

## Past to Present



A Militia member is on guard after the General National Congress decided to protect government offices and diplomatic residences. Janzour, Libya Aug. 12, 2013.

Libya's history is an integral part of that of the Mediterranean. Its strategic location in the centre of the Mediterranean coast of Africa, has always defined its outlook. Ancient [trans-Saharan caravan routes](#) connected central Africa, through the Sahel and Sahara, with Libyan ports. Libya also lay on the routes of invading powers from Europe and the Middle East, including [Phoenicians](#), [Greeks](#), [Romans](#), Byzantines, [Arab Muslims](#), [Spaniards](#), [Ottomans](#), and [Italians](#).

Libya's immense size restricted the imprint of foreign powers, and its small [population](#) always took a cautious attitude towards newcomers. But the Phoenicians, Greeks, and Romans made trade an essential part of the [economy](#), the Muslim conquest brought Arabic as well as Islam, and the Ottomans brought mixed ethnicity – it is common to encounter Libyans with brown and blond hair and with blue and green eyes and new architectural styles, notably the typically Ottoman octagonal minarets. Libyan [cuisine](#) preserves influences from North Africa, Greece, Italy, and Turkey.

