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Conflict in Libya

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Why in News

The internal conflict in Libya that has been running since 2011 has shown signs of de-escalation as the rival authorities in the country have called for a ceasefire.



- **Rival Forces:** The Self-proclaimed **Libyan National Army (LNA)** led by **Khalifa Haftar** has been battling forces aligned with the **Tripoli-based, internationally recognised Government of National Accord (GNA)**.
 - Both sides are formed from **local armed factions**, whose **shifting loyalties** have steered the course of the conflict.
 - LNA has long enjoyed backing from countries including the **United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Russia and Jordan**.
 - **The USA, Turkey and Qatar** support the GNA.
- **Ceasefire:** The ceasefire call by GNA head proposed **demilitarising Sirte city and resumption of oil production** until a political deal is reached. It has also called for elections in March 2021.
 - The LNA dismissed this proposal, but a **parallel ceasefire call** by the LNA-aligned parliament has proposed **Sirte** as the seat of a new government.

Background

- Libya was ruled by **Muammar Gaddafi** for 42 years from 1969 to 2011 after he overturned the previous monarchy and proclaimed the new **Libyan Arab Republic**.
- In 2011, the **first civil war** broke out in Libya against the regime of Gaddafi. This war was a part of a series of anti-dictatorial protests in countries of Arab world like Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, Algeria, Lebanon, Jordan etc, known as the **Arab Spring**.
- In response to the civil war, a **multi-state NATO-led coalition** began a military intervention in Libya in March 2011, aimed at protecting civilians and providing cover for a rebel advance.

The NATO intervention was backed by a **UN Security Council resolution 1973** which was supported by 10 countries. 5 countries viz. **India**, Brazil, Germany, Russia and China abstained from voting.

- A UN-backed internationally recognized government was put in place called the Government of National Accord (GNA) which was supposed to bring out a democratic transition.
- However, GNA **failed to provide political stability** to the country.
- LNA captured the East of Libya and has been running long campaign against Islamist groups and other opponents since then.
- Libya has no single government currently, with **LNA backing the Tobruk-based parliament which governs East of Libya**, and the **GNA which controls Libya's western parts from Tripoli**.
- Both sides have been in constant conflict since 2014, in what has been termed as the second Libyan Civil War. In addition to these, there are also **smaller rival groups** in the country like the **Shura Council of Benghazi Revolutionaries, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant** etc.

Impact

- Nearly 4,00,000 Libyans have been **displaced** over the past nine years. Thousands more have **died**.
- The conflict has cost tens of **billions of dollars in lost oil revenue**, damaged infrastructure, and sharply reduced living standards.
- **Covid-19** infections have started to surge.
- The collapse of public services and corruption has fuelled protests in western Libya against the political elite.
- Libya, a member of **OPEC**, holds Africa's **largest oil reserves**, producing 1.6 million barrels per day before 2011. Blockades and presence of military forces have caused **output to fluctuate** sharply since then, affecting the **oil prices**.

- **International Response:**
 - The **International Berlin conference**, held on 19th January 2020, was attended by Libyan parties and other concerned countries.
 - As a result of this conference, the UN Security Council endorsed a **55-point road map** for ending the war in Libya in February 2020.
 - The resolution demands that all countries refrain from interfering in Libya's conflict and its internal affairs and observe a **UN arms embargo**, including ceasing all support for and withdrawing all armed mercenary personnel.
 - Egypt, in association with LNA, proposed the **Cairo Declaration** on 6th June, 2020, for the Second Libyan Civil War ceasefire.
 - The USA has ordered **evacuation of its troops** stationed in **Tripoli**.
 - **India evacuated** its contingent of peacekeeping forces consisting of 15 **CRPF** personnel from Tripoli. India has also asked its citizens there to exercise extreme caution.
 - Foreign powers officially back the process of restoring peace in the country, but have **also shipped arms** to their allies, undercutting diplomatic efforts.
- **India's Stand:**
 - India has **expressed concern** over continuing conflict and instability in Libya and said it **supports** efforts towards **immediate cessation of all hostilities** in the country.
 - Although India has been critical of the USA military intervention in Libya on the ground that civilians would be affected, its stand on Libya has been more of a **realistic one** as it has many **vested interests** in Libya.
 - **Economic :** The regime in Libya needs to be a friendly one since Libya is an oil rich country and political instability could affect Indian **industrial investments and energy security interests** there. Indian companies, especially in the hydrocarbon, power, construction and IT sector, have several ongoing projects in Libya.
 - **Diaspora:** Considering an estimated **18,000 Indians** who work in Libya, it is a considerable contribution to the remittance economy and adds to India's foreign exchange
 - **Foreign Policy:** Supporting western intrusion into sovereignty of a country will not set a good precedent for other third-world countries.

Way Forward

- Achieving peace in Libya is crucial not just for the country itself but also for stabilizing the global oil market and set a precedent for other such war-torn countries. However, a lasting deal will require **political and economic agreements** that have proved elusive for years, and **cooperation from foreign powers**.

- The western wishful thinking that the exogenous establishment of human rights democracy is possible through expeditionary intervention in domestic affairs of a country needs to end to give way to a more **organic building up of trust in democratic institutions and sovereign control.**

Source: IE