

Libya urged to reschedule presidential vote 'swiftly'

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By NOHA ELHENNAWY | AP

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Fri, 2021-12-24 16:32

LONDPON: The US and four European powers on Friday urged war-torn Libya to quickly set a new date for delayed presidential elections.

In a joint statement, they urged the North African country's leaders to "swiftly" name a new date and issue the final list of presidential candidates, which had been a key point of contention in the run-up to the polls that were set for Friday.

"We call on the relevant Libyan authorities to respect the aspirations of the Libyan people for prompt elections," said Britain, France, Germany, Italy and the United States.

The authorities overseeing the country's first-ever presidential election said earlier this week that holding it on Friday as scheduled would be "impossible."

The vote was intended to mark a fresh start for the oil-rich country, a year after a landmark cease-fire and more than a decade after its 2011 revolt that toppled and killed dictator Muammar Qaddafi.

But speculation of a delay had been mounting for weeks. There were bitter disputes over the vote's legal basis, the powers of the winner and the candidacies of several deeply divisive figures.

The country's electoral commission has suggested rescheduling the vote to January 24, but it remains to be seen whether agreement can be reached among divided institutions.

Libya's parliament is to meet on Monday to debate a new timeline.

Another key issue will be the mandate of the current interim government, which was meant to end Friday with the elections.

In their statement, the five powers insisted that "transfer of power from the current interim executive authority to the new executive authority shall take place following the announcement of the results" of polls when they happen.

In a later tweet, the UK embassy in Tripoli said London "continues to recognize the #Government_of_National_Unity as the authority tasked with leading #Libya to #elections and does not endorse the establishment of parallel governments or institutions."

The Tripoli-based unity administration is headed by Abdulhamid Dbeibah, a tycoon and presidential candidate. Analysts have suggested that his rivals may wish to exploit the delay in order to put him out of the picture.

The presidential ballot was intended to go hand-in-hand with parliamentary polls as part of a United Nations-led peace process, yet UN special envoy Jan Kubis resigned just weeks before the ballot.

One contentious issue was a presidential elections law controversially passed by parliamentary speaker Aguila Saleh and endorsed by Kubis. Critics say it bypassed due process and favored a run by eastern military chief Khalifa Haftar.

Another candidate is Qaddafi's son Seif Al-Islam – a divisive symbol of the old regime wanted by the International Criminal Court over war crimes allegations.

Libya has seen a year of relative calm since the October 2020 cease-fire following a year-long offensive by Haftar's forces on Tripoli, with both sides backed by foreign states.

But the delay to elections has once again thrown the political process into doubt, and the potential for new fighting remains ever-present.



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UN calls on Libyan authorities to honor millions who registered to vote
Libya parliament to meet Monday on elections timetable: official

[UK condemns Iran's launch of ballistic missiles in war games](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2021-12-24 12:42

LONDON: Britain said on Friday it condemned a launch of ballistic missiles by Iran in war games conducted this week.

"These actions are a threat to regional and international security and we call on Iran to immediately cease its activities," the Foreign Office said in a statement.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard fired more than a dozen surface-to-surface ballistic missiles, the official IRNA news agency reported on Friday. The report said the Guard fired 16 missiles during an ongoing major military exercise across the country's south. It said the name of missiles were Emad, Ghadr, Sejjil, Zalzal, Dezful and Zolfaghar and that their range is from 350 to 2,000 kilometers (220 to 1250 miles). The short-range and medium-range missiles, Iran has said, can reach US bases in the region as well as Israel. It said the missiles successfully hit one target at the same time as 10 drones simultaneously hit their targets. State TV showed missiles launching in the desert.

Iran had displayed and test fired the missiles in the past.

Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, the chief of staff of Iran's Armed Forces, said the planned drill was an answer to Israel's recent "massive but pointless threats" to Iran.

Bagheri said, "This was a tiny part of hundreds of missiles that can hit any hostile target simultaneously."

Israel has long seen Iran's nuclear program as a threat and seeks a harder line by the US and international community. Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful.

During the second day of the drill on Tuesday, Iran launched cruise missiles, too.

The Guard in the past has said it has cruise missiles with ranges of 1,000 kilometers (620 miles). It also has missiles that range up to 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles).

From time to time, Iran holds military exercises, saying they are aimed at improving the readiness of its forces and testing new weapons.

The five-day annual exercise that began on Monday came days after the breakup of talks to revive Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers. Iran has accelerated its nuclear advances as negotiations to return to the accord struggle to make headway. The talks will resume on Monday. Former President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the nuclear deal and re-imposed crushing sanctions on Iran in 2018 . Tehran has since started enriching uranium up to 60 percent purity – a short technical step from the 90 percent needed to make an atomic bomb.



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Iran's Guard fires cruise missiles in military exerciseIran holds missile drill in Gulf of Oman amid tensions

[Italy pledges support for Baghdad](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-24 14:53

ROME: The Italian government has pledged its support to Iraq to further its goals for stabilization and to continue the fight against terrorism.

Iraq's president and prime minister held talks on Thursday in Baghdad with Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio.

President Barham Saleh stressed the need to defuse the region's crises and prevent escalation through dialogue.

"Iraq is an indispensable element for regional stability," he said in a statement.

Saleh and the chief of Italian diplomacy discussed bilateral ties and efforts to "strengthen them in various fields, and joint bilateral cooperation in the face of various challenges, especially those related to combating terrorism and extremism, strengthening economic and cultural relations, confronting the dangerous repercussions of climate change and protecting the environment," a spokesman for the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs told Arab News.

Saleh praised "Italy's supportive role for the Iraqi security forces in combating terrorism within the international coalition and Nato, in addition to contributions in the humanitarian and social aspects."

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi stressed the importance of benefiting from Italy's experience in fighting corruption and organised crime networks.

"Di Maio and Al-Kadhimi discussed ways to develop Iraqi-Italian relations in various political and economic areas and in the war on terrorism," the same source told Arab News.

The two parties also discussed improving security relations, especially with regards to the training of Iraqi forces under the NATO framework, with the defense pact moving to a non-combat role in the country.

Di Maio reaffirmed Rome's support for Iraq and its government.

"Italy is committed to stabilization and development of this country, and to continue help the government in a concrete way to fight against terrorism," he said.

He also praised the Iraqi government's efforts to "bring views closer and enhance local and regional stability," and wished for a boost of bilateral commercial relations.

Italy is part of the international coalition of troops in Iraq, with some 1,000 Italian soldiers currently deployed. The country will head the NATO mission in Iraq from May 2022.



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[Arab coalition carry out air strikes on Houthi weapons storage in Sanaa](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-24 02:37

RIYADH: Arab coalition forces have started carrying out air strikes to destroy Houthi weapons at a stadium in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, after a deadline given to remove them had expired, the alliance said early Friday.

(Developing story)

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[UN calls on Libyan authorities to honor millions who registered to vote](#)

Author:

Fri, 2021-12-24 02:02

NEW YORK: The UN on Thursday reminded the Libyan authorities that presidential and parliamentary elections, conducted “in the appropriate conditions, on a level playing field among all candidates” are indispensable for a peaceful solution to Libya’s political crises.

“The current challenges in the electoral process should in no way be instrumentalized to undermine the stability and progress which has been achieved in Libya over the past 15 months,” said Stephanie Williams, the UN’s special adviser for Libya.

Calling on leaders to honor the will of millions of Libyans who had registered to vote, Williams also urged politicians to remain focused on the electoral process and strive to create the necessary conditions for the elections to be secure, fair and free.

The long-awaited Libyan presidential election, initially slated for Dec. 24, was pushed back by a month on Wednesday, following the recommendation of the High National Election Commission amid disputes over the laws governing

elections, the eligibility of several divisive candidates, and occasional infighting among various armed groups.

The electoral process had also been dogged by east-west rivalry, and the presence of thousands of foreign fighters and mercenaries, with several reports of harassment by militias of electoral workers, judges and security staff.

A Libyan parliamentary committee said that it has become "impossible" to hold the elections on Friday.

Amnesty International's Diana Eltahawy cited intimidation by armed groups and militias which "not only enjoy rampant impunity but are integrated into state institutions without any vetting to remove those responsible for crimes under international law."

Williams said the UN "welcomes (the HNEC's) commitment to the ongoing electoral process and to continuing the review of the applications of the candidates for parliamentary elections."

The special adviser, who arrived in Tripoli earlier this month and met with "hundreds of people from all of Libya's regions," said she was pleased to witness "a shift from a discourse of conflict to one of peaceful dialogue.

"Even those who only last year bore arms against each other have continued to come together," she said. "Despite the many hardships endured by many Libyans, including in southern Libya, and the pleas of those still displaced by the conflict that has torn the country apart during the past 10 years, I have met many Libyans who have recovered a sense of normalcy.

"I have heard stories of separated families that could finally travel to visit relatives, a development made possible by the ceasefire and resumption of flights and the reopening of roads."

Williams had overseen UN mediation efforts which led to an October 2020 ceasefire and the formation of a transitional government, as well as the elections scheduled for Dec. 24.

"I have also heard time and again the overwhelming desire of Libyans to go to the ballot box to determine their future and to end the long transitional period through the holding of inclusive, free, fair, and credible elections," she said, adding: "I have also heard their genuine hopes that elections must be part of the solution, and not part of the problem, in Libya."





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New chaos in Libya as Dec. 24 election is postponed
Libya parliament says 'impossible' to hold presidential vote