped Libya of its image as a unified state with a coherent external voice.

First: Foreign Policy Conflicts and Multiple Diplomatic Representation:

The ongoing political division in Libya since 2014 has led to multiple actors claiming to represent the state on the international stage, creating a clear conflict in foreign policy and weakening the state's ability to present a unified diplomatic narrative. In both the East and the West, parallel political authorities and institutions emerged, each with its own external priorities and positions, negatively affecting Libya's international credibility (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2023).

This political fragmentation has contributed to dual diplomatic representation, as each government entity appointed ambassadors and staff to diplomatic missions based on political loyalties and regional interests rather than representing the unified national interest. In recent years, there have been reports of increased spending and salaries within Libyan foreign missions abroad tied to non-professional appointment mechanisms grounded in partisan loyalty rather than diplomatic competence (Al-Arabia London, 2026).

Political division has also influenced official positions on regional and international issues. Since 2014, Libya has witnessed the coexistence of two principal governments: the UN-supported Government of National Unity in Tripoli and the eastern-aligned government linked to the House of Representatives in Tobruk. This has created differences in external engagements with various states, reflected in cooperation strategies with international partners such as Turkey, Russia, and neighboring countries, which often engaged with different factions to serve their own interests rather than promote a unified national agenda (Minbar Libya; The Soufan Center, 2024).

At the international level, Libya faces the problem of overlapping recognition between internal and external legitimacy. At times, a particular government received international representation despite lacking full domestic recognition, or vice versa, further complicating diplomatic missions and foreign states' approach to Libyan representation (Libya Tribune, 2023).

Consequently, Libya's diplomatic presence in international forums has encountered coordination difficulties and a lack of unified positions, affecting its ability to defend its interests on issues such as regional security, migration, and economic relations with external partners. In some instances, embassies have effectively become arenas for negotiating domestic political loyalties rather than serving as representatives of the unified national state (Al-Arabiya 24, 2026).

Second: Decline in Libya's Effectiveness in International Forums and Loss of Diplomatic Weight:

Political division in Libya has been a key factor in diminishing its capacity for meaningful participation in international forums and influencing decisions on regional and global issues affecting its core interests. States with unified legitimacy and coherent foreign policies typically strengthen their presence in multilateral arenas, whereas Libya's competing political structures have resulted in weak international representation and a fragmented diplomatic narrative, undermining its weight and effectiveness in the international system (Nye, 2004).

A prominent indicator of this decline is Libya's reduced participation in decision-making at global levels, whether at the United Nations or regional organizations such as the African Union and the Arab

League. In recent years, Libya has struggled to play an active role in shaping widely accepted policies or adopting unified positions reflecting state will, often becoming a passive recipient of international initiatives rather than an influential contributor (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

Political division has also affected Libya's diplomatic weight in the United Nations and other multilateral bodies. There have been periods of dispute over Libya's seat or representation in international institutions due to competing authorities claiming recognition. This has manifested in weak Libyan representation in numerous standing committees and major negotiations addressing energy, irregular migration, regional security, and peace and security in North Africa and the Mediterranean (African Security Analysis, 2025).

Moreover, this decline has eroded international partners' confidence in Libya's positions, as divergent official statements from competing entities have led many states to approach Libyan counterparts cautiously or with reservation, fearing that positions may be temporary or not truly reflective of unified authority. A report by The Soufan Center (2024) observed that this reality has led some countries to reprioritize their foreign policy engagement with Libya in ways that align with their own interests, rather than collaborating with a state possessing a consistent, unified external vision.

Beyond that, the absence of unified representation has weakened Libya's contribution to peacekeeping operations and regional negotiations, whether led by the United Nations or regional organizations. States that once regarded Libya as an important partner on issues like maritime security and counter-terrorism now find themselves dealing with multiple actors holding divergent views, limiting opportunities for effective cooperation and sidelining Libya from leadership roles in these arenas (The Soufan Center, 2024).

The decline in Libya's effectiveness in international forums is not merely a temporary indication of potential weakness. It reflects a deep erosion of the state's position within the international system due to ongoing political division, which has undermined its capacity to act as a unified and reliable actor on the global stage.

Axis IV: Consequences for Libya's Position in the International System:

Political division in Libya represents one of the most significant factors that has adversely affected the Libyan state's standing in the international system, causing it to lose much of the influence and power it once enjoyed prior to 2011. The ongoing internal fragmentation and the proliferation of competing authorities claiming legitimacy have clearly diminished Libya's ability to engage effectively in international politics and participate in decision-making processes that affect its regional and global interests. This impact is evident on multiple levels, including international recognition, strategic alliances, and global confidence, as well as in its effect on the international community's priorities regarding the Libyan file (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

Furthermore, Libya has often become a theater for external conflicts involving regional and international powers seeking to assert their influence on the ground by supporting local actors. These interventions have reinforced internal division and distanced Libya from its role as an independent political actor. The intensified involvement of external actors in Libyan affairs has pushed the crisis beyond its national borders, leaving Libyan politics relatively isolated from other major regional crises, such as conflicts in the Middle East and the Ukraine crisis. This has led to a decline in international attention to Libya and its core issues (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

The ongoing internal political division has also transformed Libya into a quasi-state with fragmented authority, where competing governments and parallel administrations weaken its ability to negotiate with international partners on strategic issues such as reconstruction, border security, and irregular migration management. This setback is reflected in reports by international institutions characterizing the country as politically fragile through 2025, still incapable of formulating a unified vision that effectively defends its interests in international forums (IMF, 2025).

The persistence of division also contributed to the decline of Libya's role in its surrounding regions, whether in North Africa or the Mediterranean. Libya has lost its status as a reliable actor in regional settlements or in combating cross-border terrorism. Literature indicates that continued instability led neighboring states and the international community to view Libya as a scene for containment of power struggles rather than a party capable of shaping political solutions (IRIS, 2025).

Additionally, the domestic situation has affected bilateral relations with many countries, as each Libyan political faction has cultivated its own international support networks according to its orientation and political agenda, resulting in divergent relationships with major global powers, including the European Union, Turkey, Russia, and the Gulf Cooperation Council states. This fragmentation has weakened Libya's ability to unify its strategic interests with those of its partners.

Thus, political division in Libya has not only impacted domestic life but has also led to a clear decline in the Libyan state's position within the international system, distancing it from centers of regional and

global decision-making. These repercussions continue into 2025, underscoring the necessity of restoring unified political decision-making as a foundation for improving Libya's international standing.

1. **Weakening of Unified International Recognition**:

International recognition is one of the most prominent indicators of state sovereignty and legal-political standing within the international system. In the Libyan case, this recognition significantly weakened after 2014 due to the multiplicity of competing political authorities, resulting in a lack of unified representation in international organizations and complicating bilateral relations with other states.

Since the outbreak of the crisis, multiple Libyan governments have emerged, each claiming legitimacy — such as the Government of Salvation in Tripoli, the interim eastern government, the Government of National Accord, and currently the Government of National Unity alongside a parallel government emanating from the House of Representatives. This proliferation created confusion in international positions, with some states and international actors recognizing one government over another, or later retracting recognition based on shifting balances and interests (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

This issue has manifested in several ways:

- **Dual representation in international organizations:** Disputes surfaced over who represents Libya at the United Nations or at Arab League meetings, especially during summits or discussions requiring a single voice on behalf of the state.
- **Differences in reception of official delegations:** At times, certain states refused to receive Libyan delegations due to legitimacy debates, or alternately received representatives from opposing factions at different times.
- **Conflicts within diplomatic missions:** Some Libyan embassies and consulates witnessed severe internal disputes, even disrupting their operations due to contention over who held official representation rights, affecting the state's reputation and complicating the protection of Libyan citizens abroad (Mediterranean Center for Strategic Studies, 2023).

Furthermore, this lack of unified recognition has negatively impacted international confidence in Libya's external commitments. Agreements or pledges made by one faction without national consensus are often seen as part of internal competition rather than expressions of sovereign policy, weakening Libya's ability to build long-term alliances (The Soufan Center, 2024).

This instability in diplomatic and political recognition has constrained Libya's negotiating position and limited its contribution to international decision-making, often leaving it vulnerable to external political manipulation and the competing interests of global powers.

2. **Libya's Transformation from a Regional Actor to a Field of External Influence**:

Before 2011, Libya was considered a state with relative influence in its regional environment, especially in North Africa and the Sahel, through its economic and political initiatives and direct relationships with African states. However, after the fall of the previous regime and especially with the escalation of political division after 2014, Libya gradually transformed from a regional political actor into a theater of external influence and conflict among regional and international powers.

Internal division, institutional fragmentation, and weakened central authority opened the door for multiple actors to intervene, each seeking to advance its own interests by supporting a specific Libyan faction. Libya became a focal point of competition among states such as Turkey, the UAE, Egypt, Russia, and France, each backing different Libyan actors militarily or politically. This deepened internal fragmentation and increased the dependency of local factions on external sponsors (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

This shift in Libya's regional position was not merely the result of external intervention but stemmed from the loss of key components of independent regional agency, particularly sovereignty erosion and the lack of a national consensus on foreign policy. Libya was no longer able to initiate or play a mediating role in issues affecting its region, such as migration, border security, or economic cooperation. Instead, it became a passive recipient of foreign interventions rather than a partner in crafting solutions.

Furthermore, this decline allowed external powers to leverage the Libyan crisis within broader geopolitical competitions, as seen in the Turkish-UAE rivalry or the broader Russian-Western divide, making Libya a stage for conflicts that extend beyond its borders and further diminishing its prospects of regaining its natural position within the regional order (The Soufan Center, 2024).

Over time, some Libyan institutions became beholden to regional agendas, advancing the interests of external sponsors rather than a unified national project, undermining Libya's political independence and reducing its remaining leverage in its geographic environment (IRIS, 2025).

3. **Decline in Libya's Negotiating Capacity and Policy Formulation**:

The ability to negotiate and formulate international policy is a hallmark of sovereign agency in the international system, and it depends on unified political decision-making, institutional stability, and clear

external visions. In Libya's case, ongoing political division since 2014 has weakened the state's capacity to engage in meaningful negotiations and coherently represent its interests in international arenas.

A prominent manifestation of this decline is Libya's weak negotiation position on issues related to irregular migration, energy, regional security, and reconstruction. In these domains, Libyan parties often entered negotiations piecemeal, reflecting the interests of local authorities or factions rather than a unified national vision. This fragmentation has undermined international partners' confidence in Libya's commitments and, at times, led to Libya's exclusion from serious negotiations or relegation to accepting externally-imposed outcomes (IMF, 2025).

Over the past years, Libya has also failed to develop a unified foreign policy or a national strategy for negotiating key issues. Instead, competing political actors have used foreign policy as a tool to gain external recognition or secure political and military support, resulting in contradictory official statements, conflicting agreements, and commitments that lack legal legitimacy (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

Moreover, the absence of internal consensus among executive and legislative institutions has hindered the establishment of a national agenda for negotiation and international engagement. As a result, several international tracks—including reconstruction projects and economic support—have stalled due to the lack of a unified Libyan entity capable of signing binding agreements. International and regional reports characterize Libya as a "state with deficient representation" in its external relations (IRIS, 2025).

This weakened negotiating capacity has deepened Libya's political marginalization in the international system, preventing the state from capitalizing on strategic opportunities, whether in economic partnerships or diplomatic initiatives, thus adversely affecting its regional and international standing.

4. **Erosion of International Confidence and Shifts in Global Priorities Regarding Libya**:

The continued political division has also resulted in the erosion of international confidence in Libyan actors and prompted the international community to reassess its priorities regarding the Libyan issue. While Libya was once central to the foreign policy agendas of several regional and global actors, in recent years attention has significantly shifted due to repeated political stalemates and the failure of negotiated outcomes.

The decline in confidence began with the repeated collapse of political dialogues, as well as the failure to implement the outcomes of international conferences, such as the Skhirat Agreement, the Berlin Conference, and Geneva consultations. The inability of Libyan actors to honor timelines for elections or uphold outcomes of national dialogues has weakened their credibility in the eyes of the international community (The Soufan Center, 2024).

Consequently, several countries and international institutions have recalibrated their engagement, prioritizing narrower humanitarian or security-related concerns—such as migration control or counter-terrorism—over comprehensive political solutions. This shift reflects a broader assessment that Libyan factions lack a genuine willingness to reach consensus, and that international interventions have yielded limited tangible results.

The concurrent existence of rival Libyan authorities and conflicting external interests has dispersed international efforts, undermining coordinated initiatives and reinforcing a kind of "crisis normalcy," where Libya's political situation is no longer seen as urgent compared to other global crises (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

This erosion of confidence has also been linked to a reduction in long-term development and investment support, as external actors hesitate to commit resources without a trustworthy and unified Libyan partner. Divergent diplomatic representations have further complicated Libya's relationships with international financial institutions, constraining its ability to benefit from economic opportunities or reconstruction assistance.

In total, Libya's diminished effectiveness and eroded credibility in the international community signify a profound shift in how the state is perceived globally, reinforcing its marginalization and highlighting the critical need for political unity as a precondition for restoring confidence and influence.

5. **Erosion of International Trust and the Shift in Global Priorities Toward Libya:**

One of the most significant consequences of the ongoing political division in Libya since 2014 has been the gradual erosion of international trust in Libyan actors, accompanied by a noticeable shift in the international community's priorities regarding the Libyan file. Whereas Libya once held a prominent position on the foreign policy agendas of several regional and international powers, recent years have witnessed a sharp decline in sustained international engagement, largely due to mounting frustrations over the failure to achieve a stable political settlement.

This decline in trust began with the repeated collapse of political dialogues and the failure to implement the outcomes of international conferences such as the Skhirat Agreement, the Berlin

Conferences, and the Geneva understandings. These failures were often the result of intransigence among local actors or their lack of full sovereign authority. Such behavior undermined the credibility of Libyan stakeholders in the eyes of the international community—especially when it came to honoring election timelines or adhering to the outcomes of national dialogue processes (The Soufan Center, 2024).

As a result, several countries and international organizations have reassessed their involvement in Libya. Many have reduced direct political engagement and instead shifted their focus to narrower humanitarian or security priorities aligned with their national interests—such as combating irregular migration or counterterrorism—without committing to a comprehensive settlement process (IRIS, 2025). This change in priorities reflects a growing belief that Libyan parties lack the genuine will to compromise and that continued international involvement yields diminishing returns.

The multiplicity of competing Libyan authorities, coupled with conflicting interests among their foreign backers, has further fragmented international efforts and obstructed unified initiatives. This has led to a form of "normalization of the crisis," whereby Libya is no longer seen as a top priority compared to other pressing global concerns such as the war in Ukraine, conflicts in the Middle East, or global energy challenges (Arab Center Washington DC, 2025).

This erosion of trust has also coincided with a decline in developmental support and investment, as international donors increasingly perceive Libya as an unreliable partner incapable of guaranteeing implementation or managing funds transparently. Diplomatic rivalry has also strained Libya's relations with international financial institutions, limiting its ability to benefit from economic and reconstruction opportunities.

In summary, Libya's continued political fragmentation has reshaped the international community's perception of the Libyan state as one lacking stability and sovereignty, diminishing its international standing and reducing foreign engagement to short-term, interest-driven interventions rather than efforts to rebuild a unified national state.

Conclusions:
1. Political division is the primary factor behind the decline in Libya's international standing. It has weakened the state's ability to speak with one voice in international forums and in formal diplomatic representation.
2. The proliferation of rival power centers and the failure of political unification initiatives have severely affected diplomatic performance, causing conflicting foreign positions and dual representations that undermined Libya's regional and international credibility.
3. Libya has shifted from being an independent regional actor to a battleground for external influence, eroding its political sovereignty and increasing its dependence on foreign powers that treat it more as a zone of influence than as a fully sovereign partner.
4. Internal fragmentation has obstructed the formulation of a unified foreign policy and reduced Libya's capacity to negotiate on critical issues such as reconstruction, security, and migration—creating confusion among international actors about who represents the Libyan state.
5. The erosion of international trust in Libyan actors has led the global community to scale back political involvement and focus on limited, security-based issues, weakening momentum for comprehensive international initiatives and pushing Libya to the margins of global influence.

Recommendations:
1. Reach a comprehensive political settlement that establishes a unified government with both domestic and international legitimacy, capable of managing foreign policy coherently and restoring confidence in Libya's official representation.
2. Restructure Libya's diplomatic corps based on professionalism and merit, rather than political loyalty, to ensure consistent messaging and reduce the problem of dual representation abroad.
3. Adopt a national foreign policy strategy grounded in Libya's long-term interests, regularly updated in coordination with official institutions and incorporating the insights of experts and former diplomats.
4. Limit regional and international interference in domestic affairs by aligning foreign relations with the principles of mutual interest and national sovereignty, achieved through consensus on the primacy of independent decision-making.
5. Restore Libya's regional role in North Africa and the Sahel through active participation in multilateral initiatives and by building strategic alliances that enhance its position in regional and global power dynamics.

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