

**Statement by David Schenker**  
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**Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee**  
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Chairman Risch, Ranking Member Menendez, Members of the committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss U.S. Libya policy. The best way to address this crisis is to stop the fighting that started in early April with the Libyan National Army's (LNA) military offensive, enabled by foreign intervention, aimed at wresting control of Tripoli from the Government of National Accord (GNA). Foreign intervention has escalated and could escalate yet further in the days to come, posing a threat to the international order in the Eastern Mediterranean and to U.S. interests in the region. Now is the time to wind this conflict down. And the best way to stop the fighting is to stop the foreign intervention fueling it, in the form of weapons, personnel, and funds.

Last week, the UN's Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ghassan Salame, convened representatives from the GNA and the LNA for talks aimed at establishing a ceasefire, beginning with the—scaled and incremental—withdrawal of foreign mercenaries. This is the first time in a year that the two sides of the conflict have engaged about an end to the violence. This initial meeting did not result in a formal agreement. Sustained efforts will be required to secure and implement a ceasefire, and we are pressing both sides to engage constructively.

Nearly 700 Libyan civilians have died since these clashes began in April. Nearly 200,000 children were unable to attend school at various points in 2019. Multiple health facilities lack supplies and medicine. The fighting threatens civilian lives, infrastructure, and civil aviation. According to the International Organization for Migration, as of December 2019, over 355,000 Libyans have been displaced. The conflict has further threatened the already tenuous safety and security of foreign migrants and refugees residing in Libya.

The near-total shutdown of Libya's energy sector since January 17, by LNA-aligned forces, has worsened electricity outages across the country and severely curtailed civilian access to fuel and other refined petroleum products used for cooking, heating, transportation, and the delivery of clean, potable water to residential areas. As we have communicated to Libyan actors publicly and privately, the National Oil Corporation must be allowed to fulfill its mandate on behalf of the Libyan people, which it cannot do when armed groups occupy its facilities or interfere with its operations. Meanwhile, the Libyan people continue to suffer as the country's oil revenues collapse, with costs that already exceed \$1 billion.

We have repeatedly emphasized to all stakeholders that there is no durable military solution to the Libyan conflict. The United States supports the UN Special Representative's work to promote a Libyan political process. Ultimately, the Libyan people must resolve this crisis. Libyan leaders who are contributing to the ongoing conflict – and those who back them militarily – must establish and respect the truce, de-escalate to achieve a sustainable ceasefire, and refocus efforts on a Libyan-led political process. Negotiations need to seriously address

difficult issues driving the conflict, including the dismantling of non-state armed groups—“militias”—that operate with impunity; the rooting out of extremist elements; and the reunification and reform of Libya’s economic institutions to ensure transparency and the just distribution of Libya’s resources. Achieving a political solution and moving toward national reconciliation will take time. If the violence continues, it will only harden positions on all sides and make finding a viable solution more difficult.

The United States continues to undertake efforts to achieve stability in this geopolitically significant, oil rich nation. In 2016 the United States cooperated with the GNA to oust ISIS from the coastal city of Sirte. We continue relationships with counter-terrorism partners across the spectrum in Libya to defend and protect it from a resurgence of terrorist groups. U.S. diplomatic engagement with Libya is centered in Tunisia, the temporary home of the “Libya External Office,” our diplomatic representation to Libya, led by Ambassador Richard Norland and supported by an expeditionary diplomatic team.

We are conveying to Libyans on all sides of the conflict – as well as their foreign backers – that the conflict must be resolved through negotiations. We have sanctioned spoilers threatening Libyan peace and stability and will continue to make use of those authorities when warranted, but there is no substitute for consistent engagement. U.S. diplomats work daily with Libyans across the political spectrum to find common ground on the issues that divide them. Ongoing security concerns have forestalled the reestablishment of a full-time diplomatic presence in Libya, but we are represented through U.S. stabilization and development assistance programs to help alleviate urgent needs. Beginning with short day trips, we are looking at formulas that allow us to deliver our message from Libyan soil, where it will have the most impact.

U.S. humanitarian response programs support several sectors, including health; food, water, sanitation, and hygiene; protection; and shelter. For instance, we have helped equip classrooms for schoolchildren in conflict-affected areas, and funded nutrition programs for vulnerable populations. Through other stabilization and governance programs, the United States supports recovery in conflict-affected areas to strengthen the local conditions necessary to enable political compromise, prevent further fracturing of the country, expand spaces for moderate actors, and protect security gains made against terrorism. We will continue to use these vehicles to bring together actors on both side of the conflict.

Through USAID-led efforts to stabilize Sirte following our liberation of the city from ISIS, the United States is implementing more than \$11 million worth of early recovery activities to meet immediate service delivery needs and build the operational capacity of key institutions. Since the overthrow of the Qadhafi regime, the United States has invested more than \$550 million in assistance to Libya, as well as more than \$164 million in humanitarian assistance.

The task of bringing the Libyans back to the negotiating table has been complicated by the involvement of external actors. Libya is not the place for Russian mercenaries, or fighters from Syria, Chad, and Sudan. It is not the place for the Emiratis, Russians, or Turks to be fighting battles on the ground through intermediaries they sponsor or support with sophisticated

and deadly equipment in pursuit of their own agendas. What is at stake is more than Libya, but peace and stability across the southern and eastern Mediterranean region.

Last month, I accompanied Secretary Pompeo to the Berlin Conference. Secretary Pompeo told leaders there, “There are things we can do today to foster a stable, sovereign, united country that is inhospitable to terrorists, and one day capable of generating prosperity through its energy resources. We must support a lasting cease-fire between the Libyan parties, and not just with words. We must take actions to end the violence and flow of arms.”

The international leaders gathered in Berlin called for a sustained ceasefire, committed to support UN monitoring when a formal ceasefire is achieved, and to reject foreign interference. Regrettably, many Berlin Conference participants have not upheld these commitments. All Berlin participants made a commitment to implement an immediate and permanent halt of deployments of personnel, fighters, mercenaries, and military equipment to Libya. That they have not yet respected this commitment reflects the urgent need for them to engage with each other to overcome the suspicions and enmities, rooted in ideology and politics, that divide them.

Following Berlin, we have joined our voice at the UN Security Council in a draft resolution reinforcing the UN arms embargo, and calling for mercenaries, such as those of the Kremlin-linked Wagner Group, to leave Libya.

It is time for those who continue to violate existing UN Security Council resolutions – including the UN arms embargo on Libya – to face consequences. We will continue to impress upon countries involved in Libya that a peaceful resolution is not just in our mutual interest, but the only viable path forward to end the conflict in Libya. And we reaffirm that the United States supports a political solution that allows the Libyan people to realize a desire for inclusive, democratic governance they have sought since 2011, when they rose up against authoritarianism and deposed the Qadhafi regime.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.