

Factors Influencing Libyan Foreign Policy and Pathways to Revamp the System

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ABSTRACT

The historical experience of the struggle against the Italian colonialism influenced the development of the foreign policy of Libya in terms of the rise of the nationalistic feelings and the adherence to the principles of sovereignty and anti-colonialism. These influential personalities such as Omar Mokhtar contributed to the defining of the Libyan region identity. The non-alignment and pan-Arab unity of Libya affected alliances and relationships between the country and the key countries during the Cold War. Since 2011, the political unrest, such as the lack of authority, the presence of armed forces, and tribal conflicts, have complicated the consistent foreign policy and deteriorated the international position of Libya. Although oil reserves act as both the asset and vulnerability, fragmented military capacity has decreased the capacity of the country to act as a region player. Enhancing the governance, instability of institutions, and external relations are key to reforming the Libyan foreign policy.

Keywords: *Libyan Foreign Policy, Political Fragmentation, Historical Influences, Oil Wealth, External Alliances.*

INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy of Libya has a historical, geographical and political context that influences it, and additionally, due to the dynamic character of the economic interests and the security aspect of the region. Oil wealth which has in the past formed the basis of the foreign involvements of the country continues to be a critical determinant in the foreign relationship of the country. Oil exports have been the dominant economic activity in Libya, and its strategic energy reserves are sought after by foreign powers interested in gain access to energy resources, which makes oil an asset and a source of conflict. The competition of such resources, however, is complicated by international influences to turn its governance, which makes the foreign policy decision-making of Libya especially difficult as it tries to manage its internal issues and protect its own economic interests (Alayat et al., 2025).

The strategic significance is also enhanced by the geographical location of the country. Libya is a significant actor in the security processes in the region due to its closeness to Europe, Sahel, as well as the Arab world in general. The Mediterranean coast of Libya, especially, has seen it become a focal point of Mediterranean

and African diplomatic negotiations, especially on migration, security and trade. These elements do not only affect the foreign policy goals of Libya, but also complicate the relations of this country with the neighboring states and foreign powers, which creates a fine-tuning of balancing between national sovereignty and involvement in expanded security systems (Lewis & Prelec, 2025).

Moreover, the domestic disintegration of Libya has resulted in the intricate pattern of security issues that affect the foreign policy perspectives of this country. A weakened state apparatus in Libya is a consequence of the fragmented political landscape of the country after the 2011 revolution, with different factions fighting over the control of power. This disintegration has compromised the capacity of Libya to project power or form coherent external relationships. It is also restrictive of the ability of the country to sustain long-term diplomatic activities because the warring parties usually have competing foreign policy interests. Therefore, the lack of central government has proven to be a crucial limitation to the capacity of Libya to affect both regional and international decision-making (Al Ghweiri, 2025).

Under these internal and external circumstances, Libya has an incentive to reconsider and perhaps reorganize its foreign policy framework. Enhancing institutional coherence, stability of the governance institutions, and rebalancing of the Libyan diplomatic activities are crucial towards solidifying the international position of the state. Libya should also be capable of aligning and harmonizing its domestic interests with those of the international community, especially concerning security cooperation and economic growth to promote an increasingly coherent and proactive foreign policy (Alayat et al., 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The interplay between domestic and foreign factors has always influenced the Libyan foreign policy, forming the system where the decision-makers have to operate in the environment that is rather complex and often unstable. The available literature underlines that no state can shape or execute its foreign policy without considering its domestic situation. The inner context of political unity and financial capacity to the historical accounts and social patterns- forms the background on which foreign relationships are established. In the situation in Libya, the influence of the internal environment has been especially strong due to the weak institutions, opposing spatial centers of power, and unsolved nation-building issues. Research after research indicates that foreign policy decisions are usually quite mirror images of domestic compulsions and that policy-makers have no choice but to change their stands based on the realities that domestic fragmentation have had on their sides. Lack of consideration of these internal determinants has frequently led to inconsistency or inefficiency in policy directions (Ethabet, 2025).

Most studies of the foreign policy development in Libya continue to focus on the historical aspect of the issue. The politics of resistance against Italian colonialism and the legacy of such leaders as Omar Mokhtar still remains a defining feature of the politics of Libya and influence its diplomatic stance. This tradition led to the continued focus on sovereignty, opposition to foreign intervention, and a powerful sense of nationalism. Historians who observe the post-independence path of Libya observe that the initial years of the kingdom and the birth of pan-Arabism under Gaddafi further entrenched ideological factors in the foreign policy making decision. Libya swiveling between non-alignment and strategic engagement with opposing sides in the Cold War is often referenced as an interval that gave rise to engagement patterns that are still evident in the current perspective of the state (Ali, 2025).

After the 2011 revolution, literature on the consequences of political fragmentation and state collapse started to gain more academic attention. According to researchers, the foreign policy of the state is characterized by the rivalry of governments and alliances and the role of armed formations that are not directly controlled by the central government. These works claim that the lack of an institutional cohesion has undermined Libya as a nation capable of advancing consistent diplomatic stances and that foreign actors henceforth play a crucial mediating role in intra-domestic political conflicts in the country. Another aspect

that the literature focuses on is the way regional alliances, including the connections with nearby Arab allies or partners in the Mediterranean area, have been influencing just as much by the internal divisions as by the strategic choices (Polat, 2025).

The oil wealth of Libya is widely discussed in the academic discourse as an opportunity and a vulnerability. Analysts note that Libya has huge reserves of energy that give it a huge bargaining force in the global context, and this is drawing foreign attention and is shaping the diplomatic agenda of the country. Simultaneously, the monopoly of the oil industry has enhanced internal rivalry, which jeopardizes institutional stability. As noted in academic literature, the protection of oil infrastructure and assurance of continuous production have always determined the direction of foreign relationships. This is often referred to as a kind of resource-based diplomacy, in which the state organizes its foreign affairs in a way that takes into account the need to safeguard the economic lifeline of the state (Lumeno, 2025).

A second significant trend in the literature is connected to the outcomes of the military fragmentation. Research points out that the disintegration of the armed forces in Libya has diminished the credibility of the state in terms of security partnership and made it difficult to participate in international security arrangements. The existence of militias and armed groups that are regionally oriented is cited frequently as a key reason why the state was not able to negotiate security treaties or to have military support. It has debated that this fragmentation has misrepresented the external relations of Libya by bringing in the non-state actors in what would otherwise be an institutional making legitimate authority weakened (Selmi, 2025).

Lastly, the contribution of international bodies and powerful nations constitutes a considerable branch of the literature. The African Union, the League of Arab States, and the European Union, as well as the United Nations, seem to be the key external powers that condition the diplomacy of Libya. According to academic sources, Libya is located at the crossroads of conflicting geopolitical interests because of its strategic location and energy value and it is due to this reason that its foreign policy is extremely sensitive to external pressure. These works also highlight the point that participation in these institutions offers Libya with the necessary platforms in terms of negotiation, conflict management, and diplomatic recognition, but its decentralized system of governance frequently hinders its capability to fully capitalize on these chances. In general, the academic literature leads to the conclusion that the foreign policy of Libya is the result of an active interplay among historical factors, political instability, economic interdependence on energy resources, and external geopolitical factors. All these readings prove that any efforts towards reforming or modernizing the Libyan system of foreign policy should first be involved in strengthening the internal governance, re-establishing institutional cohesion, and creating structures that can enable the alignment of an external stance (Bashir, n.d.).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, the qualitative design is applied in order to comprehend the determinants of Libyan foreign policy with an emphasis on the historical, political, economic, and institutional factors. It has three key elements, which consist of the analysis of primary and secondary texts, the examination of the relevant literature, and the comparative analysis of the role of external actors. The document analysis will focus on the government statements and international reports in order to trace the development of the foreign policy of Libya. The review of the literature addresses such aspects of Libya as political history, tribal relations, and foreign policy of the country. Lastly, the comparison and analysis is done on the impact of external actors on the policy of Libya including the EU and major powers. It is aimed at offering insights and suggestions to have a more coherent foreign policy system.

DISCUSSION

The developmental history of Libyan foreign policy displays a narrative of an unending negotiation between the historical divides, internal politics of the country and the exigences of the changing international system. The modern external policy of the country would be incomprehensible without the strong mark of the colonial memoir and the painful way of the creation of the state. These historical formations developed a powerful sense of attachment to sovereignty and opposition to foreign domination, which remains effective in the selection of the diplomatic preferences of Libya. Yet, the continuation of political unrest since 2011 has rearranged the way these principles have been long held into practice, thereby giving rise to discrepancies and discontinuous stances on foreign policy (Gebre-Medhin, 2025).

Among the key problems that the analysis has raised, one should mention the loss of the ability of state institutions to describe and implement a consistent policy in foreign politics. The lack of a centralized national authority has led to conflicting diplomatic interests that are promoted by parallel governments, regional groups, and armed forces. This disjointed sovereignty makes Libya unreliable as a negotiating partner and weakens its capacity to establish sustainable regional and international partnerships. Consequently, the foreign policy is reactive and not strategic most of the time, guided by immediate security interests or exterior patronage as opposed to long-term national interests (Kardas et al., 2025).

Oil wealth has continued to be a characteristic not only due to its economic applicability but also due to the fact that the control of its infrastructure is the foundation of political authority. The struggle of oil revenues within the domestic groups provides a motivation to foreign participants to intervene and other foreign policy matters of Libya are further entered into a network of foreign influences. States that have energy interests, especially the European nations, are involved in Libya by a combination of economic affiliations, security collaboration, and diplomatic threats. This produces a two-dimensional effect whereby Libya depends on external partners to get its revenue sources but at the same time tries to protect sovereignty against too much international leverage. As a matter of fact, this balance has been challenging to uphold (Lavezzo, n.d.).

These difficulties are worsened by the disaggregation of the military sector. The absence of a single command system has not only undermined the territorial integrity of Libya but also reduced its ability to engage in security systems or regional peace efforts. Foreign allies are not always eager to participate in the entirety of defense cooperation because they are afraid of complicity, the emergence of armed factions, and disputed authority. Consequently, Libya to date has not developed its role in regional security frameworks in North Africa, the Sahel or the Mediterranean despite its strategic location (Roberts, 2025).

The picture has been also complicated by external involvement. According to regional and international powers, Libya is a strategic terrain through which influence can be projected, which results in alignment and counter-alignment patterns that influence domestic politics. This multifaceted external environment is often manifested in the interaction of the country with international organizations, such as the United Nations, the Arab League, and the African Union. These organizations are not only prominent in mediation of conflicts, humanitarian aid and political roadmap setting, but they also indicate the weaknesses of the Libyan government structures themselves (Gonluhos Elmas, 2025).

Considering these forces, the paper emphasizes the necessity to redefine Libyan foreign policy as one that is institutionally coherent and strategically clear. To revamp the system will involve reconstruction of the state capacity, unifying control of military institutions and empowering diplomatic institutions that can develop long term policies. The experience of other post-conflict states proves that the foreign policy reform is firmly correlated with internal stabilization. The domestic political fragmentation will not be resolved and this will leave Libya exposed to outside influence and keep it susceptible to not making sovereign decisions.

The emerging regional dynamics must also be taken into consideration in a reformed foreign policy. The changes in Mediterranean security, the energy transition and the geopolitical competition in the North African region demand that Libya takes a more adaptive and prospective diplomatic stand. Such factors involve diversification of international relations, strengthening of economic diplomacy, leveraging its strategic geography that bridges Africa, the Arab region and Europe as a platform of positive interaction and collaboration, as opposed to competition. It is also important that Libya needs to be brought back to regional economic systems so that the country could use its natural resources, human capital, and geographic location to recreate the state of stability and influence (Kharitonova, 2025).

Finally, the discussion highlights that the challenges in the foreign policy of Libya are a manifestation of general governance problems. The solution to them lies in political solidarity, institutional change, and a diplomacy based on national interests and not sectarian motives. It is solely the process of restoring internal coherence that will enable Libya to start rebuilding its role in the regional and international arena as a country capable of managing the changing geopolitical environment and preserving its long-term sovereignty and development (Zdanowski, 2025).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The study shows that the Libyan foreign policy is influenced by a mixture of historical, political, economic, and institutional issues. The historical bequests such as the anti-colonial movement and the Alliances of the Cold war are the factors that still are present and affect the Libyan spirit of sovereignty and strategy. The political instability that is characterized by the revolution of 2011 and the lack of governance has divided the governance structure into various centers of authority and incompatible foreign policy objectives. Economic influences, especially the reliance of Libya on oil revenues, are at the center of priority in foreign policy. The same can be said of securing oil infrastructure and ensuring that international partnerships are preserved. The fragmentation of the military and the inability to operate as a consistent security partner due to a number of armed groups complicate the process of defense cooperation and influence on the region in Libya.

The reactive and inconsistent decisions made in the area of foreign policy have been caused by the institutional weaknesses such as lack of strategic planning mechanisms, inadequate coordination of decisions made by different decision-making bodies, and underdeveloped Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The intervention of societal actors and internal divisions also makes the process of policymaking more difficult, which is why domestic dynamics are connected to international behavior. It is proposed that the reform of the Libyan foreign policy should be based on institutional changes, such as the creation of the National Security Council, specialized intelligence service, and the enhancement of the strategic planning options. It is also necessary to involve research institutions and make the decision-making structures consistent and effective to guarantee coherent and effective foreign policy.

CONCLUSION

These works on Libyan foreign policy traditionally refer to the great role of internal realities, the past and the influences of external powers on the foreign policy of the country. Political dynamics in Libya are still defined based on its anti-colonial positions, the fallout of the Cold War associations as well as the recurrent disintegration of state power since 2011. All these issues of internal governance added to the twin factors of attempting to control vast oil formations alongside the difficulty of attempting to negotiate through a divided military landscape make it interesting as Libya attempts to draw itself together to be able to act in a unified way in the world arena.

Scholarly work also highlights the strategic importance of the geographical location of Libya and the energy resources which is the focus of regional and world powers. However, the absence of cohesive institutions

reduces the capacity of the state to use such assets. This means that Libya will become pragmatic in its international affairs, as opposed to long-term planning.

Another point highlighted in the literature is that institutional renewal is required to improve the policy coherence. These proposed reforms usually include the establishment of a National Security Council, the improvement of the intelligence coordination, the incorporation of strategic planning processes into the foreign policy frameworks, and the empowerment of the research institutions which will help in the making of evidence-based decisions. The steps towards the more stable and predictable diplomacy are deemed to be the improvement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the acknowledgment of the role of societal actors as well.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Developing Strong National Security Architecture.** One of the key needs within the modernization of the Libyan foreign policy is the establishment of the institutional framework that would be able to ensure the protection of the primary interest of the state. A National Security Council ought to act as the key-board to ensure sovereignty, territoriality and supervision of the security of the natural resources. Its mandate would involve the formulation of national security policies, coordination of information flows and responses to domestic problems. It is also important to ensure that regular liaisons are maintained with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since the national security and foreign policy are intertwined. To provide strong national intelligence capabilities, it is essential to have National Intelligence Center as part of the National Security Council. Such a center would bring together intelligence operations, support their exchange between the agencies, and create strategic evaluations to assist decision-makers. These institutions would produce a more coherent and informed foundation of the foreign policy by closing the gap between the foreign diplomatic concerns and the internal security processes.
- **Rebuilding Strategic Planning in Foreign Policy.** Increasingly integrating strategic planning into the core of foreign policy of Libya is necessary to enhance coherence, efficacy, and future perspective. This approach can be institute by the establishment of a General Affairs Council on Foreign Affairs. Such organisation would look at such matters as the matters of effectiveness of foreign aid programs, aptitude of diplomatic staff and matchup of material and human resources to the aims of foreign policy. An advanced strategic planning culture would in turn assist in differentiating among the long term tenets and the changeable emphases in the international behavior of Libya. Furthermore, the role of research institutions and academic centers can be reinforced to facilitate decision-making. Their observation on international relations, world organizations and trends in foreign aid would give evidence based recommendations to the diplomats and policy makers. Such combination enables Libya to review the priorities in foreign policy and look in advance at the changes in regional and global relations and flexibilize the target of its strategy according to them.
- **Institutional Mechanism Modernisation of the Policy Formation.** The other major element of system revamping is the reform of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. It is essential that the Ministry have to be reorganized to deal with the external challenges facing Libya, by enhancing its strategic planning functions and decision-making processes, as well as technical capabilities. Making sure that there is a balance between capabilities and ambitions will be achieved with the help of a careful analysis of accessible resources, present commitments, and policy purposes. The area of foreign policy can no longer be considered the prerogative of the state. The society, such as civil society and economic groups, is gaining more influence in determining and implementing foreign policy. Their acknowledgment brings about more inclusive and valid policy results. All these

reforms are aimed at reforming the foreign policy of Libya in a more coherent, transparent, and strategically based form.

- **The General People Congress Assists.** The point of entry into the formal decision-making hierarchy of Libya is made by the General People's Congress (Parliament). It gives regular and extraordinary meetings wherein it discusses national issues, gives policy guidelines, and monitors the process of the decision making process. The Congress also appoints the General People Committee (the counterpart of the Prime Minister) and overchecks its performance. Theoretically, it has the power to remove the Prime Minister, but this has not been done in reality.
- **In the General People's Committee, there are Executive Constraints.** The General People Committee in the past was very restricted in its functioning. Its Secretary (Prime Minister) collaborates with a pre-destined team which frequently involves people representing powerful political tendencies and revolutionary organizations. This restricts the ability to make independent decisions, and tie the executive to the commands of more influential political groups. Executive functions have often been paralyzed by the prevalence of incompatible loyalties and the preeminence of revolutionary leaders. Consequentially, too often executive authority is a certain imitator of decisions made by stronger forces as opposed to being an independent planner, the consequences of which go well beyond the inability to sustain a consistent and efficient foreign policy.
- **Impact of Domestic Politics to Foreign Policy.** These are structural problems in the political system of Libya, divisions, conflicting loyalties, and bureaucratic limitations, that are directly translated into the foreign policy outcomes. These domestic processes determine the process of foreign policy formulation, review and implementation in reaction to the local and international changes. The official structures, both parliamentary decision-making and the executive action, constitute the framework of the Libyan foreign policy machine. Nevertheless, institutional weaknesses together with inner tensions have a great influence on their performance. These formal and informal pressures are critical to understanding their role in getting the picture of how Libya handles its relations with the outside world and how Libya endeavors to achieve its national interests. The interplay between the political realities and structural constraints constitutes a primary determinant of the trend of foreign policy in Libya.

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