

Understanding Libya's main political and military players can be confusing. There are two principal rival governments, a third government that is formed from the rump of a previous government, and a military strongman that all have aspirations to control the country. To understand how we got here, we need to rewind to 2012, before the emergence of rival administrations.

Elections in 2012 led to the formulation of the General National Congress – or GNC – which was based in Tripoli. Under pressure after its mandate expired, new elections were held in April 2014. They came amid a turbulent time as a former general in Gaddafi's army, Khalifa Haftar, had returned to Libya and declared a coup against the GNC, which he claimed was dominated by Islamists and terrorists. He dubbed his military campaign 'Operation Dignity'.

The Muslim Brotherhood and other actors, most notably from the powerful city of Misrata, performed poorly in the 2014 elections. They blamed Haftar and formulated a campaign of their own, which they called 'Libya Dawn'.

In the summer of 2014, the entrance of Libya Dawn-affiliated forces into Tripoli led to the newly appointed parliament, known as the House of Representatives, to relocate to Libya's east, citing security concerns.

Back in Tripoli, a rump of the GNC was reformulated as the 'Government of National Salvation'. Its leader, Khalifa Ghwell maintains that he is prime minister of Libya. However, the House of Representatives maintains that it is the rightful government. Its speaker, Ageela Saleh, is a major power-broker.

The conflict that was ignited between competing parties in 2014 led to the pursuit of an UN-sponsored national dialogue. The result was a Libyan Political Agreement, concluded in Skeirat, Morocco in December 2015.

The Libyan Political Agreement created the Government of National Accord, or GNA. As its name suggests, the GNA was designed to bring competing actors together under a unified government.

It is headed by Prime Minister Fayed al-Serraj, Libya's internationally recognized leader.

However, the House of Representatives has not ratified the Libyan Political Agreement, so it contends that the GNA has no standing as it was appointed by the international community.

The House of Representatives has appointed General Haftar the head of Libyan armed forces, and the two are seen as aligned. Yet, the general has political ambitions of his own and these clash with those of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

In July 2017, French President Emmanuel Macron brought Haftar and Serraj to discuss a roadmap to settle the conflict. Both Haftar and Serraj have supported the conduct of elections 'as soon as possible', despite the many challenges of doing so.

This has now sparked the starting gun for potential presidential candidates to begin their campaigns. But critics fear elections may just see the creation of a further contested government and make Libya's governance crisis worse.