

# Libya Country Brief



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Libya is still struggling to emerge as a free, stable society after decades of authoritarian rule under longtime dictator Muammar Qadhafi. Last year's lethal attack on an American diplomatic compound underscores Libya's shaky security situation and indicates that much remains to be accomplished in a post-civil war Libya. **America should help the country develop the capacity to defeat and disarm its anti-government militias.**

# Libya



**Population:** 5.3 million

**Capital:** Tripoli

**President:** Muhammad el-Marqaryaf  
(moh-HAH-mehd ehl mee-GAHR-yeef); since August 10, 2012



*CIA World Factbook , 2013*

*Tripoli has the will—but not the capacity—to extend government control throughout the country. In the aftermath of its civil war, Libya has been unable to stem internal political violence or effectively control its long borders. <sup>1</sup>*

- International diplomats are frequent targets in Benghazi: Last year's attack on the city's U.S. post, which killed our Ambassador and three other Americans, was not the only recent strike against foreign personnel; in January 2013, assailants fired upon the Italian consul general's car,<sup>2</sup> and in mid-2012, unknown attackers struck the British ambassador's convoy.<sup>3</sup>
- Following the strike on the U.S. diplomatic compound, tens of thousands of Libyans marched in protest against the attacks because they saw our Ambassador as a steadfast ally of the Libyan people.<sup>4</sup> However, local authorities have been unable or unwilling to move against the powerful Islamist militias and terror suspects behind the attack.<sup>5</sup>

*Following Qadhafi's fall, his arms depots were looted, flooding the country and the region with weaponry.* Some of these weapons—along with the veteran fighters who used them—remained in Libya, while others filtered into other countries across the region. Other countries, such as Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Israel, have expressed concern that Libyan arms are supporting local insurgents and fueling regional instability.<sup>6</sup>

- The U.S. is particularly concerned with Libya's looted stockpile of shoulder-fired, anti-aircraft missiles (also known as MANPADS), which pose a significant threat to both civilian and military airplanes and helicopters.<sup>7</sup> They are easy to use and to smuggle—making them a favored weapon of insurgent and terrorist groups.<sup>8</sup>
- Some fighters involved in the post-civil war violence have committed terrorist attacks in neighboring countries, including striking a gas field in Algeria and carving out an Islamist stronghold in Mali.<sup>9</sup>
- In the past, Libya had both chemical and nuclear weapons programs. Many of these programs' precursor materials still exist within the country, posing a proliferation risk until they are destroyed.<sup>10</sup>

*Securing long-term American security interests in Libya will require sustained policymaker attention.*<sup>11</sup> The U.S. government has already advanced plans to provide security and transition support to Tripoli, some in order to combat conventional arms and WMD proliferation.<sup>12</sup>

- In the last Congress, however, some legislators tried to condition or rescind American funds to secure Libyan borders, train Libyan forces, or continue anti-proliferation programs until certain specific conditions are met.<sup>13</sup>
- Spending funds now to secure Libya's porous borders, stabilize its generally pro-American government, and neutralize local and regional terrorist threats is firmly in our national self-interest.

#### TOPICS

**FOREIGN RELATIONS** 115

**TERRORISM** 98

#### END NOTES

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