

**ANNEX: On the US strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability in Libya**

IN SHORT *USA Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability*



[Source: 2022 Prologue to the Strategy](#)

In 2017, the USA confirmed that it will work to strengthen fragile states. In 2019 President Trump signed the Global Fragility Act. The [new Strategy](#) is the implementation of this Act and is launched by President Biden. The Strategy offers a comprehensive approach with participation of all government branches to offer developmental, diplomatic and military aid to the displayed prioritized countries. The Strategy sets goals such as conflict prevention and political stabilization in prioritized regions, partnerships in governance and private sectors, and management efficiency within US foreign policy.

**Background**

Following a relative decrease of political involvement in Libya after the collapse of the Ghaddafi regime and the killing of the former US Ambassador to Libya, the United States of America (USA) has launched a new strategic plan that includes Libya as well<sup>1</sup>. The Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability, that has been launched on April 1<sup>st</sup> 2022 by President Biden, is the implementation of the 2019 Global Fragility Act, adopted under President Trump. Considering the (finalization of the) drafting of this Strategy in the months before its release, recent events in Libya can be deemed been interrelated:

- [29-09-2021](#): Libyan Minister of Oil (GNU) Aoun called upon US oil companies to return to Libya;
- [24-12-2021](#): the USA had temporarily suspended the war crimes trial against Field Marshall Haftar for these elections although planned Libyan elections didn't take place;
- [07-02-2022](#): release of the [US Annual Threat Assessment of Libya](#) (US ATA). Remarkably, with a more significant focus on Russia's role in Libya, with no longer<sup>2</sup> any reference to Turkish financial and military support to its proxies, and the presence of foreign forces as a potential flashpoint<sup>3</sup>;
- [24-02-2022](#): on that same day of Russian invasion of Ukraine, a Joint statement of the US Embassy (and others) was released to preserve the independence and integrity of Libya's National Oil Corporation (NOC);

<sup>1</sup> The new Strategy speaks of the prioritized countries as 'partner countries' and partnerships. This would imply an agreement or acceptance of this new Strategy. For Libya the question is with which of the two governments such an agreement has been reached.

<sup>2</sup> Compared to the [2021 USA ATA](#).

<sup>3</sup> See also the EULPC Weekly Report 04-09 March 2022.

In the Middle East and North Africa, Moscow is using its involvement in Syria, Libya, and Sudan to increase its influence, undercut U.S. leadership, present itself as an indispensable mediator, and gain military access rights and economic opportunities.

- [12-03-2022](#): a US Federal Court decided to resume the trial against Haftar for his alleged involvement in war crimes in Libya;
- [12-03-2022](#): US Ambassador Norland met with PM GSA Bashaga;
- [17-03-2022](#): US Ambassador Norland met with president of the Presidential Council Al-Menfi and PM GNU Dbeiba. On the same day the US Ambassador proposed to streamline Libya's oil revenues to prevent an economic crisis.

### **The new Strategy can be assessed from different angles**

The goal of this paper is to assess the new USA Strategy and to contribute to the understanding of developments in Libya, offering alternate perspectives on related developments relevant to the EU security.

### **EU Energy security and dependence on oil**

Europe depends on other countries to facilitate its energy and oil needs. Due to the invasion in Ukraine, Europe is eager to decrease its dependency on Russia. [US Statements](#) to support the EU in doing so can, in conjunction with the new Strategy and the historic call by GNU Minister Aoun, be seen as a shift of focus to Libya's oil reserves<sup>4</sup>. The [recent visit](#) of the US Secretary of State to Algeria and Morocco (where oil transports was on the agenda) is noteworthy. Taken together and assessing the new Strategy, the US influence in Libya will increase. Although a focus on Libya's oil means a decreasing European dependency on Russia('s oil), it also means an increasing dependency on the USA and Turkey's consolidated presence in Libya: stability in a region is a precursor for oil deliveries and with the USA aiming to be in the midst of stabilizing Libya, it can also gain further importance in the oil infrastructure, while Turkey did not sanction Russia, continuing oil exploration in disputed Eastern Mediterranean.

### **Security in Libya and the War in Ukraine**

The War in Ukraine draws NATO's attention to Europe. A prolonged conflict could result in decreased Wagner Group activity in Libya when Russia prioritizes Ukraine over Libya. If so, a relative vacuum in Libya might develop, leaving Turkey and the USA as sole 'hard powers' in theatre. A renewed alliance between these partners might take shape, evidenced by the international relevance of Turkey's diplomacy in both conflicts, and the absence of the passage about Turkey's involvement in Libya in the US ATA. From a European perspective, with NATO not prioritizing its Southern flank, this development means again a growing European dependency on other nations when it comes to safety and security in the South. The desirability of this is to be determined, especially because migration is not mentioned in the new US Strategy, while this is a most pressing issue for Europe.

### **Other international and political developments**

Libya has two Governments, the Political Dialogue Forum is ending in June and the UNSMIL mandate is ending even sooner. Considering Russia's opposition to the current SASG Stephanie Williams, a prolongation of the mandate without substantive or administrative adjustments can be unlikely. In this respect, the April 1<sup>st</sup> launch of the new US Strategy is pragmatic: it does not need Russia's approval and it increases the USA's national footprint in Libya.

Turkey seems to start efforts to restore the relations with Saudi Arabia, judging from its [suspension](#) of the Khashoggi murder trial and referral to Saudi courts.

Libya has been the only Arab country to agree to the resolution excluding Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. The new US Strategy remains vague about which government has legitimacy in Libya, although [a recent statement](#) by the US Ambassador might anticipate an outcome if interpreted through the lense of Bashaga's growing support base: "the United States continues to support the vast majority of Libyans who expect elections and demand a chance to cast a vote for their country's future". The resumption of the Haftar trial by the USA is noteworthy in this respect. Furthermore, it is relevant to consider the outcome of the elections in relation to the possible (further) legitimization of Turkish military presence in Libya.

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<sup>4</sup> It is unlikely that Europe will increase efforts to explore gas and oil sites in the Mediterranean Sea because this might lead to enhanced tensions with Turkey, at a time that Turkey can be seen as the main actor in the diplomatic arena for both Ukraine and Libya. It should also be noted that Europe aims to transition to clean energy, away from fossil fuels. In the mean time, however, dependence on fossil fuels remains.