# The Global Fragility Act in Libya: Laying the Groundwork for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration

The following contains insights from a private roundtable discussion convened by the International Republican Institute (IRI). The event focused on global lessons learned from dealing with hybrid and nonstate armed groups, the specific challenges posed by the Libyan context, as well as the solutions and opportunities to advance the early-stage efforts to make disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) a reality and provide a foundation for Global Fragility Act (GFA) implementation in Libya. The event included participants and speakers from think tank institutions, the United Nations (UN), the Hill, international development organizations and the U.S. government. Additionally, it contains several recommendations from IRI based on its country strategy for Libya and global research and experience aimed at dealing with armed groups.

Challenges & Considerations

Hybrid or non-state armed groups pose a thorny governance dilemma in Libya. As part of the GFA, the U.S. Government's newly released 10-Year Strategic Plan for Libya recognizes these challenges by calling for the DDR of armed actors. As the national political process continues to stall, there is a need to lay the groundwork for DDR in Libya by leveraging foreign assistance as a tool to address grievances that could push citizens to join armed actors and to increase citizen confidence in the state as a provider of security. Key challenges are as follows:

- A necessary element of successful DDR programs, and thus an essential part of pre-DDR, is envisioning and understanding what the Libyan government and public want the security sector to look like. Many of the issues in Libya have roots in the Gaddafi regime, and neither the status quo nor a return to the Gaddafi era are conducive to DDR and peacebuilding.

- Before implementing DDR programs, Libyan stakeholders must develop a vision for its security sector that is built from the ground up and promotes democracy. The GFA follows a 10-year timeline, which allows for sustainable change over time, providing realistic goals and benchmarks.

- There has been a consistent deterioration of checks and balances in the Libyan government. Hybrid armed actors access an increasing amount of the state's resources. Additionally, some
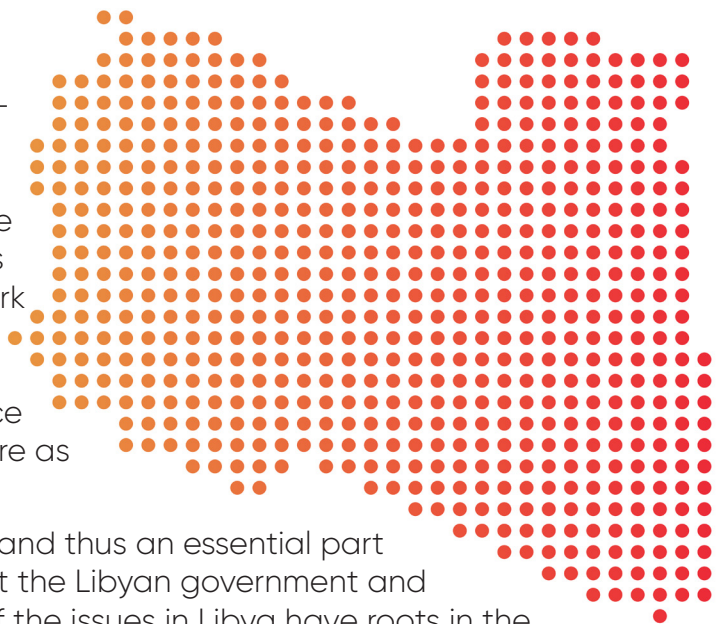
armed groups have crept into the political system and may not be responsive to citizen interests.

- The strength, size, and prevalence of armed groups in Libya has created a sophisticated war machine, allowing them to continue to gain more influence over political leadership. An important pre-DDR focus must be stopping the growth of militias and strengthening civilian oversight of the security sector. Authorities and political leaders should limit financial support for armed groups and direct it instead to state security forces.

- The Berlin process[1] includes three interrelated tracks—the political and development tracks must be supported so as to avoid an uneven progression that stalls or unbalances the whole system. While buy-in among various actors is critical, security actors must be counterbalanced by elevating local voices, as well as enforcing accountability.

- Involving armed groups in pre-DDR is essential. However, there are constraints within existing U.S. government regulations that prevents or hinders programs focused on peace processes, dialogue or DDR from directly engaging with armed groups. This indicates a point of tension in the existing pre-DDR toolkit—in that foreign assistance programs are key to effective pre-DDR, but may not be possible to operationalize given these constraints.

Recommendations

- Given limited U.S. government resources, it is critical to understand where implementation will be most effective. Libya should not be subordinated to other regional issues, but rather receive an appropriate level of focus from the U.S. government in an effort to end atrocities and create necessary structures for democracy. Due to the complexities of working at the national level and the influence local communities have on armed groups, implementation should focus on the local level. Pre-DDR can involve technical areas such as peacebuilding, governance, and dialogue that can eventually be scaled to manage a national DDR process.

- Many armed actors operate in the community where they are from, giving those communities unique insight and influence over these actors. Thus, an essential pre-DDR priority is to improve local trust, without which the communities and stakeholders will not be receptive to DDR programs.

- The lack of accountability and transparency amongst the government and armed actors further complicates any programming in Libya. There should be a focus on applying political pressure, especially in light of ongoing atrocities. The international community can be influential and should begin to set certain boundaries to improve accountability and transparency. For example, the U.S. government has been effective at countering kleptocracy, including through the Magnitsky Act; these policies can be applied to corruption and accountability

---
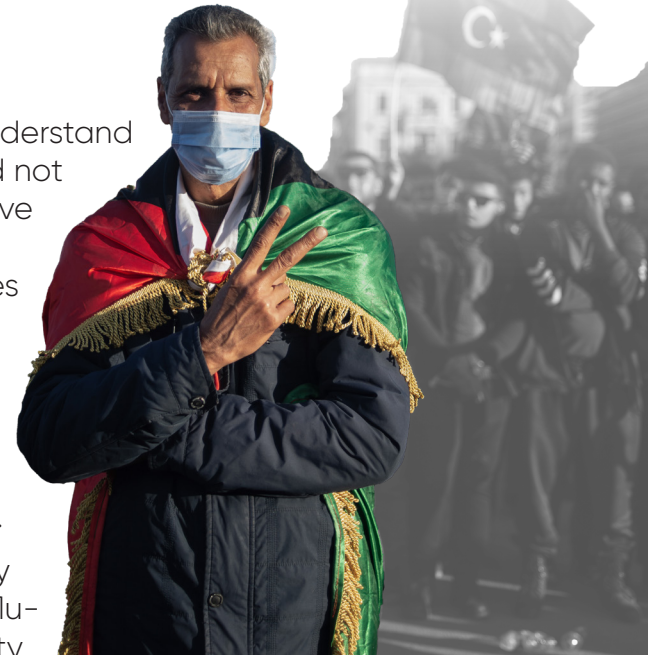
[1] This refers to the Berlin Conferences on Libya, which were convened by the German government and the UN. With attendees from a range of foreign governments and multilateral institutions, this process focused on devising and advancing efforts to stabilize conflict in the country.

issues in Libya to promote normative change. Additionally, approaches can aim to promote accountability for human rights abuses at the local level.

- Pre-DDR involves building a system that can manage demobilized actors, given the constant flux of individuals that self-demobilize. Pre-DDR efforts can focus on working with this smaller case load to establish processes, show the transition is possible, and build credibility at the technical level that can eventually be scaled up. This includes a focus on establishing bodies and mechanisms that can implement DDR when the time comes. Additionally, individuals should be vetted and demobilized on a case-by-case basis, rather than at the group-level.

- The appropriate and transparent management of state revenues needs to be developed to place bounds on what is spent in each sector, which can help manage DDR and SSR efforts. Reforms such as public sector transparency, decentralization, and promoting alternative sources of income could create meaningful change that would support DDR efforts.

- Creating spaces for local governance in situations where they may be coopted is key to stemming the proliferation of hybrid and nonstate armed groups. Yet, in Libya, there are significant gaps in capacity and knowledge that inhibit the state's—and particularly the local councils'—ability to respond to local needs and priorities. Priority areas include establishing stronger administrative structures, service delivery, and revenue generation. There is also a need to increase coordination between national, subnational, and local governments in order to reach some of the most remote areas and to establish or strengthen state presence. This should be paired with interventions to promote civic engagement and a culture of political participation.

- Dialogue among citizens can be an effective way to build trust and to identify community needs, priorities, and strategies to promote collective action. Additionally, there have been instances where locally-led dialogues with armed groups have helped influence the behavior of armed groups, reduce incentives for violence, encourage moderation, and lay the basis for defection and disengagement. This can entail supporting civil society actors, religious leaders, community elders or other locally legitimate actors to promote dialogue. For example, by directly communicating with armed groups, community members at the local level in northern Uganda, Colombia, Northern Ireland, and Syria gained an understanding of such groups' priorities and composition, which can lay the groundwork for peace in some instances.[2] This may also involve strengthening the capacity for local parties to negotiate a peaceful settlement.

---

[2] Yousuf, Zahbia. "Local engagement with armed groups in the midst of violence." Conciliation Resources. 2015. https://www.c-r.org/accord/engaging-armed-groups-insight/midst-violence-local-engagement-armed-groups