

## Libya: What the analysts are saying

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One year after a popular uprising toppled its former dictator, Libya's new transitional government has failed to provide coherent state leadership and control, analysts say.

A continuing power struggle with [hundreds of militias](#) threatens Libya's transition towards a secure and democratic state. In the absence of national institutions, rebels instrumental in overthrowing former leader Muammar Gaddafi now run everything from detention centres to hospitals, but have also engaged in fatal clashes and stand accused of human rights abuses.

Recent weeks have seen a rise in [inter-militia violence](#); the killing of a [member of the former regime](#); and [fatal tribal clashes](#) in the south. [Revenge attacks](#) against the entire community of [Tawergha](#) have allegedly been [repeated against others](#) accused of fighting alongside Gaddafi during the war.

If the transitional government does not succeed in stabilizing state institutions in the coming months, observers fear national elections, scheduled for June 2012, could lead to a further escalation in conflict.

Here is a round-up of recent publications by think-tanks, analysts and human rights organizations:

A [16 February report](#) by **Amnesty International** accused the ruling National Transitional Council (NTC) of lacking both the authority and the political will to rein in militias, which it described as being "out of control". The report said militias were committing widespread human rights abuses, including torturing detainees, sometimes to death, during interrogations. Detainees told Amnesty they confessed to rapes and murders they had not committed just to stop the torture. Amnesty said the militias enjoyed "blanket immunity" and that the authorities had done "nothing" to investigate and prosecute war crimes.

**Médicins Sans Frontières (MSF)** [suspended its medical operations](#) in the coastal city of Misrata in late January, saying it was repeatedly treating patients who suffered injuries as a result of torture during interrogation sessions. Militia requests for MSF to care for detainees to

make them fit for further interrogation and torture were "unacceptable", MSF said.

In late November, the UN Secretary-General's [report](#) to the Security Council on the **UN Support Mission in Libya** cited discrimination against third country nationals and cases of individuals being targeted for the colour of their skin. It said militias had reportedly detained children alongside adults; held women under male supervision; and taken members of the Tawergha ethnic minority, many of whom fought alongside Gaddafi during the war, from their homes by force, abusing or executing them in detention.

Militias have become entrenched; they are well organized and have their own procedures for registration of members and weapons, the **International Crisis Group (ICG)** said in December, in [its latest report on Libya](#), but they are bound together by a quest for power and territorial security rather than a political agenda. "Militias mimic the organization of a regular military... they issue warrants; arrest and detain suspects... sometimes at substantial cost to communities subject to discrimination and collective punishment." Geographical inequality, power plays and fragmented chains of command have led to armed clashes between them, affecting the country's ability to develop, but militias should not be forced to disarm until their interests and security fears have been addressed, the ICG said. "Rebuilding Libya requires addressing their fate, yet haste would be as perilous as apathy."

Pushing the militias to disarm too hard or too fast could backfire by provoking resistance, the **Institute for Near East & Gulf Military Analysis (INEGMA)**, [agreed](#) in November 2011. "Some are predicting that a new conflict may be nearing a 50 percent chance of occurring." To avoid this, INEGMA research associate Ash Rossiter said the NTC should focus on increasing its own legitimacy and gradually building up national security forces.

But left unchecked, militia violence could bring the country back into civil war, the head of the NTC, **Mustafa Abdel Jalil**, [warned](#) in January.

The defence and interior ministries will require significant capacity-building in order to transform disparate groups into national military and police forces, Bob Perito, director of the US Institute of Peace's **Security Sector Governance Center of Innovation**, [wrote in early February](#), after meeting police, military and government officials in Libya.

Alina Menocal, a research fellow with the Politics and Governance Programme at the **Overseas Development Institute (ODI)**, said the transition to a new Libya would require more than the simple abolition of the militias, but rather a dialogue on how to sustain a political consensus that would make them secure enough to give up their arms and power. "A basic political settlement is missing," she wrote in a [2 February ODI blog post](#).

According to Joost Hiltermann, **deputy programme director for the Middle East and North Africa at ICG**, who participated in a [public discussion](#) on Libya hosted by ODI in late January, it is a bit of a vicious circle: A lack of security slows efforts towards greater rule of law, because without security, people turn to militias and warlords; and yet "until an elected, legitimate government is in place, regional militias will remain across the country and there will be no possibility of demobilization."

Elections in Libya will be "difficult to pull off" in the tight timeline, according to Sean Delly, deputy director of the Post-war Reconstruction and Development Unit (PRDU) at the University of York and former senior recovery adviser to the UN Development Programme

(UNDP), who also participated in the event.

Ibrahim Sharqieh, a foreign policy fellow at the **Brookings Institution**, [warned](#) in December 2011 that victory should not be confused with legitimacy in post-revolutionary Libya. An expert on conflict resolution in the Arab world, Sharqieh stressed that violence will only come to an end when rebels learn to work together towards national goals in the absence of the war-time unifier: Gaddafi's regime. Ownership, legitimacy, inclusion, reconciliation, capitalizing on tribalism and leveraging the skills of the rebels are imperatives moving forward, he said. "The reconstruction of Libya will benefit from the diversity of experiences the rebels have, as the process itself is multifaceted."

Because militias have tribal leanings, any moves to ensure stability should also take into account Libya's tribal political culture, according to Thomas Husken of the University of Bayreuth in Germany. Militias have empowered tribal leaders and led to a heavy tribal influence over the NTC and the current order, he wrote in an [article](#) published by the **Libyan Centre for Studies and Research** in January. The tribal structure is not compatible with Western models of democracy and its relationship with youth and urban civil society is "highly problematic", he said. "In the last months tribal politicians did not hesitate to push liberal groups, the educated urban youth and particularly women out of the political arena in order to gain power." This tension is likely to continue playing out during the transitional period.

The divisions between militias and the government and between the tribal structure and elements of society are two of many. While Libyans share an ownership of the revolution, complexities within that ownership could overrun the sense of unity that the revolution fostered, the **United States Institute of Peace** said in a January 2012 [special report](#). Divisions between the youth movement and the NTC; between Libyans who stayed and those from the Diaspora; between secular and religious groups; between tribes and ethnic groups; and of course, between militia groups, have increased tension and could intensify conflict to a point of no return if not addressed. The "swinging nature of rebel groups' allegiances" will further complicate attempts to re-establish normalcy," the report said.

In a [February 2012 two-part series](#), the **Jamestown Foundation** said the instability in Libya has transcended borders, leading to security problems in North and West Africa. The availability of looted Libyan arms has emboldened a Tuareg rebellion in Mali and could facilitate the creation of new armed groups in West Africa, the think-tank said. "The West's poorly considered support of a spontaneous Libyan rebellion lacking common aims, ideology or even basic organization has secured the present reality."

Jamestown also noted calls on social media for the NTC [to be overthrown](#) because of a perception that it is working for the "return of the Gaddafi dictatorship". Its leaders have been subject to verbal abuse and violent attacks by armed militia groups or protesters. "The ability of Libya's [NTC] to either project or promote conciliation seems to be diminishing rather than increasing," it said.